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Nicolas Revire

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Nicolas Revire. The Enthroned Buddha in Majesty : an Iconological Study. Religions. Université Sorbonne Paris Cité, 2016. English. NNT : 2016USPCA157 . tel-01552082

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UNIVERSITÉ SORBONNE NOUVELLE – PARIS 3
École Doctorale 268
Unité Mixte de Recherche 7528 – Mondes Iranien et Indien



Thèse de Doctorat
Langues et civilisations orientales

Nicolas REVIRE

**The Enthroned Buddha in Majesty:
An Iconological Study**

VOLUME 1

Thèse dirigée par
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Soutenue le 10 décembre 2016

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*siddham || deyadharmmo 'yam upāsakasya
yad atra puṇyam tad bhavatu mātāpitroḥ sarvasattvānām ca*

Success! This is the pious gift of a layman.
What merit be therein, let it belong to his parents and all living beings.

Abstract

This dissertation consists of a detailed study of a particular representation of the Buddha, in which he sits on a prominent throne, i.e. a *bhadrapīṭha* or *bhadrāsana*, in a majestic posture with two legs pendant, that is, in *bhadrāsana* or the “auspicious pose.” This pendant-legged imagery, generally associated with a throne, has been found widely depicted in ancient religious art associated with early urban complexes and is, as a rule, mostly associated with kingship, fertility, and even divinity.

South Asian antecedents are well known for Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*. They are first depicted in the art of Andhra Pradesh and Gandhāra as early as the third–fourth centuries CE and, in close succession, followed by images from Sārnāth in the mid-to-late fifth century. Often, this *bhadrāsana* as a pose is combined with the teaching gesture of the “Turning the Wheel of the Law,” holding both hands in *dharmacakra* at solar plexus level.

This iconographic type, of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* with *dharmacakra*, became a hallmark of the rock-cut caves of Ajañtā, Aurangābād, Kaṅherī, Ellorā, and many other western Deccan sites in Maharashtra from the turn of the sixth century onwards. It was also adopted in Nālandā and other Pāla sites of Bihar and Bengal before spreading further into the Himalayan regions of Kashmir, Ladakh, and Tibet. The type was widely produced in East Asia as well, with colossal examples stretching along the land Silk Road in China during the Tang period (618–907 CE). In Southeast Asia, the iconography also became widely disseminated, especially during the seventh to ninth centuries, first in the Mekong Delta, and then in the art of Dvāravatī, one of Thailand’s oldest religious cultures. As in East Asia, however, Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* from mainland Southeast Asia generally show a variant teaching gesture with only the raised right hand in *vitarka*. Conversely, in Java, the sub-type performing the hand gesture in *dharmacakra* became common in the late eighth and remained so throughout the ninth century. The results of this iconological examination have wide implications for understanding the origins, spread and development of Buddhist art in those lands, particularly during the mid-to-late first millennium CE.

In sum, the dissertation traces the roots and original significance of this specific iconographic type in South Asia as well as its chronological development and subsequent spread in East and Southeast Asia by both land and maritime trade routes. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive corpus has been assembled of Buddha images, as well as other deities similarly seated in (and on a) *bhadrāsana*. Particular attention is paid to those images which

have secure provenances, are securely dated, and are identified by inscriptions — although these last are regrettably rare. When possible or desirable, the dissertation also examines the loose relationship between these visual representations (icons or narrative images) and a selected corpus of narrative texts or prescriptive ritual sources which are likely to have been in circulation in those regions of South Asia and beyond during the first millennium CE.

The research finally deals, on a case by case basis, with the difficult and controversial issue of the identification of such enthroned Buddhas in majesty. It can on the whole be demonstrated that this iconography can either represent a past, present, or future Buddha, the latter especially — if not exclusively — in the art of East Asia and, in a later period, in the Himalayas. Without proper and primary textual or epigraphic supports, it remains quite hazardous systematically to identify such images in India with the future Buddha or even more with a transcendental Jina. In broad terms, I propose that this imagery embeds a universal and imperial form of Buddhahood, viz. an enthroned Buddha in all his glory as King of the Dharma (*dharmarāja*) and “Lord of the universe.”

Keywords: bhadrāsana, Buddha, Buddhist art, dharmarāja, iconography, South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Throne

Résumé

Cette thèse étudie en détail un type particulier de représentation du Bouddha où il est représenté assis sur un trône prééminent, le *bhadrapīṭha* ou *bhadrāsana*, dans une posture majestueuse avec les deux jambes pendantes, c'est-à-dire assis en *bhadrāsana*, ou dans l'attitude « de bon augure ». Cette iconographie, étroitement associée à l'imagerie du trône, se retrouve largement représentée dans l'art religieux ancien des premiers complexes urbains, et est, en règle générale, intimement liée aux modèles de la royauté, de la fertilité, et même du divin.

Les prototypes les plus anciens du Bouddha en *bhadrāsana* sont bien connus en Asie du Sud. On les trouve d'abord représentés dans l'art de l'Andhra Pradesh et du Gandhāra, dès le III^e ou IV^e s. de notre ère, et suivis de près par les sculptures trouvées à Sārnāth dès la seconde moitié du V^e s. Le plus souvent, cette pose en *bhadrāsana* est combinée avec le geste de l'enseignement dit de « la mise en branle de la Roue de la Loi » en tenant les deux mains en *dharmacakra* au niveau du plexus solaire.

Cette iconographie du Bouddha en *bhadrāsana* et *dharmacakra* est une caractéristique des grottes d'Ajañṭā, d'Auraṅgābād, de Kaṇherī, et d'Ellorā, et de nombreux autres sites rupestres du Deccan occidental dans le Maharashtra dès la fin du V^e s. Il a également été adopté à Nālandā et autres sites Pāla du Bihar et du Bengale, avant de finalement se disséminer dans les contrées himalayennes du Cachemire, du Ladakh, ou encore du Tibet. Cette iconographie du Bouddha en *bhadrāsana* se retrouve également largement répandue en Asie de l'Est, avec des exemples monumentaux répartis le long de la Route de la Soie terrestre en Chine au cours de la période Tang (618–907). En Asie du Sud-Est, cette iconographie est aussi populaire, surtout entre les VII^e et IX^e s., d'abord dans le Delta du Mékong, puis dans l'art de Dvāravatī, une des plus anciennes cultures religieuses de la Thaïlande. Cependant, comme en Asie de l'Est, les représentations du Bouddha en *bhadrāsana* de l'Asie du Sud-Est continentale arborent essentiellement une variante du geste de l'enseignement où seule la main droite est levée en *vitarka*. À l'inverse, à Java, c'est le sous-groupe effectuant le geste des deux mains en *dharmacakra* qui est le plus populaire à la fin du VIII^e s. et au IX^e s. Plusieurs implications notables ressortent de cet examen iconologique concernant les origines, la diffusion et le développement de l'art bouddhique dans ces contrées, particulièrement au cours de la seconde moitié du premier millénaire de notre ère.

En somme, la thèse tente de retracer la genèse et la signification originelle de cette iconographie spécifique en Asie du Sud, ainsi que de mieux cerner son développement chronologique et sa diffusion ultérieure en Asie de l'Est et du Sud-Est à travers les routes commerciales terrestres et maritimes. Pour atteindre cet objectif, l'étude s'appuie sur un large corpus assemblé de représentations du Bouddha, ainsi que d'autres divinités qui sont de même assises en (et sur un) *bhadrāsana*. Une attention particulière a été accordée aux sculptures pour lesquelles la provenance est connue et fiable, et qui sont datées, voire, bien que très rarement, identifiées par des inscriptions. Lorsque cela fût possible, ou souhaitable, nous avons aussi étudié les rapports plus ou moins avérés entre ces représentations visuelles (icônes ou images narratives) avec un corpus raisonné de textes narratifs, ou sources rituelles prescriptives, susceptibles d'avoir pu circuler dans ces régions de l'Asie du Sud et au-delà, au cours du premier millénaire de notre ère.

Enfin, cette recherche a cherché à traiter, au cas par cas, la difficile et controversée question de l'identification de ces représentations du Bouddha trônant en majesté. Il a été généralement démontré que cette iconographie peut s'appliquer aussi bien aux Bouddhas du passé, du présent, ou du futur, ce dernier mode de représentation étant particulièrement — peut-être même exclusivement — réservé à l'art de l'Asie orientale, et de l'Himalaya à une période plus tardive. Pourtant, en l'absence de sources textuelles primaires appropriées ou autres supports épigraphiques, il reste tout à fait périlleux de vouloir reconnaître systématiquement dans ces représentations en Inde le Bouddha du futur, voire un Jina transcendantal. Plus largement, nous proposons de voir dans ces représentations du Bouddha trônant dans toute sa gloire, la synthèse d'un concept universel et impérial de la bouddhité, tel le Roi du Dharma (*dharmarāja*) et le « Seigneur de l'univers ».

Mots clés : art bouddhique, Asie du Sud, Asie de l'Est, Asie du Sud-Est, bhadrāsana, Bouddha, dharmarāja, iconographie, trône

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my debt of gratitude to Prof. Claudine Bautze-Picron for her unfailing support of my PhD study and related research, for her patience, encouragement, and for sharing her immense knowledge of Indian art. As my main dissertation advisor, Claudine helped steer this work through many pitfalls and blind alleys, making it possible for me to finish it in a timely fashion. She gave me the basic idea for this dissertation during conversations we had in Paris in 2009 and in Berlin in 2010. I proudly admit that I have “borrowed” more than one turn of phrase or idea from her. One of her works should be specifically mentioned. At the outset of my research, I read *The Bejewelled Buddha from India to Burma* (2010a) and I have returned to it profitably again and again. I realize now how many of my own conclusions presented here have been prefigured in Prof. Bautze-Picron’s work. Of course, I take full responsibility for all the shortcomings of my own work.

Dr Peter Skilling, as my co-advisor, has, likewise, been a constant source of inspiration and sound advice from the very beginning of this dissertation project. But he also has given me the freedom to make my own mistakes and learn from them. I marvel at the breadth of his scholarship and his many keen insights into Buddhism, and feel privileged to be part of the small circle of his disciples. Unfortunately, he had to withdraw at the last moment from my doctoral committee.

I would also like to acknowledge an old debt to one of my first gurus in the field of art and archeology of South and Southeast Asia, the late Prof. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc’h, of the University Sorbonne nouvelle – Paris 3. It was he who guided me through my MA thesis and encouraged me to pursue further studies toward a PhD.

Among my other mentors in Thailand, Dr Peter Masefield has also been a role model. He introduced me to the academic study of so-called Theravāda Buddhism and further taught me Pali. During my time with him at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, I spent numerous enjoyable hours reading canonical and post-canonical Pali texts with him. His continuing friendship and guidance mean a lot to me and I gratefully seize the opportunity to acknowledge it here. I was also lucky to spend a year in 2012–2013 learning to read ancient inscriptions of South and Southeast Asia at Silpakorn University, with Dr Kannika Wimonkasem and Dr U-tain Wongsathit. Both of them spent many hours selflessly teaching me paleography, though neither they nor I knew at the time where those studies might lead. Whatever scholarly merit there is in this dissertation is in large part the result of the past guidance of all the above persons.

Besides my past and present advisors, I would like to thank the rest of my doctoral committee: Prof. Nalini Balbir, Prof. Arlo Griffiths, Dr Christian Luczanits, and Mr Thierry Zéphir for their graciousness in accepting to serve on my dissertation committee even on short notice and with some hardship. I am anticipating their insightful comments, questions, and fruitful discussions at my defense. Arlo, in particular, has always been supportive of my work from the very beginning and I am grateful for his kindness in sharing so much time, material, and knowledge with me and for accepting to be the first external examiner. I learned and benefitted greatly from my correspondence with him and appreciate his honest feedback. I would also like to thank Christian for his sense of responsibility in accepting to be the second external examiner and for the assistance he provided on selected portions of the dissertation prior to my submission. More recently, this research has profited from the assistance of many other scholars and individuals who made numerous constructive comments or provided further references or corrections on specific issues. I can only name a few persons here: Dr Emmanuel Francis, Mr Rolf Giebel, Dr Rajat Sanyal, Dr Hiram Woodward, and Dr Monika Zin. To all whom I have deliberately omitted to list here, not because I would not have wanted to but for lack of space, I acknowledge them appropriately in the footnotes.

My heartfelt thanks also go to the Archaeological Survey of India and the Fine Arts Department of Thailand for permissions to study and photograph at many museums and sites under their authority. Similarly, I would like to acknowledge the American Institute of Indian Studies, The Huntington Archive Digital Database Collection, and all museums, institutions or individuals, particularly Prof. Joachim Bautze, who provided many illustrations crucial for this study. Without this precious visual database at my disposal, it would not have been possible to conduct this wide-ranging project. I am also greatly indebted to Prof. Leedom Lefferts for his continuing assistance in tirelessly editing the abstruse language of this work and, moreover, for providing electronic access to many unpublished doctoral dissertations from North American universities. In addition, I wish to thank Thammasat University, my main employer, for their much needed financial and technical support, and my colleagues and students for their friendship and abundant patience over the years. In particular, I am thankful to Mr Martin Perenchio for his encouragement, enthusiasm and genuine interest in my research.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my aunt, Jeanne, and thank my partner, Jup, as well as her family, for supporting me spiritually throughout the writing of this dissertation and for making my life in Thailand such a pleasant experience.

Technical Notes

Place Names

In general, Indian geographic and place names are not spelled with markings if they denote modern states and cities (e.g. Bihar, Maharashtra, Patna). However, if reference is made to ancient sites or polities, spelling is generally marked (e.g. Ajaṅṭā, Gandhāra, Nālandā) — although I do not claim absolute internal consistency. In addition, for the sake of brevity, museums are often referred to by their location (e.g. Amarāvātī Museum, Sārnāth Museum).

Pali & Sanskrit

Since this dissertation was written in Thailand, I have not always had access to or been able to make use of the original editions of Sanskrit sources. In place of these original editions, I have used electronic texts available through different websites, principally that of the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL: http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretil.htm).

In general, abbreviations in Sanskrit follow the system established in *Abkürzungsverzeichnis zur Buddhistischen Literatur in Indien und Südostasien* (ed. Bechert 1990). All Pali references have been assigned a unique abbreviation by the *Critical Pali Dictionary*, which is recognized internationally and likewise adopted here (cf. list of Abbreviations & Acronyms). For the most part, references to Pali texts are made to Pali Text Society publications, in which case publication details are not included in the list of references.

In the case of a prose Pali or Sanskrit text, the volume/book number, if any, is generally indicated in Roman numerals, followed by the chapter, page, and line number(s), if relevant, in Arabic numerals. For instance, a reference to *Dīghanikāya*, volume II, page 35, would be shown as D II 35, and Mhbh I 57, 68.52 indicates a reference to the *Mahābhārata*, book I, chapter 57, page 68, line 52. In the case of a text in verse, the number of the verse(s) alone, or preceded by its section, is given (e.g. Buddhac 1.69 for *Buddhacarita*, canto 1, verse 69; and Dhṃ 387 for *Dhammapada*, verse 387). In the case of a text containing both prose and verse, the page number(s) of the original (if a prose passage is referred to) or number of the verse (if one or more verses are referred to) is given; for example, Sn 107 and Sn, v. 635 refers to *Suttanipāta*, page 107 or verse 635, while Lal 376, v. 69 refers to

Lalitavistara, page 376, verse 69. If reference is made to a translation or an edition that has been published by a person or an organization other than the Pali Text Society, that reference is treated in the same manner as a normal citation, following the author/date system.

In addition, references to Pali and Sanskrit terms, texts, or names are generally treated as compounds, that is, without a space or hyphen, so that I write *Dīghanikāya*, not *Dīgha Nikāya* or *Dīgha-nikāya*, and *pralambapādāsana*, not *pralambapāda āsana* or *pralambapāda-āsana*, to mention only these few examples.

Romanization & Editorial Conventions

Throughout this dissertation romanization of Pali and Sanskrit sources conforms to ISO 15919 (“Transliteration of Devanagari and related Indic scripts into Latin characters”). This means, for example, that I use *m̐* instead of *m̄* for *anusvāra* and the vowel *ṛ* instead of *ṝ*. Likewise, the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS), published by the Royal Institute of Thailand (Ratchabanditsathan), is used to render Thai language words in the Latin alphabet. Romanized Chinese transcriptions follow the simplified Pinyin system without tone marks. For languages for which no universally accepted romanization system exists, spellings preferred by individual authors or commonly used forms are followed.

In transliterated texts and restored inscriptions, I make use of the following editorial signs and conventions:

* An asterisk indicates that the following word, name, or title in Sanskrit is the probable reconstructed meaning, often equivalent of a Chinese or Tibetan translation.

(...) Parentheses enclose graphic elements whose reading is uncertain, but for which scribal intent is secure.

[...] Square brackets enclose graphic elements wholly lost or unreadable but restorable on the basis of philological considerations.

----- Dashes denote totally illegible or lost syllables (*akṣaras*) which are not restorable.

I noted that the auspicious word [*siddham*] which opens many Sanskrit inscriptions is in the cases studied here always expressed by a symbol.

Lastly, unless otherwise stated, the use of **bold** in the text expresses my own emphasis.

List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

A	<i>Āṅguttaranikāya</i>
AIS	American Institute of Indian Studies, Center for Art and Archeology, Photo archive available online: http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/aiis/
Ap	<i>Apadāna(s)</i>
Bhag	<i>Bhagavadgītā</i>
Bhāg-p	<i>Bhāgavatapurāṇa</i>
Buddhac	<i>Buddhacarita</i>
BHSD	<i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary</i> (Edgerton 1953).
Ch.	Chinese
CL	Images of Christian Luczanits available online: http://www.luczanits.net
Cp-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> (commentary on <i>Cariyāpiṭaka</i>)
CPED	Concise Pali-English Dictionary (Buddhadatta 1968)
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pali Proper Names</i> (Malalasekera 1937–38)
DTC	Dharmachakra Translation Committee (2013)
EFEO	École française d'Extrême-Orient
HAR	Himalayan Art Resources: www.himalayanart.org
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
Jāt	<i>Jātaka(s)</i>
LACMA	Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Lal	<i>Lalitavistara</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (Collective 1997)
Mhbh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MPS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra</i>
MTL	<i>Madras Tamil Lexicon</i> , available online: http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/tamil-lex/
Mv	<i>Madhuratthavilāsini</i> (<i>Buddhavaṃsa-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Mvu	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
Nidd I	<i>Mahāniddesa</i>
Nidd II	<i>Cullaniddesa</i>

P.	Pali
PED	<i>Pali-English Dictionary</i> (Rhys Davids & Stede 1921–25)
Pkt	Prakrit
Pv-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī (Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Rāmāy	<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>
S	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>
SED	<i>Sanskrit English Dictionary</i> (Monier-Williams 1899)
Skt	Sanskrit
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i>
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī (Saṃyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i> (commentary on D)
s.v(v).	<i>sub voce</i> (dictionary entry/entries)
T.	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i>
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Th.	Thai
Th-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī V (Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Tib.	Tibetan
Vin	<i>Vinayapiṭaka</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
Vv-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī (Vimānavatthu-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
WHAV	Western Himalaya Archive, Vienna: https://whav.aussereurop.univie.ac.at

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Résumé	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Technical Notes	vii
List of Abbreviations & Acronyms.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: PROLEGOMENA	1
1. <i>Research Scope, Problems, and Methodology</i>	2
2. <i>East or West? The Quest for Origins</i>	5
2.1 Anatolia and Mesopotamia: The Cradle of Early Civilizations	5
2.2 The Greek and Hellenistic World	7
2.3 The Indian Subcontinent	9
3. <i>Questions of Terminology</i>	11
3.1 A “European Posture”? Foucher Revisited.....	11
3.2 Sanskrit Terminology: Back to Coomaraswamy.....	12
4. <i>Descriptions of bhadrāsana</i>	13
4.1 Early Sitting Apparatus in India.....	14
4.2 The <i>bhadrāsana</i> as Royal Throne.....	16
4.3 The <i>bhadrāsana</i> as a Sitting Posture.....	24
5. <i>Summary and Discussion</i>	29
CHAPTER 2: GREATER GANDHĀRA AND THE NORTHWEST.....	32
1. <i>Historical Geography</i>	32
2. <i>A Graeco-Buddhist Art?</i>	33
2.1 Definition	33
2.2 Royal and Divine Portraits on Kuṣāṇa Coins.....	34
3. <i>Corpus Analysis</i>	39
3.1 Narrative Art	39

3.2 Iconic Art	46
4. <i>Summary and Discussion</i>	63
4.1 From Auspicious Yakṣas to Bhadrāsana Buddhas?.....	63
4.2 On the Appearance of the First Preaching Bhadrāsana Buddha Image	64
CHAPTER 3: ANDHRA PRADESH AND THE LOWER EASTERN DECCAN	66
1. <i>Historical Geography</i>	66
2. <i>Corpus Analysis</i>	69
2.1 The Early Period (ca 200 BCE–200 CE)	69
2.2 The Later Period (ca 200 CE–Onwards)	78
3. <i>Summary and Discussion: From Empty Thrones to Enthroned Buddhas?</i>	94
CHAPTER 4: NORTH-CENTRAL INDIA AND THE WESTERN DECCAN CAVES	98
1. <i>Historical Overview</i>	98
1.1 The Gupta Period (ca 320–550 CE).....	98
1.2 The Vākāṭaka Empire (ca 250–477 CE).....	100
2. <i>The Religious Environment</i>	102
2.1 The Sudden Growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism(s)	102
2.2 The Question of Buddhist Patronage	104
2.3 The Rise of Hinduism	106
3. <i>Corpus Analysis</i>	108
3.1 Defining Features: A Gupta-period Art Style?	108
3.2 Non-Buddhist Deities	109
3.3 Buddhist Sculptures from Sārnāth	121
3.4 Buddhist Sculptures from Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.....	129
3.5 Paintings and Sculptures from the Western Deccan Caves	133
4. <i>Summary and Discussion</i>	207
4.1 A Royal and Solar Iconography?	207
4.2 The Buddha as “Pantokrator”	209

CHAPTER 5: EASTERN INDIA (BIHAR, BENGAL, ORISSA) AND THE HIMALAYAS	214
1. <i>The Pāla-Sena Classical Age (ca 737–1200 CE)</i>	214
2. <i>Corpus Analysis</i>	216
2.1 Hindu Sculptures from Bihar, Bengal, and the Himalayas	216
2.2 Buddhist Sculptures from Bihar.....	220
2.3 Buddhist Sculptures from Bengal.....	272
2.4 Buddhist Sculptures from Orissa.....	275
2.5 Buddhist Sculptures from the Himalayas	276
3. <i>Summary and Discussion: From Enthroned to Crowned Buddhas?</i>	292
CHAPTER 6: EPILEGOMENA — “OUT OF INDIA”	294
1. <i>A Widespread Iconography in East and Southeast Asia</i>	295
2. <i>The Tang Ascendancy and Maritime Interactions with Southeast Asia</i>	299
3. <i>An Ideal Model? The “King Udayana” Images of Longmen</i>	304
4. <i>Initial Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas in Southeast Asia (ca 650–750 CE)</i>	308
5. <i>Later Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas in Southeast Asia (ca 750 CE–Onwards)</i>	309
APPENDIX A: Solar Symbolism in Early Buddhist Literature.....	315
APPENDIX B: Legends of the First (Seated) Buddha Image.....	327
References	334

CHAPTER 1: PROLEGOMENA

Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold.

*There were six steps to the throne, and the top of the throne was round behind;
And there were stays on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the stays.*

Twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other on the six steps:

There was nothing like it made in any kingdom.

(Kings I 10, 18–20)

“I am a king, Sela, an unsurpassed doctrine-king.

By my doctrine, I set the wheel turning, the wheel which is not to be rolled back.”

(Suttanipāta, v. 554)

The stately throne is a precious seat called Red Marble Stone.

*The Blessed One was sitting on the Red Marble Stone seat, [...] in the realm of the thirty-three devas,
to teach [...] to the deities who reside in the ten thousand worlds of the universe [...].*

(Buddhapādamāṅgala 23)

This dissertation studies in detail a particular corpus of Buddha images, those where he is enthroned in (and on a) *bhadrāsana*, that is, in the “auspicious pose” with both legs extended downward (pendant) and feet firmly planted on the ground or on a lotus pedestal. While bodily postures of the Buddha are a common theme in Buddhist texts and art in various cultures, not many in-depth studies have been dedicated to this attitude in *bhadrāsana*. The present work attempts to thoroughly trace the origins and significance of this particular posture in art, as well as determine its chronological development and spread in South Asia and, beyond the subcontinent, in Southeast and East Asia, through overland and maritime trade routes. The material is presented regionally, more or less chronologically, with brief historical introductions to each succeeding chapters. Before I proceed with the analysis of my corpus, some introductory notes dealing with problems of methodology, terminology, definitions, and textual background are presented in this chapter.

1. Research Scope, Problems, and Methodology

My present research on the pendant-legged Buddhas was initially prompted by the simple observation that nothing substantial has been written so far on this topic. Some iconographic works and catalogues written by pioneer scholars in the field of Buddhist art only touched upon the subject in passing, but, to date, and to my knowledge, no comprehensive survey or study has yet been conducted. The very few scholars who have examined this peculiar posture in detail limited their focus to geographical areas and specific historical periods (e.g. Bourda 1949; Revire 2008, 2010, 2012a; Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013). No publication seems to exist that has traced the complete history, origin, and spread of this pose in Asia, that is, mainly, in the Indian subcontinent during the heyday of Buddhism and in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan up to the modern period.

It is not difficult to explain why this would be the case. Literally several hundreds, if not thousands, of sculptures and paintings represent the Buddha seated in this posture across Asia, made in all kinds of materials and at different scales. But, as the present work will attempt to show as comprehensively and methodically as possible, the corpus of collected images is significantly restricted to certain key areas and periods, which makes the analysis much easier to develop than first anticipated. For example, when compared to standing or cross-legged Buddha images, only a relatively small number of these pendant-legged images have been preserved in South and Southeast Asia and thus mainly date from the first-millennium. Moreover, this iconographic type¹ is found mostly in some of the oldest Buddhist and artistic cultural centers in South Asia (e.g. Gandhāra, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Ajaṅṭā, Sārnāth, Nālandā) or later in Southeast Asia (e.g. Dvāravatī, Śrīkṣetra, Java) and East Asia (e.g. Dunhuang, Xi'an, Longmen, Nara). The importance of these Buddha sculptures, paintings, and reliefs, therefore, cannot be underestimated for charting the development of Buddhism in the region.

Contrasting with this dearth of scholarly attention, new evidence and additional data have continued to come to light in the past few decades from scientific excavations, notably in South and Southeast Asia, or to appear on the art market. In general, however, the analysis of the corpus for this dissertation is often compounded by the lack of precise provenance for

¹ “Iconographic” in accordance with Erwin Panofsky’s definition (1939: 3): “iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form.” The study of the intrinsic meaning of art is what Panofsky called “iconographic analysis in the deeper sense” (*ibid.*: 8), and is hereafter referred to as “iconology.”

the images that have come down to us since we have often scant archeological data on them, if any at all. Therefore, the sculptural remains selected here are often limited to those still *in situ* or recovered in scientific excavations, that is, those that were published in archeological reports, or were collected and placed in museums in the early days before the demand from the art market led to clandestine looting and destruction of many sites, as well as the production of forgeries. By restricting the study to well-documented objects, I hope to obtain more reliable results.

These artifacts and sculptures from various lands and cultures, when collected and compared, give us a better picture on the origins and spread of this specific — yet prevalent — iconographic type throughout Buddhist Asia, especially during the first-millennium CE. Whilst an effort has been made to cover in limited time and space the whole of Asia in order to get the complete picture from even before its emergence in early Buddhist iconic art (*ca* third century CE) up to and beyond its final decline in India, *circa* the twelfth century CE, it is beyond the scope of the present study to give equal space to all regions and cultural spheres stretching from such countries as ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gandhāra) to Tang China or pre-modern Japan. In this dissertation, therefore, the focus will be reserved to material originating from South Asia in the mid-to-late first millennium CE. Since I lacked the time and financial means to travel to each remote region, museum, and site (sometimes inaccessible today), be it in the Indian subcontinent, or along the Chinese Silk Road, where such images were once produced on a very large-scale and can often still be found *in situ*, and furthermore since I lacked the language skills needed to deal with all local primary or secondary sources that are not published in a European language or are outside my South (and Southeast) Asian regional focus, I necessarily had to omit some material from my research or approach it only in a preliminary manner. A chronological limitation has also been imposed for the same reason: the study mainly ranges from the third to the twelfth centuries CE, with only a few necessary excursions into the more remote past or more recent periods.

It is my main purpose throughout the dissertation to understand these Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana*. Due to a dearth of previous scholarship in this area, this research is for a large part necessarily descriptive; copious descriptions and illustrations are indeed essential to this work, but only as the basis for an analysis and interpretation. I wish to contribute to our understanding of what the artists and sculptors of these images were trying to convey, and why they chose this particular visual form as their means of expression. Sometimes it has been possible to find scriptural bases for the creation of sculptures of this iconographic type,

more often not. In either case, there is a lot to be supplied by the iconologist in order to arrive at a coherent interpretation, for the Buddhist narrative and iconographical texts are frequently silent or at variance with the sculptures or paintings as they appear in reality. It is at these points that informed speculation is the only bridge between what can be demonstrated by historical documentation and archeological fact. I have carried my explanation and interpretation as far as appeared reasonable and admitted that, beyond this point, in the absence of new evidence, we cannot go any further. I truly hope, however, that the main result of this fieldwork and investigation offers a decent database for future research in the field of Buddhist art and iconography. The questions to be answered are many and include the following: What is the significance of this pendant-legged pose in narrative art or when “frozen” or idealized as an icon? Does it have any single, trans-Asian value? What led to its adoption by the Indian, by the Chinese, by the Southeast Asian traditions?

The present work is therefore a first attempt to fill a serious gap in scholarship by studying and contextualizing a carefully selected corpus of Buddha images in the pendant-legged posture, offering a new typology, terminology, and relative chronology for its development through the ages in accordance with Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée* schema (1958). The corpus presented in the dissertation is not strictly divided from the main text and is generally discussed in a holistic manner within its larger historical, religious, and regional framework by treating it from a variety of disciplinary and methodological angles. The images are thus not examined in isolation but rather are considered as part of a larger cultural and artistic milieu in constant transformation through the centuries.

A comprehensive database is given for some regions and periods in the form of tables appended to the dissertation. Attempts to establish an absolute chronology for the corpus are, however, often impossible. A relative chronology based on my treatment of various forms of evidence — archeological, inscriptional, or stylistic — is used to trace the appearance, dissemination, and disappearance of this iconographic type throughout Buddhist Asia, while focusing primarily on the South Asian material. This method provides an accurate and contextualized, if general, picture of the images under study and their connectivity between sites. As further evidence and sculptures come to light, the proposed chronology can be expanded or compressed without necessarily disrupting the relative order and sequence.

2. East or West? The Quest for Origins

It is not my purpose to trace in detail the origins of the chair and throne usage and the related pendant-legged posture in the art of the ancient world, but to briefly sketch how it came to be accepted and interpreted initially in the Indian subcontinent before moving into the rest of Buddhist Asia. Ultimately, this imagery has been found in sites dating to the dawn of human civilization, in such various places and lost kingdoms as Babylon, Egypt, Israel, or Phrygia, and is, as a rule, mostly associated with kingship or divinity, gods and goddesses alike.

2.1 Anatolia and Mesopotamia: The Cradle of Early Civilizations

The so-called “Seated Woman of Çatal Hüyük” in southern Anatolia (also known as “Dame aux fauves”) is possibly one of the earliest image of its kind [Figure 1.1].² It is a baked-clay, Neolithic sculpture, completed sometime about 6,000 BCE and found in a granary. The statuette represents a nude female form, seated between feline-headed (leopard or panther) arm-rests, and is often associated with other late Neolithic seated god and goddess figures also found at the site, or other Anatolian sites nearby such as Hacilar.³ It is generally thought to have been used during magical rites and to depict a corpulent and fertile goddess in the process of giving birth while seated on her throne as “Mistress of Animals.” It may be anachronistic to see it as the first representation of a supreme god, a “Great Mother Goddess” who was to become the center of a cult to ensure fecundity.⁴ Its close similarity to later seated images of the Phrygian tutelary goddess Cybele in the first millennium BCE is nevertheless striking.⁵

In Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia, chairs and thrones were also long designed to be sat on in pendant-legged fashion and the portrayal of enthroned high dignitaries, dead or alive, is common in the iconography of pharaonic Egypt, and the ancient Near East.⁶ This is

² The site was first unearthed by archeologist James Mellaart in the 1960s. When the statuette was found, its head and hand rest of the right side was missing (Mellaart 1967: pls 67–68, IX). The current head and the hand rest are modern replacements. For a recent study of this site and its related iconography, see Hodder 2006.

³ See for example Mellaart 1967: figs 49–50, 53, pls. 79, 84–91. Another similar figurine from Anatolia, but for which the exact archeological origin is unknown, can be observed at the Musée du Louvre (inv. no. AO 26090).

⁴ For a recent appraisal on the interpretation of this figurine, see Testart 2010: 26–33.

⁵ For more on the cult and iconography of Cybele, see Lane 1996.

⁶ For example, the pharaoh of the Bible is described as sitting on a throne (*Exodus* 11, 5 and 12, 29). The book of *Esther* 5, 1 similarly refers to the king of Persia seated on his throne. See also *Kings* I 10, 18–20 for a literal description of the throne of Solomon. Moreover, the finding of such seated royal images in ancient Near Eastern sites like Hazor and Qatna are now identified as deceased kings (e.g. Ornan 2012: figs 1, 7–10).

majestically testified, for instance, by the colossal statue of King Menkaura (r. *ca* 2,500 BCE) of the fourth dynasty during the Old Kingdom of Egypt and found at the base of his pyramid at Giza [Figure 1.2], or else the royal portrait of Gudea (r. *ca* 2,150–2,125 BCE), king of the independent kingdom of Lagaš, in the late third millennium BCE [Figure 1.3]. And just as these rulers sat in thrones to ensure their supreme status, so did their gods,⁷ and goddesses.⁸ For example, the relief on the upper part of the Hammurabi Code — the emblem of the Mesopotamian civilization — depicts Hammurabi, king of Babylon (r. 1,792–1,750 BCE), standing and receiving his investiture from the enthroned Sun god Šamaš seated in profile [Figure 1.4]. Similarly, a depiction in low-relief on a boundary stone (*kudurru*) from the Babylonian Middle Kassite period *circa* 1,200 BCE shows Nanaya (Nanā) seated in profile on a throne with lion legs (Carter 2010: 143, fig. 2). This goddess became very prominent later in Central Asia and we shall encounter her again in Gandhāra during the Kuṣāṇa period (Chapter 2).

Possibly the first truly multicultural empire in Asia was the Achaemenid (*ca* 550–330 BCE), centered in Persia, but extending over Mesopotamia, Egypt, part of Greece, Thrace, the Middle East, much of Central Asia, and today’s Pakistan. The most emblematic representation of an enthroned figure can be seen in the stone reliefs that decorate the Achaemenid capital, Persepolis, and its surroundings. Multiple royal spaces — the Apadana, the council hall, the throne hall, the treasury, the tombs — contain versions of the same scene: King Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) or his successors sit in profile on a throne with legs pendant, as miniaturized representatives of the nations which the empire had conquered approach the king to bring him tribute or even carry the throne from below (Higgins 2012: 39, Appendix A 45). In fact, the Achaemenid kings sit as the Akkadians, Assyrians, and Sumerians had before them, archetypically in the pendant-legged posture. Considering this, one wonders to which extent the symbolic force of their sitting habits may have resonated further afield across Eurasia and eventually into the Indian subcontinent.

⁷ The god of Israel is frequently described as sitting on a throne in the Bible, for example in *Psalms* 9, 4 and 9, 7, or in a vision in *Isaiah* 6, 1, and notably in *Isaiah* 66, 1, where Yahweh says of himself: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool” (this verse is also alluded to by *Matthew* 5, 34–35).

⁸ Goddess Isis, whose very name means “throne,” nursing her child Horus, was an important representation of the pharaoh’s power that was carried into the Ptolemaic period (305–30 BCE) and later transferred to imperial Rome (27 BCE–476 CE), when her cult as the “Universal Mother” was firmly established throughout the entire Mediterranean basin. During the later Christian era, it is the enthroned Virgin Mary as the “Seat of Wisdom” (*sedes sapientiae*), who assumed this role of supporting the child Christ. On this iconological development in the West, see *inter alia* Gersten 2011. For a pre-modern example from Goa, India, see Pal 1988a: cat. no. 122.

Contacts between the Middle East and Northwest India have been documented since ancient times. For centuries, the two regions fostered important contacts, encouraging and reinforcing certain material culture exchanges. For example, we have confirmation that knowledge of Achaemenid traditions expanded into Northwest India beyond the presence of a few Indian dignitaries. We think for example that the Achaemenid script, imperial Aramaic, was one of the primary factors in the development of the Kharoṣṭhī script in Gandhāra (Sircar 1970–71: 109–110; Salomon 1995: 276). It follows that northwest Indian peoples who developed this script must have maintained intimate contacts with the Achaemenid world.

2.2 The Greek and Hellenistic World

Likewise in the Mediterranean world, as early as the Homeric period (*ca* 800–700 BCE) Greek gods are often described in the literature as sitting on thrones, chairs, or high seats,⁹ just as the same gods, kings, heroes, artisans, and philosophers are depicted on tens of thousands of Greek kraters and terracotta plaques sitting in pendant-legged fashion on a chair, albeit often in profile [Figure 1.5]. One famous example is the influential and majestic statue of Zeus at Olympia, the supreme lord of the Greek pantheon, enthroned frontally, and made of panels of ivory and gold by Pheidias in the fifth century BCE (Lapatin 2001: 80ff).¹⁰ The large scale chryselephantine sculpture was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world until its eventual loss and destruction during the fifth century CE. No copy of the cult statue, however, has ever been found and details of its form are known only from ancient Greek descriptions and approximate representations on coins or engraved gems (e.g. H. Walters 1926: cat. no. 1245; LIMC: VIII, cat. nos 360–402, 473–526). Ultimately we must understand that these Hellenistic traditions and artistic production were not fixed in time and space, but that their worldview and gods travelled, notably during the brief but multinational empire of Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 BCE) and his successors, who overthrew and replaced the Achaemenid's influence in the Middle East, in Central Asia as far as Bactria, and even in Northwest India (Andreae 2008).

The main tool available to us for tracing these Pan-Hellenistic developments is numismatics (Stančo 2012). The study of coins allows us not only to follow political changes in these regions, especially where there are no historical records at all, but it also provides, as

⁹ For a few references, see *Iliad* VIII 436; *Odyssey* I 145 and IV 136.

¹⁰ According to a legend, when Pheidias was asked what inspired him — whether he climbed Mount Olympus to see Zeus, or whether Zeus came down from Olympus so that Pheidias could see him — the artist answered that he portrayed the god according to book I, verses 528–530 of Homer's *Iliad*.

I shall demonstrate in depth further on, a wealth of relevant iconographic schemes as well as securely dated material. The coinage of Northwest India, for example, consists primarily of bilingual Indo-Greek coin issues which portray the ruler on the obverse with a Greek legend forming a circular border and a Hellenistic deity on the reverse with a Kharoṣṭhī legend encircling it (Bopearachchi 1991). More precisely, several coins of Graeco-Bactrian origins depict, on the reverse, Zeus sitting on a throne both in frontal and three-quarter views (*ibid.*: 326–345, pls 52–60; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 4; Stančo 2012: figs 335–346). The representation of Zeus carrying a figure of the goddess Athena-Nike with a wreath on his right palm, while holding a long sceptre in his left hand, is particularly common. This iconographic type — called Zeus Nikephoros — apparently emerged in the second half of the second century BCE or the beginning of the first century BCE, and originated from gold and silver mints of Alexander the Great [**Figure 1.6**]. It could be understood as an allusion to the famous chryselephantine statue of Olympian Zeus by Pheidias (Stančo 2012: 201).

The extent to which the depiction on coins of such enthroned Greek gods as Zeus and others was interpreted or even adopted directly into later Central Asian iconography remains to be determined. Some representations of Zeus, for example, may have undergone specific local developments around the turn of the Common Era and be interpreted differently in various regions. For example, certain scholars (e.g. Grenet 2006) argue that this imagery of enthroned Zeus was assimilated by the Iranian solar god Mithra. This would seem to be the case, for instance, of the coins which King Hermaios (*ca* r. 90–70 BCE) minted in the Kabul area, with a sitting Mithra depicted on the reverse in the manner of Zeus, and where we can see rays radiating from the deity’s head (Stančo 2012: figs 342–343). Another possible fusion of Zeus-Mithra sitting on the throne with a radiating halo was depicted on the reverse of a coin minted by the first Sasanian king in Bactria, Ardašīr (r. *ca* 224–242 CE), bearing the unambiguous inscription Bago Miuro, i.e. “Lord Mithra” (Grenet 2006; Stančo 2012: 202, 211, cat. no. 26). In turn, the Central Asian Mithra, seated on the solar chariot, most likely influenced the iconography of the Indian god Sūrya, including costume, boots, hat, and even the peculiar mustache.¹¹ In the late Kuṣāṇa art of Mathurā, Sūrya or Āditya is thus always shown squatting and dressed in Indo-Scythian garb [**Figure 1.7**]. The squatting posture only slightly differs from the pendant-legged pose in that the subject generally sits on a low stool or cushion, sometimes on his haunches, causing his knees to rise above the waist. Thus it might not be too far-fetched to assume that Buddhist iconography later reproduced some of

¹¹ *Contra*, Rosenfield (1967: 190–191, 197) thought that the squatting Sūrya images were rather derived from Kuṣāṇa royal portraits.

their concepts and associated imagery. At any rate, this iconographic process of assimilation in Northwest India, partly inherited from the Graeco-Bactrian world, is especially clear with Ardoxšo and Pharro, or their Indian counterparts Hāritī and Pañcika, as we shall see later (Chapter 2).

2.3 The Indian Subcontinent

In the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, an early and rare example of a sandstone figure seated in the pendant-legged posture was found in the Indus valley [Figure 1.8] and raises the intriguing question of its origins and source of inspiration.¹² Was it made locally or was it imported? Did he represent a king, a high priest, or a god? Whatever the case, only by approximately the Mauryan period (323–185 BCE) do material artifacts depicting anthropomorphic figures begin to appear extensively in the archeological record, for example terracotta figurines and plaques that coincide with the rise and fall of the Mauryan Empire in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.¹³ While stylistic features of these terracottas have often been linked to “Western” influence, the iconographic substance of the terracottas seems to be of autochthonous inspiration (Bautze 1995). For example, a group of terracotta plaques depict amorous couples (*mithuna*) on beds, with one series in particular portraying a couple on a chair [Figure 1.9]. This series of plaques from Kauśāmbī, in Uttar Pradesh, represents quite possibly the first extant visual example of any chair-like apparatus on the Indian subcontinent (Poster 1986: 36, fig. 7; Bautze 1995: pl. XXIXa). Madhukar Dhavalikar (1977: 54) describes the scene as follows:

The chair on which the couple is shown sitting is noteworthy since it is of foreign origin. It is an import from the classical world and was known to the Romans as *cella curulis*. It could have found its way into India with the Indo-Greeks on whose coins its representations are found. The chair has no back but

¹² Some early interesting miniature carts made of copper were also discovered in Harappa and Chanhu-daro. One model shows a two-wheeled canopied chariot with the figure of a driver seated in front on a raised seat with his legs suspended (P.K. Agrawala 1977: 15–16, figs 17–18).

¹³ A unique bearded terracotta figure of a man sitting in the pendant-legged pose on a stool and holding a dish with his left hand, attributed to the Śuṅga period (second–first century BCE), can be seen in the Mathurā Government Museum (Sharma 1994: 58–59, fig. 5). Other terracotta figures of a “young boy holding a parrot” and a “corpulent male figure” seated in the same benevolent squatting posture, and said to originate from western Bengal, *circa* first century BCE, are kept at the LACMA (Pal 1986: I, 143, 145, pl. 51).

has side arms, and the Indians certainly must have found it inconvenient for the simple reason that one cannot sit in it in the cross legged posture — the typical Indian posture. But since it was a novelty from the Western world, some dandies must have acquired it.

Dhavalikar’s humorous visual analysis summarizes a number of possible historical realities in a few short sentences, but his opinion that the “novelty” or its inspiration must have come from the “Western/classical world” must be qualified in comparison with the evidence presented so far in this introductory chapter. At any rate, the Kauśāmbī plaque seems to be a plausible visual starting point from which the depiction of other chair-like apparatuses and pendant-legged figures may be assumed to have spread in the Indian subcontinent (Auboyer 1949: 39–45). We can evaluate this hypothesis in Indian art by looking at post-Mauryan stone reliefs, for example at the Bodhgayā railing in Bihar, at a time when the Buddha was not yet represented in human form **[Figure 1.10]**.¹⁴

One early sculptural example of a pendant-legged figure in India is the red sandstone life-size image of a headless Yakṣī from Jhingki Nagara at Mathurā which is currently housed in the Government Museum **[Figure 1.11]**.¹⁵ The eroded Yakṣī is majestically seated with both legs pendant and the feet resting upon a stool, with her right hand raised with palm turning inward and left hand resting on her left knee. Referring to her softness, naturalism, and voluminousness, Sonya Rhie Quintanilla (2007: 91–92) considers this Yakṣī to feature elements of late Bhārhut art style, *circa* 100 BCE. A Brāhmī inscription, found on the pedestal between her feet, is key to the identification of the figure and confirms its relatively ancient dating. We thus learn that her name is Yakṣī Lāyavā and the sculpture was made by Nāka, a pupil of a certain Kuṇika (*ibid.*: 256, Appendix I.4). From the foregoing, there is enough evidence to conclude that the pendant-legged posture was already well established in early Indian art and iconography, even prior to the advent of Buddha images in the Northwest.

¹⁴ See also the “lady at toilet” from a rail post at Mathurā, AIIS # 44496.

¹⁵ For more views, see AIIS # 44633–35.

3. Questions of Terminology

The technical terms for seated Buddha images discussed in this dissertation now need to be reassessed. These Buddha images are usually distinguished by their manner of sitting with both legs pendant and feet firmly resting on a pedestal, as opposed to those seated with legs crossed. Several categories and designations used for describing these images are the products of older scholarship and have recently come to be reconsidered. The following is a brief summary of my previous research (Revire 2008 and 2011), coupled with another attempt to look at this terminology from a different perspective and in the light of primary textual sources that had not previously come to my attention.

3.1 A “European Posture”? Foucher Revisited

For most of the twentieth century, the Buddhas seated with legs pendant tended to be described as seated in the “European fashion,” or “Western manner,” by international scholars. The term “European posture/manner/fashion” apparently made its first appearance in the emerging field of Buddhist art of the mid-to-late nineteenth century among European savants, mostly German and French, then immersed in a colonial environment.

The earliest instance that I am aware of was penned by the German Emil von Schlagintweit in his work *Buddhism in Tibet* (1863), which has a special section on the representations of Buddhist deities.¹⁶ Another German scholar, Albert Grünwedel in his “Handbuch” entitled *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien*, first published in 1893, also used the expression.¹⁷ This early terminology was taken over by French scholar Alfred Foucher in a book review of the latter (1894: 348) and then given authority in Foucher’s subsequent writings on Buddhist art (e.g. 1905: 49, n. 1; 1909: 26). These latter writings had tremendous impact on subsequent generations of western scholars.

At first sight, this exogenous designation — *nach europäischer Art/à l’européenne* — may be perceived as a symptom of naive and incipient characterization of Buddhist iconography. Or, it perhaps reflects the Eurocentric biases and attitude of superiority of early

¹⁶ “The European fashion of sitting should be given to Maitreya, for this mode is called after him Chanzhug, sitting like Champa (Maitreya)” (Schlagintweit 1863: 210–211). My sincere thanks to Richard Smith for pointing out this reference.

¹⁷ “In der Regel wird er stehend oder — wenn auch nicht ausschließlich — nach europäischer Art sitzend dargestellt” (Grünwedel 1893: 161); for the English version, see Grünwedel 1901: 186. I am grateful to Claudine Bautze-Picron for having checked the original occurrence in the German edition.

western scholars in their criteria of classification. As it happens, this characterization — *à l'europpéenne* — was mainly based on the assumption that traditional “Indians” never adapted to chair-usage and the consequent pendant-legged pose, a notion that I have contested somewhat in the preceding pages. Some scholars (e.g. Frédéric 2001: 48, n. 16) even went so far as to speak of the “Chinese,” the “Iranian” or “Gandhārian” posture, based on the supposition that this pose may have found its origin in Greater Gandhāra from where it subsequently spread to China. Whatever the grounds for making such assertions, I do not think it appropriate that a descriptive art historical term should be “ethnicized.” Several Sanskrit equivalents are regularly given as alternative in iconographic manuals, dictionaries, and treatises and *a priori* such “emic” terms are preferable. But which of these is the most legitimate?

3.2 Sanskrit Terminology: Back to Coomaraswamy

Perhaps recognizing the European imperialist thinking of his day, the designation “European pose” seemed totally inappropriate to Ananda Coomaraswamy, one of the most prominent South Asian scholars in the first half of the twentieth century and a serious critic of Foucher’s theories.¹⁸ Art historian Coomaraswamy had a creative mind, but he was not exactly a textual scholar. His interpretations of Buddhist texts were often subjective and, at times, the terms he uses that seem to be from original sources were, in actual fact, his own creations.

Responding with his own nationalistic view, Coomaraswamy (1923: 77; 1927b: 76, 96) naturally preferred to substitute Foucher’s Eurocentric label with a Sanskrit compound of his own creation, “*pralambapāda āsana*,” which he later transformed to *pralambapādāsana*, literally “sitting posture with (two) leg(s) pendant” even though the original sources never use the word *āsana* in connection with the word *pralambapādāsana*. It must be emphasized again that this designation has no textual basis and was simply proposed as a response to Foucher’s European biases.¹⁹ Subsequently, the disciples of these two great pioneers in the

¹⁸ It is not out of place to recall here the debate between Foucher and Coomaraswamy concerning the supposed place of origin of the first “anthropomorphic” Buddha image. The former was in favor of a Greek influence and located its appearance in Gandhāra. The latter was in favor of an Indian origin and placed the first Buddha image in Mathurā. See S. Huntington 2014; also **Chapter 2, n. 6** for further references.

¹⁹ As noticed by Lokesh Chandra in his foreword to I. Kim 1997 (p. vi): “When there is a classical term in Sanskrit as well as in Tibetan, it is not advisable to devise a new neologism.” Lokesh Chandra overstates his case, however, accusing Coomaraswamy of inventing the compound “*pralamba-pāda*” as being unattested in any Sanskrit source. It is in fact perfectly valid and is indeed found in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* of Śāntideva, in the phrase “*pralambapādām nāsīta*” (ed. Bendall 1897–1902: 125): “sit not with dangling leg” (trans. Bendall &

study of Buddhist art continued to use one terminology (“the European pose”) or another (“*pralambapādāsana*”). Foucher’s preferred terminology, sometimes replaced by Coomaraswamy’s artificial Sanskrit compound, has been followed by a whole generation of art historians who developed the study of art and archeology in South and Southeast Asia.

In addition to these two, other Sanskrit terms are sometimes used to refer to this posture. These are *bhadrāsana*, *maitreyāsana*, *sattvāsana*, and even *paryāṅkāśana* (e.g. Mallmann 1948: 256–257; Liebert 1986: 36, 216, 225; Terentyev 2004: 47). Some of these terms, however, are further inventions or neologisms based on preconceived ideas, such as *maitreyāsana* (“the posture of Maitreya”). The correct interpretations of others are even more problematic as they might bias scholarly interpretation. For instance, the term *paryāṅkāśana* is, in fact, a designation of a cross-legged posture (see *infra*).²⁰

For my purpose, the term *bhadrāsana* is no doubt the best choice amongst all the above alternatives, for two reasons. First, unlike *pralambapādāsana* and other artificial Sanskrit equivalents, *bhadrāsana* has an ancient textual basis which I analyze in detail below. Second, and perhaps more important, it also seems to satisfactorily capture the regal symbolism conveyed by these images seated and often literally enthroned in the pendant-legged posture. Therefore I use this expression almost exclusively in this dissertation.

4. Descriptions of *bhadrāsana*

The neuter Sanskrit compound word *bhadrāsana*²¹ is constructed from two words: *bhadra* and *āsana*. The adjective *bhadra* means “good, auspicious, propitious, benevolent, excellent, etc.” and *āsana* literally means “a sitting place,” “a seat” or “a stool,” but can also designate, by extension, a particular “sitting posture” (SED, s.vv.).²² For that reason, and depending on context, *bhadrāsana* can alternatively be translated as the “auspicious” or “glorious

Rouse 1922: 125). This example was already noted by Foucher (1900: 67, n. 5), but with the *caveat* that this “dangling leg” (note the singular) refers to the favorite posture of Bodhisattvas (known as *lalitāsana*), not Buddhas, and that it is not appropriate for monks to adopt it.

²⁰ Perhaps enhancing the confusion is that the term *paryāṅka* in Sanskrit, *pallaṅka* in Pali, and *banlang* in Thai — “palanquin” in English — also refers to a kind of couch, divan, or sofa, specially designed for kings or high dignitaries; it can also be a synonym of *āsandī* (Acharya 1946: 303; Auboyer 1949: 194–195; see also *infra*).

²¹ Hereafter, I give only the Sanskrit term unless referring to a specific Pali text or source.

²² The same words and meanings are employed in Pali (*bhadda* and *āsana*; PED, s.vv.), but it should be noted that *āsana* does not mean “posture” *per se*, for which there is a completely different term, *īryāpatha* (Skt), *īriyāpatha* (P.), *īriyabot* (Th.). Buddha images are found in four natural postures, standing, sitting, walking, and lying down. Furthermore, the *āsana* as a “seat” may at times consist only of a piece of cloth laid on a dais or on the floor (e.g. Vin IV 272). According to the *Mānasāraśilpaśāstra*, the technical term *āsana* can also relate to “a class of buildings, a moulding, a site-plan, a temple,” or even “a type of dwellings” (Acharya 1946: 64–65).

seat/chair/throne,”²³ or else, if figuring as *bahuvrīhi* compound, as “seated/sitting auspiciously.” As we shall see below, textual evidence supports both usages, but, before we proceed, let us take a look at the data for the use of thrones or chairs in ancient India.

4.1 Early Sitting Apparatus in India

Arguably the first sitting apparatus found in Indian literature is attested in the Vedic period.²⁴ For example, in the *Atharvavedasamhitā* (ca 1,000–800 BCE), the Sanskrit verb $\sqrt{\text{sad}}$, “to sit,” seemingly evolved into the word *āsandī*. In the following passage, a full, rather metaphorical, description of the *āsandī*, where elements of the chair are identified with the elements of the ritual (verses, sacrificial formulas, chants, etc.), is given:

*sá samvatsarām ūrdhvó 'tiṣṭhat tám devā abruvan vrātya kím nú
tiṣṭhasítī || só 'bravīd āsandīm me sám bharantv íti || tásmāi
vrātyāyāśandīm sám abharan || tásyā grīṣmās ca vasantás ca dváu
pādāv āstām śarác ca varṣás ca dváu || bṛhác ca rathamtarám
cānūcyè āstām yajñāyajñīyam ca vāmadevyám ca tiraścyè || ṛcaḥ
prāñcas tántavo yájūmṣi tiryāñcaḥ || véda āstāraṇam
bráhmopabárhaṇam || sámāsādā udgīthó 'paśrayáḥ || tám āsandīm
vrātya árohat || (XV 3.1–9)*

He stood a year erect; the gods said to him: Vrātya, why now standest thou? He said: Let them bring together a **settle** (*āsandī*)^[25] for me. For that Vrātya they brought together a **settle**. Of it, both summer and spring were two feet, both autumn and the rains (were) two. Both *bṛhát* [“mighty”] and *rathamtará* [“fire”] were the two length-wise (pieces), both *yajñāyajñīya* [“divine”] and *vāmadevyá* [“seer”] the two cross(-pieces). The verses (*ṛc*) the forward cords (*tántu*), the sacrificial formulas (*yájus*) the cross ones. The Veda the cushion (*āstāraṇa*), the *bráhman* the pillow (*upabárhaṇa*). The chant (*sáman*)

²³ *The Encyclopedia of Hindu Architecture* gives the following definition: “a kind of throne, a chair of state, a great seat” (Acharya 1946: 380).

²⁴ This section is largely drawn from primary sources discussed in Auboyer’s Appendix (1949: 193–199) and somewhat revisited in Higgins 2012.

²⁵ Ralph Griffith (1895: II, 188) translated *āsandī* as “couch.”

the seat [*āsādā*], the *udgīthā* the support (?). That settle [*āsandī*] the Vrātya ascended (trans. Whitney 1905: 776–777).

This descriptive passage is repeated in near identical form in at least three other early Sanskrit sources, namely the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (VIII 5–12), the *Kauṣītaki-upaniṣad* (I 5), and the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa* (II 24). All passages progress in a similar manner, beginning at ground level and then describing the construction of the *āsandī*, piece by piece, upwards.²⁶ The sitter, a Vrātya in this case, is described last and sits on top. First the *āsandī* is constructed with a wood frame and woven cording for its seat, not a solid board. Next, a layer of bedding is described: a pillow, a cushion, and/or a coverlet depending on the text and translation. MacDonell and Keith (1912: 72) help clarify the subsequent term, *āsāda*, metaphorically described above as the chant, as the “seat proper,” or, even perhaps, the sitting apparatus as a whole.²⁷ Finally, before the concluding element, the seated Vrātya, the passage describes a “support” of some kind (*upāsri* or *upāśraya*).²⁸ Unfortunately, no extant sculptures or images from this period are available that would help us clarify the meaning of this last item and whether or not it could represent a back support for a chair.

In another passage from the *Atharvavedasamhitā* (XIV 2.65), an *āsandī* is said to support a newlywed couple in their consummation. While one could imagine a “chair” in this context, it seems more fitting to agree that the *āsandī* (P. *āsandi*) here described is more an “extra long chair, a deck chair” (PED, s.v.), that is, a divan, or even perhaps a “bed” [Fig. 1.9]. It is thus possible to assume that the term *āsandī*, and related forms *āsandika/āsāda/āsana* represented a category of furniture during this early period which we might distinguish today. Similar categorization continues hundreds of years later in the Pali Canon, in which the *āsandi* is mentioned as a “bier” for a corpse, as “the seat in the front part of a cart,” as “six feet long,” as “capable of seating three people,” and as “stackable” (Auboyer 1949: 193–194, 198). Given such variation, we should not be overly concerned here with difference of form but rather the possibility of flexible usage.

²⁶ The *Kauṣītaki-upaniṣad* mentions the *āsandī* in conjunction with another sitting apparatus, the *paryāṅka* (“couch”), although both seem to perform the same function.

²⁷ Note that the variant *prāsāda* equally denotes the “seat and dwelling” of gods and kings, that is, their mansion or palace in a figurative sense (SED, s.v.; Acharya 1946: 343ff).

²⁸ Incidentally, Apte (1965) defines *upāsri* as “bolster,” which would be in accordance with passages from the Pali Canon containing furniture descriptions in which bolsters, cushions, or pads (P. *bhisi*) are always mentioned in relation to *āsandis* and their bedding. Monier-Williams defines *upāsri/upāśraya* with the ambiguous term “support” (SED, s.v.).

The combination of the above textual passages with the extant visual evidence allows us to imagine that the *āsandī*, *āsandika*, *āsāda*, or even the *āsana*, was used, or sat upon, in a variety of manners. It is surely conceivable that a few dignitaries would have let their legs hang off a seat or couch once in a while as is clearly illustrated in early Indian art [Figs 1.9–1.10]. Upon closer examination, the various scenes seem to depict a posture in relation to the height of the seat, that is, the individual’s knee to foot length is nearly equivalent to the seat’s leg height. Equal height of sitter and apparatus, therefore, would seem to determine the pendant-legged posture. Interestingly, footstools (*pādapīṭha*) beneath the sitters also appear with increasing frequency, giving a support on which to rest the feet. As Jeanine Auboyer (1949) and Charles Higgins (2012) have claimed, both stools and chairs are necessary apparatuses that help shape the sitter in the desired pendant-legged posture.

4.2 The *bhadrāsana* as Royal Throne

In Indian symbolism and mythology, the *bhadrāsana* as a throne,²⁹ or its equivalent term *bhadrapīṭha* (SED, s.v.), has been given special importance since time immemorial.³⁰ We know that the *bhadra*-throne is often considered one of the eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamaṅgalas*) that appear very early in Indic traditions³¹ and which frequently is represented on coins (Wicks 1999: 11–16; Ronachai & Mihailovs 2012: 40–43; Mahlo 2012: 24–26, 46–59), as well as on footprints of the Buddha (*buddhapādas*) in South and Southeast Asia (Knox 1992: cat. nos 120–121; Skilling 1992: 74; Quagliotti 1998: 75, 81, n. 3, 144; Cicuzza 2011: 23, 132–133).³²

²⁹ The word “throne” itself is from Greek *θρόνος* (*thronos*) and means “seat, chair.” I use this term as the seat of state of a king or high dignitary, especially the seat occupied by a sovereign on certain occasions. For a typology of Indian thrones, see Auboyer 1949: 9–38; also Acharya 1934: 457–469 and 1946: 309ff, 522–524.

³⁰ The *Bhṛgusaṃhitā* (35, 164), an astrological treatise of uncertain date, gives a reference to *śubha bhadrāsana*, i.e. “a shining/splendid auspicious throne.” As far as I am aware, the corresponding term *bhaddāsana* is unknown in the Pali Canon, whereas *bhaddapīṭha* is more common. The latter is allowed as a special seat for monks in Vin V 149 and occurs in Jāt nos 140, 283, 415, 484, 492, 521, 533, 546, as well as in Vv-a 9, 28, 31. In contrast, the *bhadrāsana* is prohibited to monks in the *Vinayasūtra* (17, 267), written by ninth-century Indian scholar Guṇaprabha and included in the Tibetan *Bstan ’gyur*. I thank Ulrich Timme Kragh for checking the auto-commentary preserved only in Tibetan.

³¹ According to certain Jaina sources, the *aṣṭamaṅgalas* include the *bhadrāsana* (Shah 1955: 109–111). The *bhadrapīṭha* is also described in *Citrakarmaśāstra* 16, 165–167.1 as part of the *aṣṭamaṅgala* diagram (ed. & trans. Marasinghe 1991: xxi, n. 1, 153, fig. 1; see also Marasinghe 1996: 186).

³² Claudio Cicuzza (2011: liii–lxiii) gives several lists where the “auspicious throne” appears in its Pali form (*bhaddapīṭha*); one exception is the *Sāmantakūṭavaṇṇanā*, a Pali work composed in Sri Lanka in approximately the thirteenth century, where the term *bhadrāsana* occurs in its Sanskrit spelling.

To begin, the term *bhadṛāsana* appears several times in the Hindu Epic literature and the *Purāṇas*.³³ One significant early occurrence comes from the *Mahābhārata* (supplementary passages) and is given as *bhadṛāsane pratiṣṭhāpya indrāṇīm samakārayat* (Mhbh I 57, 68.52). In this example, the compound is found in the locative singular case, clearly correlating the *bhadṛāsana* to an object, i.e. a throne type.³⁴ This phrase seemingly refers to the **installation** (*pratiṣṭhā*) of **Indrāṇī**, Indra’s royal consort, **on the “auspicious throne.”** The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (I 250, 24) has a similar passage where god Śakra (Indra) is said to be offered obeisance by all deities while the latter takes possession of his majestic chair during his coronation:

bhadṛāsanagataṁ śakraṁ praṇemuḥ sarvadevatāḥ |
khyāpyamāno mahārāja tadā devena daṇḍinā ||

All the gods, bowed down to Shakra, seated on the auspicious state chair, and of great king! He has proclaimed as victorious, by a staff-holder God then (trans. Shah 1961: I, 505).

In addition, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* two verses occur where *bhadṛāsana* again appears as a throne or highly valued chair. The first incidence figures in Rāmāy II 23, 16:

na ca kāñcanacitraṁ te paśyāmi priyadarśana |
bhadṛāsanam puraskṛtya yāntam vīrapuraḥsaram ||

Nor do I see your escort, my handsome and mighty husband, proceeding with the **gold-wrought throne** held before them (trans. Pollock 1986: 133).

³³ See *Agnipurāṇa* II 218, 6.1–2, II 218, 17.3–4 and II 244, 3.3–4; *Garuḍapurāṇa* I 38, 7.1 and I 100, 4.2; *Liṅgapurāṇa* II 5, 83.2; also *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṅgraha* 7, 23.2 and 14, 14.2. In addition, characteristics of the *bhadṛāsana* are elaborately described in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* II 14 (cf. trans. Shah 1961: II) where the throne is instructed to be made with the wood of the four trees (viz. *nyagrodha*, *uḍumbara*, *aśvattha*, *madhūka*). In the latter text, the “auspicious throne” is frequently cited and often associated to gods and kings (I 41, 29, I 209, 26, II 8, 1, II 21, 7, II 52, 118, II 57, 3, II 103, 11, II 103, 22, II 105, 9, II 161, 16, III 22, 17).

³⁴ See also Mhbh VII 58, 9, XIII 21, 3, and XIII 61, 86.

The second occurrence is from Rāmāy V 4, 8:

mattapramattāni samākulāni rathāśvabhadrāsanasamkulāni |
vīrasriyā cāpi samākulāni dadarśa dhīmān sa kapiḥ kulāni ||

The wise monkey saw mansions — one after another — filled with amorous and intoxicated people, crowded with chariots, horses, and **golden seats**, and filled with the splendor of warriors (trans. Goldman & Sutherland 1996: 122).

Interestingly, the translators of the above two cited passages render the Sanskrit term *bhadrāsana* as either “gold-wrought throne” or “golden seat” in lieu of the more literal “auspicious throne.” At any rate, this association of the throne-seat with gold is not uncommon in early Indic literature³⁵ and is further corroborated by a passage from the *Mahāsudarśanāvadāna*, a Sanskrit text found in the Gilgit Buddhist manuscripts (1562.7).³⁶ The latter text makes an additional connection between the “*bhadra*-throne” and kingship, here idealized in the person of King Mahāsudarśana:

atha rājā mahāsudarśano dharmyāt prāsādād avatīrya sauvarṇe
bhadrāsane niṣaṅṅo || (ed. Matsumura 1988: 36).³⁷

Then **King Mahāsudarśana sat on a golden and auspicious throne** after descending from the Dharma palace (my translation).³⁸

³⁵ The compound *kañcanabhaddapīṭha* or *suvaṅṅabhaddapīṭha* (“golden auspicious throne”) occurs several times in Jāt nos 140, 415, 521, 533. See also Vv-a 28–31 (trans. Masefield 1997: 42ff) which speaks of the gift of a “stately-divan” (*bhaddapīṭha*) by a woman to a monk, which meritorious deed resulted in her being reborn in a celestial abode (*vimāna*) along with a throne “made of gold” (*sovaṅṅamaya*). The *Agnipurāṇa* (II 244, 3–4) also enjoins to decorate with gold (*suvarṇa*) the “auspicious seat” (*bhadrāsana*), which is actually made with the wood of the four trees (see note *supra*).

³⁶ Early Gāndhārī fragments referring to the Mahāsudarśanā narrative, albeit not exactly for the same passage, were recently found in the manuscripts of the Schøyen collection (Allon & Salomon 2000).

³⁷ The Central Asian version of the same passage, although largely reconstructed, is embedded in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (MPS 34.128) and was first tentatively read as: (*atha*) *rājā mahāsudarśano dharmāt prāsādād avatīrya sauvarṇe (prajñāptabhadrāsane nyaṣīdat |)* (ed. Waldschmidt 1951: 342). A later slightly improved reading is offered as: [...] *atha rājā mahāsudarśano dharmāt prāsādād avatīrya sauvarṇe bhadrāsane niṣaṅṅaḥ* (ed. Matsumura 1988: 37).

³⁸ Rupert Gethin’s loose translation of the matching passage reads: “The king comes down from the palace and sits on the seat” (2006: 107). Mark Allon’s English translation of the corresponding Sanskrit excerpt from MPS

This passage is particularly interesting for our purposes since the story later identifies King Mahāsudarśana as the quintessential Cakravartin³⁹ who was none other than the Buddha himself in a previous life. Thomas Rhys Davids, in his introduction to the translation of the *Mahāsudassanasutta* (D II 169–199), a parallel version in Pali, qualified the monarch Sudassana as “the Great King of Glory”⁴⁰ and the story as “an attempt [...] to describe in set terms the greatest possible glory and majesty of the greatest possible king, in order to show that all is vanity” (1910: 197).⁴¹

Both versions, Sanskrit and Pali, show a close connection with the Mahāparinirvāṇa episode, one of the most central texts of early Buddhism, where Ānanda questions the Buddha about the appropriateness of his dying in Kuśinagarī/Kusinārā (Waldschmidt 1951; Allon 1987; Gethin 2006). But the two narratives differ significantly in some details and do not show word-for-word agreement. In the Sanskrit version, as seen above, Mahāsudarśana is depicted “sitting on the auspicious throne” (*bhadrāsane niṣaṇṇo*) before talking to his queen, whereas there is no exact correspondence with the Pali passage. In the second version, the equivalent *bhaddāsana* is not found and only *pallaṅka* is used, rendered here as “couch.” It is not clear whether *paryaṅka/pallaṅka* is employed as a synonym for *bhadrāsana*. Moreover, the precise position of the legs in which the king sat upon the *bhadra*-throne is not specified in the Sanskrit passage although there are several other passages where the cross-legged posture is indicated with the following expression *paryaṅke paryaṅkena niṣadya* (“he sat cross-legged on a couch”). In the Pali version, however, the dialogue between Mahāsudassana and the queen takes place on the golden couch (*sovaṇṇamaya pallaṅka*) as follows:

(ed. Waldschmidt 1951: 342) is as follows: “Then king Mahāsudarśanā descended from the Righteous palace and sat down on the golden throne that had been arranged” (1987: 80).

³⁹ The Sanskrit term *cakravartin* (P. *cakkavatti*) is hereafter left untranslated or rendered as “wheel-turner,” although it is sometimes more freely rendered as “universal monarch,” “world emperor,” “wheel-conqueror,” etc. For a thorough discussion of the term, see Gonda 1966: 123–128.

⁴⁰ According to the same author (Rhys Davids 1910: 199, n. 1), Sudassana means “beautiful to see, having a glorious appearance,” and is the name of many kings and heroes in Indian legends. It is also the name of several cities or places in Pali literature and in Buddhist cosmology. For example Sudassana is applied to the city of the Thirty-three with Lord Indra or Sakka at its head on the peak of Mount Sumeru/Sineru (DPPN, s.v.).

⁴¹ The same legend occurs, with variations, in the *Mahāsudassana-jātaka* (Jāt no. 95). There is also an apocryphal version from Thailand where, in contrast with the above canonical versions, the story narrates the past life of the king himself rather than that of the Buddha (ed. Unebe *et al.* 2007: 12–15).

*atha kho ānanda rājā mahāsudassano dakkhiṇena passena
sīhaseyyam kappesi pāde pādam accādhāya sato sampajāno ||
(D II 190)*

Then [O Ananda], **King Mahāsudassana adopted the lion-posture** on his right side with one foot on the other, mindful and clearly aware (trans. Walshe 1995: 288).

Here the king is lying down on the couch in the same manner the Buddha adopted on other occasions during his lifetime, most notably at the scene of his great demise. In one other instance, the Pali recension gives only the somewhat ambiguous formulation *sovaṇṇamaye pallaṅke nisinno* (D II 186), i.e. “[the king] was **seated on a couch made of gold,**” with *pallaṅke* in a locative singular ending for “on a couch,” (Skt, *paryāṅke*) but omitting *pallaṅkena* (Skt, *paryāṅkena*), the instrumental case of *pallaṅka*, “in a cross-legged position.” Maurice Walshe nonetheless extrapolated and felt authorized to translate this phrase as “[the king] sat down **cross-legged** on the golden couch” (1995: 286), even if the original Pali does not literally say so. I do not contest this rendition, however, for, as we have seen, the Sanskrit version clarifies this matter with the appropriate use of the instrumental case. Moreover, the term *pallaṅka* is generally perceived as a couch on which one sits cross-legged, in a meditation posture, or, as we have just observed in the quoted passage with Mahāsudassana, even lies down.⁴² The noun is often used in Pali with the verb “to bend” (*ābhujati*), here the legs, and this is how the phrase is explained for example in Vism 271:

*pallaṅkan ti samantato ūrubaddhāsanaṃ ābhujitvā ti bandhitvā ujum
kāyam paṇidhāyā ti uparimasarīraṃ ujukaṃ ṭhapetvā
atṭhārasapiṭṭhikaṇṭake koṭiyā koṭim paṭipādetvā evañ hi nisīdantassa
cammamaṃsanhārūni na paṇamanti || athassa yā tesam
paṇamanappaccayā khaṇe khaṇe vedanā uppajjeyyūṃ | tā na
uppajjanti tāsu anuppajjamānāsu cittaṃ ekaggaṃ hoti kammaṭṭhānaṃ
na paripatati vuddhiṃ phātim upagacchati ||*

⁴² According to a Pali commentary by Buddhaghosa, an *āsana* is for sitting on, a *pallaṅka* for lying down on: *ekāsane nisajjam | ekapallaṅke sayanaṃ* (Sv III 928). I wish to thank Peter Masefield for this reference.

Herein, **crosswise** is the sitting position with the thighs fully locked. **Folded:** having locked. Set his body erect: having placed the upper part of the body erect with the eighteen backbones resting end to end. For when he is seated like this, his skin, flesh and sinews are not twisted, and so the feelings that would arise moment by moment if they were twisted do not arise. That being so, his mind becomes unified, and the meditation subject, instead of collapsing, attains to growth and increase (trans. Ñāṇamoli 1991: 264).

As for the “auspicious throne,” i.e. *bhadrāsana*, it remains to be seen if other textual sources can shed more light on how one is to be “seated auspiciously” upon it, whether cross-legged or pendant-legged, although the latter is more likely as it would seem more natural for a king granting an audience and affirming his authority over its subjects. But beside this early textual evidence, a more conscious classification of throne types fit for various classes of kings and gods alike was developed in the forty-fifth chapter of the *Mānasāraśilpaśāstra*, an architectural treatise composed probably in South India between the eleventh and fifteenth century.⁴³ In this chapter, titled *siṃhāsana*lakṣaṇavidhāna, the *bhadrāsana* equals the *siṃhāsana*, that is, the “lion throne,” and is more specifically attributed to the Paṭṭabhāj class of kings (Acharya 1946: 523 and 1980: 439, n. 1, 467). The earlier *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, however, specifies that the “auspicious throne” is made only for the use of deities, and the “lion seat” for kings.⁴⁴ In yet a later lexicographical Pali work, the *Abhidhānappadāpikāṭikā*, a similar citation from a non-specified source where the compound *bhaddāsana* defines the *sīhāsana* is presented:⁴⁵

hemaṃ sīhāsanaṃ vesam vuttaṃ bhaddāsanaṃ tathā |

Likewise, the “**auspicious throne**” is said to be in the disguise of the “**golden lion throne**” (my translation).

⁴³ According to Anna Ślāczka (2007: 188, n. 4), the sixth-century date proposed by Acharya seems too early, although there is little doubt that this text is a compilation of tradition and knowledge that goes back well before its extant written form.

⁴⁴ *bhadrāsanaṃ tu devānāṃ rājñāṃ siṃhāsanaṃ bhavet ||* (III 22, 17.3–4; cf. trans. Shah 1961: 68).

⁴⁵ I thank Giuliano Giustarini for drawing this reference to my attention. There is also a Pali commentary that states: *sīhāsane ti thirāsane aparājītapallaṅke ti attho*, i.e., “on the lion throne: the firm throne, meaning unconquered couch” (Th-a III 152).

The expression *simhāsana* evidently implies a seat marked with a lion. Indeed, the significance of the lion, that is, a solar symbol as well as a royal and divine animal, is well known in India since ancient times (Auboyer 1949: 108–112). By extension, the “lion throne” indicated the royal ranks of its occupant, as the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (602–604 CE) made clear in his travelogue about Indian customs:

The Throne of the reigning sovereign is large and high, and much adorned with precious gems: it is called the Lion-throne (*simhāsana*). It is covered with extremely fine drapery; the footstool is adorned with gems. The nobility use beautifully painted and enriched seats, according to their taste (trans. Beal 1884: I, 75).

Xuanzang also gave an account of a legend in which Avalokiteśvara advised a prince not to sit on a *simhāsana*, nor to use the title of *mahārāja* or “Great King” (Beal 1884: I, 212–213). The meaning is clear: the thrones of the sovereign have a hierarchical order and the *simhāsana* is fit only for certain ranks of kings (the prince was not a *mahārāja*); therefore only a monarch who has reached a specific level of command, the Cakravartin being the most elevated in the hierarchy, has the right to sit upon it.⁴⁶ In the Buddhist sphere, the lion is equivalent to the Buddha, he who emits the “lion’s roar,” a metaphorical translation of the preaching of the Buddhist law.⁴⁷ Therefore, the lion, king of beasts, accompanies or supports the Buddha, king of the Dharma (*dharmarāja*); he is a royal symbol and represents the triumphant power of Buddhist teaching. Furthermore, the lion is the emblem of the princely house of the Śākya, the royal lineage to which the historical Buddha belonged, the lion amongst lions, the Śākya (Śākyasimha). Hence, the Buddha seated on the *simhāsana* can be interpreted as a Cakravartin in a spiritual sense, the “sovereign” who guarantees cosmic order by spreading the Dharma.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This idea is clear in the *Mānasāraśilpaśāstra* (45, 203–206) which enjoins that “beautiful thrones marked with lions” should be made for the Cakravartin or other remaining classes of prestigious kings, although another passage (45, 189) also notes that “lion legs” should not be made for thrones of the Astragrāhas, that is, a class of petty kings (Acharya 1934: 439, n. 1, 468–469). See also Auboyer 1949: 179.

⁴⁷ The *Mahāsīhanādasutta* (D I 175) describes a “lion-roar” thus: “The ascetic Gotama roars his lion’s roar, in company and confidently, they question him and he answers, he wins them over with his answers, they find it pleasing and are satisfied with what they have heard, they behave as if they were satisfied, they are on the path of truth, and they are satisfied with the practice” (trans. Walshe 1995: 156).

⁴⁸ In the Pali Canon (Sn, v. 554), the Buddha is reported to have said: *rājāham asmi selā ti bhagavā dhammarājā anuttaro | dhammena cakkam vattemi | cakkam appativattiyam*; “I am a king, Sela, an unsurpassed dhammarājā anuttaro | dhammena cakkam vattemi | cakkam appativattiyam”;

An even more intricate connection between the *bhadrāsana/bhadrapiṭṭha* as an “auspicious” or “stately throne” of cosmic importance and the Buddha is explained in the *Buddhapādamāṅgala*, an anonymous Pali work transmitted in Thailand, as follows:

*bhaddapiṭṭhan ti idaṃ paṇḍukambalaratanasilāsanaṃ nāma hoti |
yasmā hi bhagavā attano santike dhammaṃ sotukāmatānaṃ
sannipatitānaṃ dasasahassacakkavālalokadhātukānaṃ devatānaṃ
sattappakaraṇābhidhammadesanāya tāvatimsabhavane
pāricchattakamūlamhi paṇḍukambalaratanasilāsane sannissinno
ahosī ti attho | tasmā idaṃ paṇḍukambalaratanasilāsanaṃ
bhaddapiṭṭhan ti vuccati | idaṃ bhaddapiṭṭhaṃ buddharatanaṃ ti
vuccati | idaṃ sattamaṃ buddhapādalakkhaṇamaṅgalaṃ nāma
veditabban ti vuttam |* (ed. Cicuzza 2011: 23)

The stately throne is a precious seat called Red Marble Stone (*paṇḍukambalaratanasilā*). **The Blessed One was sitting on the Red Marble Stone seat**, placed at the foot of the *pāricchattaka* tree, **in the realm of the thirty-three devas** (*tāvatimsabhavana*), **to teach the seven books of the Abhidhamma to the deities** who reside in the ten thousand worlds of the universe, [and who had] gathered round the Blessed One wishing to hear the Dhamma [being taught by him]. **For this reason this precious seat called the Red Marble Stone is spoken of as a stately throne.** This stately throne is explained as the Buddha-jewel. It is to be understood as the seventh auspicious sign, or characteristic on the feet of the Buddha. Thus it is said (trans. Cicuzza 2011: 132–133).

This text composed perhaps in the fifteenth century is extremely appealing inasmuch as it not only designates in a Buddhist context the *bhadra*-throne as the seat of Indra or Sakka⁴⁹ — chief and king of the gods, and, according to the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (VIII 12–14),

doctrine-king [*dhammarāja*]. By my doctrine, I set the wheel turning, the wheel which is not to be rolled back” (trans. Norman 2001: 74).

⁴⁹ Compare with *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* I I 250, 24 cited above. For details on *paṇḍukambalaratanasilā*, see DPPN, s.v. In Thai-Pali texts, the *paṇḍukambalaratanasilā* or “Red Marble Stone” is also known as the “Gem

the prototype of the Cakravartin ideal to every anointed kings on earth,⁵⁰ but it also places the throne on top of Mount Meru (also called Sumeru/Sineru), the center of all physical, metaphysical, and spiritual universes in Indic cosmology. Auboyer (1949: 74–104) admirably pointed out the microcosmic symbolism of the “*yūpa*-throne” and its analogy with Mount Meru and the world pillar (*axis mundi*) that unites three planes, sky, earth, and underworld.⁵¹ Based on my own investigation, I also agree with Auboyer (1949: 173ff) that it is the “throne” that signaled its occupant (a god, the Buddha, or a king) his glorious and royal — if not “cosmic” — status. There is clearly a constant correlation between the “royal throne” and the seat of gods, and alternatively, the throne can be symbolically perceived as the proper “cosmic birthplace” of the king, as a center and pivot of the universe. But it now remains to be seen if the name of the sitting posture coined *bhadrāsana* owes its origin to the same royal and “auspicious” throne-seat.

4.3 The *bhadrāsana* as a Sitting Posture

We have just seen above that the term *bhadrāsana* was initially conceived as an object, a “good, worthy, auspicious,” i.e. “elevated” or “raised,” seat equivalent to the *bhadrapīṭha*, the *simhāsana*, or even the *paṇḍukambalaratanasilā* of Indian lore. But from at least the Pāla period onwards (*ca* eighth–twelfth centuries CE), the term also has a demonstrable textual basis as a sitting pose in South Asia. From then on, two competing lines of interpretation for the “*bhadra*-posture” must not be confused. One abstruse explanation comes from the Yoga scriptures, a corpus of mainly Śaiva texts probably composed and assembled in Sanskrit somewhere during the medieval age. The other, a different and more straightforward description, is given in one iconographic treatise (*śilpaśāstra*) and several tantric Buddhist

seat” for which a meticulous description is given in the Thai *Traiphum* (“Three-worlds”). Accordingly, the seat of Indra is said to be located in the Puṇḍarīkavana Park, under the tree “of desires” (*Erythrina fusca*), named *pāricchattaka*, standing outside the city of the Thirty-three, in the northeastern direction (Cœdès & Archaimbault 1973: 162–163), although Cicuzza (2011: 132, n. 73) identifies the tree as the “coral tree” (*Erythmia indica*).

⁵⁰ See Gonda 1966: 79ff. The story of King Māndhātara, he who shared Indra’s throne, is another illustration of this close relationship between the Buddha, the Cakravartin, and Indra (Jāt no. 258). See Knox 1992: cat. no. 23, Zin 2001: 307ff, figs 6, 8, 9 and 2012: 151–155, fig. 5.

⁵¹ The altar-throne is also often addressed as the “navel of the earth” in ancient India (e.g. Buddhac 13.68; trans. Olivelle 2008: 396–397). For the connection between the *axis mundi* and the navel of the earth, see Gonda 1969: 83ff. Incidentally, the *Citrakarmaśāstra* 7, 46–48 describes five types of “lion thrones” (*simhāsana*) for the seated Buddha, one of which is known as *merusunāra*, the “Meru throne” (ed. & trans. Marasinghe 1991: 28–29). See also Lal 197, v. 46; trans. Foucaux 1884: 174; DCT 2013: 147.

ritual texts (e.g. *sādhanas*, *kriyās*),⁵² also composed in Sanskrit and often translated into Tibetan. This latter discrepancy probably results because Buddhist and Śaiva scriptures sometimes incorporated a shared terminology, but then built their own interpretations over it.⁵³

For example, over the centuries Yoga texts developed a repertoire of complex postures to exercise the body and mind where steadiness and comfort were the two salient characteristics. These scriptures thus allude to the manner of sitting as forming part of the eight-fold observances of ascetics (*aṣṭāṅgayoga*) and as a physical aid to meditation (*dhyāna*). One commentary, the *Yogasūtrabhāṣya*, gives this enumeration of sitting postures where the *bhadra*-pose is also enjoined:

*tad yathā padmāsanaṃ vīrāsanaṃ bhadrāsanaṃ svastikaṃ
daṇḍāsanaṃ sopāśrayaṃ paryāṅkaṃ krauñcaṇiṣadanam
hastiniṣadanam uṣṭraniṣadanam samasaṃsthānam sthīrasukhaṃ
yathāsukhaṃ cety evamādīni || (2, 46)*

And there [the sitting postures] are: the (1) *padmāsana* (lotus), (2) *vīrāsana* (heroic), (3) *bhadrāsana* (decent), (4) *svastika[-āsana]* (like the mystic sign), (5) *daṇḍāsana* (staff), (6) *sopāśraya[-āsana]* (supported), (7) *paryāṅka[-āsana]* (bedstead), (8) *krauñcaṇiṣada[-āsana]* (seated heron), (9) *hastiniṣada[-āsana]* (seated elephant), (10) *uṣṭraniṣada[-āsana]* (seated camel), (11) *samasaṃsthāna[-āsana]* (evenly balanced), (12) *sthīrasukha[-āsana]* (the steady and pleasant), in accordance with one’s pleasure, and so forth (trans. Jhā 1907: 89; with minor stylistic changes).

The same posture is also mentioned in ancient Java, in the *Dharmapātañjala* probably composed around the tenth–twelfth centuries,⁵⁴ where the following definition is given in Old Javanese:

⁵² For an overview of the *sādhanā* genre in India, see Bautze-Picron 1994.

⁵³ The *bhadrāsana* is also known in Jaina literature and exegesis, where, it mostly denotes a “chair of state” in narratives (cf. *Kalpasūtra* 48, 54, 63, 68, 88; ed. & trans. Lalwani 1979: 32, 35, 40–41, 43, 48). The *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra (1088–1172), however, refers to it as a yogic posture (4, 130; see *infra*).

⁵⁴ According to Andrea Acri (2011: 519), the term *bhadrāsana* also appears in other Javanese texts, namely the *Tattvajñāna*, the *Navaruci*, and the *San Hyañ Kamahāyānikan* (Śaiva).

*ikaṅ talapakan kalih | umuṅgva i sor in pupu kalih | ya bhadṛāsana
nāranya |*

Both of the foot-soles will take place below the two thighs: **that is the
bhadṛāsana** (ed. & trans. Acri 2011: 314–315).

But it is the first section of the late *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, which deals specifically with *āsanas* or sitting postures, that gives the more detailed instructions to its yogin practitioners as to how one must correctly sit, “chair-less,” in the *bhadra*-pose:

atha bhadṛāsanam ||

gulphau ca vṛṣaṇasyādhaḥ sīvanyāḥ pārśvayoḥ kṣipet |

savyagulphaṁ tathā savye dakṣagulphaṁ tu dakṣiṇe ||

pārśvapādau ca pāṇibhyāṁ dṛḍham baddhvā suniścalam |

bhadṛāsanam bhaved etat sarvavyādhivināśanam |

gorakṣāsanam ity āhur idaṁ vai siddhayoginaḥ || (1.55–56)

[**This is the *bhadṛāsana*:**]

Place the heels on either side of the seam of the perineum, keeping the left on the left side and the right one on the right side, hold the feet firmly joined to one another with both the hands. This *bhadṛāsana* is the destroyer of all the diseases. The expert Yogīs call this ***gorakṣāsanam*** (trans. Sinh 1915: 9–10; my transliteration, with minor stylistic changes).

Admittedly, this complex prescription for yogins is nowhere close to my theoretical understanding of the “auspicious posture” adopted elsewhere in Buddhist texts (see *infra*) and taken for granted hereafter in this dissertation, that is, sitting on a chair with the two legs pendant. The term *bhadṛāsana* is basically used above as a generic label and is actually glossed as *gorakṣāsanam*, from the name of the sage Gorakṣa, one of the most well-known disciples of the mythical Matsyendra who allegedly heard the teachings of Haṭhayoga from the lips of Śiva. Presumably, the author of the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* himself collected the already known technical terms and designations with which he was familiar to write his

section on *āsanas* and he perhaps sometimes gave them interpretations which suited his own purposes. It cannot, however, be used as a reliable guide to determine the characteristic of the *bhadra*-posture encountered elsewhere in earlier traditions.⁵⁵ It has to be remembered, moreover, that the methods instructed by the founders of the Yoga system and followed by generations of disciples have long been kept secret for centuries and undoubtedly necessitated the instructions of a qualified teacher (*guru*) to be fully grasped.

In contrast with the above expositions and presumably serving a different function as well since it now pertains mainly to Buddhist *maṇḍalas* and meditational deities is a passage from the *Vajrāvalīnāmamaṇḍalopāyikā* (Tib. *Dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga rdo rje phreng ba*) composed by Abhayākaragupta, an abbot of Vikramaśīla monastery, probably in the late eleventh or very early twelfth century CE (Mori 1997: 14–20). From that text, the following passage dealing with *āsanas* provides a brief but more familiar definition for the “auspicious” sitting mode on a lofty chair:

rju caraṇadvayam uccāsanastho dhārayed iti bhadrāsanaṃ ||

In the *bhadrāsana*, the two legs should dangle down from a raised seat straightway (ed. & trans. Dipak C. Bhattacharyya 1981: 76–77).

Another ritual compendium from Nepal, the *Kriyāsamgraha* (Tib. *Bya ba bsduṣ pa*), composed in Sanskrit slightly later, but before 1216, and translated into Tibetan *circa* 1280–1292, confirms the above use and definition of *bhadrāsana* in the sixth chapter. The section describes how the tantric officiant who has completed practicing the “deity yoga” (*devatāyoga*) should perform the rite of walking around a site before constructing the *Vajradhātumaṇḍala*. In doing so, the chief officiant sits down in particular postures, including the *bhadrāsana* while assuming the identities of the sixteen Bodhisattvas through meditation and reciting their *mantra* (Skorupski 2002: 97; Tanemura 2004: 34). In the Tibetan version of the text (not consulted), this *āsana* or sitting pose is defined as *rkang pa gnyis drang por gdan mthon po la gnas nas gzung bar bya'o*, which Peter Skilling freely

⁵⁵ The first description of this pose in Yoga seems to appear in Śaṅkara’s commentary (i.e. *vivaraṇa*) of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, dating to approximately the eighth–ninth century. This description differs significantly from that in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*. The pose is also described by Vācaspatimiśra in the tenth century and again by the Jain master Hemacandra in the twelfth century, both descriptions being equally different. Yet the definition we have from the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* probably derives its verses from the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā*. I wish to thank Jason Birch for these clarifications. The *bhadra*-pose is similarly described later in the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, a late seventeenth-century Haṭhayoga text.

translates as “having sat on a high seat, the two legs are to be held straight, that is *bhadrāsana*” (Pers. Comm.). Something similar is found in the nineteenth-century writing of Tibetan scholar Jamgön Kongtrül (2012: 216): “When both legs extend down from the [teaching] throne, with the toes pointing outwards, this is the auspicious seated posture [of Maitreya] (*bhadrapada*, *bzang po’i stabs*).”

Yet perhaps the earliest extant and most tantalizing account of the term *bhadrāsana* as a “sitting posture” comes from the *Citrakarmasāstra*, a *śilpāsāstra* probably composed in Sri Lanka in the course of the first millennium CE and ascribed to a certain Mañjuśrī.⁵⁶ The work covers the second half of the *Vāstuvidyāsāstra*, a unique treatise in Sanskrit devoted to both monastic architecture (Part I) and Buddhist iconometry and iconography (Part II). The latter part, with which we are concerned here, also deals with all ritual aspects pertaining to the modeling of a Buddha image, especially connected with the eye-opening ceremony. One section describes two models and measurements for seated images of the Buddha. The first model pertains to the sitting posture called *sattvaparyāṅka*, in a cross-legged position; the second is linked to the *bhadrāsana*, a pose which is defined as follows:

bhadrāsana-- sthāne niṣaṅṅe pādālambanam |
(15, 38; my transliteration)

[When the image is] **seated on a *bhadrāsana*, the legs hang down**
(ed. & trans. Marasinghe 1991: 112–113).

Further iconographic and iconometric details are given as to how “the feet are planted on the ground with the two heels placed six *aṅgulas*^[57] apart. The distance between the two big toes should be five and a half *aṅgulas* and that between the two knees twenty-six *aṅgulas*. The left hand should rest on the thigh and the right hand should either remain bent or kept in front of the seat^[58] at a distance of seventeen *aṅgulas*, etc.” (Marasinghe 1991: lvi, fig. 23). Interestingly, an eighteenth-century pattern book written in Newari script with Tibetan numerals — thus possibly produced in Nepal for use in Tibet —, consisting of several ink

⁵⁶ Walter Marasinghe gives compelling arguments for placing this text’s composition in the island as early as between the fifth and seventh century CE (1996: 183–187). I am thankful to Peter Skilling for bringing this important source to my attention.

⁵⁷ The *aṅgula* is an Indian unit of linear measure, one twenty-fourth part of a *hasta* or ancient cubit.

⁵⁸ This hand gesture presumably denotes what is known as *abhaya* or *vitarka* and echoes the Bhadrāsana Buddhas in bronze found later in Tamil Nadu [Figs 3.22–23].

drawings, shows similar precise iconometric guidelines for depicting Buddha icons when seated in the pendant-legged posture [Figures 1.12a–b].

More recently, Lokesh Chandra (2012: 362) claimed that the term *bhadra* may be a Sanskritization of “Bactria” and referred to Tibetan iconographic texts giving a literal translation of *bhadrāsana* as *bzang po'i 'dug stangs*, simply “auspicious or good sitting position,” and as *hor 'dug*, that is, “the āsana of the Hor or Central Asians.” I was not able to check his sources but, according to Peter Skilling, “Hor” can mean either Central Asians or Mongolians (Pers. Comm.). At any rate, there is no sign of “Bactria” in either of these Tibetan definitions and so Lokesh Chandra’s interpretation seems far-fetched. But if some credence is to be given to the above Tibetan tradition, then the term *bhadrāsana* would possibly reflect a geographical origin for this posture somewhere in Central or West Asia, something that I shall investigate further in my section on “Gandhāra and the Northwest” (Chapter 2).

5. Summary and Discussion

I initiated this introduction contesting certain terminology and preconceived ideas concerning pendant-legged posture in Indian and Buddhist art and voiced my opinions about the origins and actual meaning of *bhadrāsana*. Thus I discard the use of the “European posture” when addressing this imagery. As we have seen, this “auspicious pose” does not find its origins in Europe proper, but most likely in the ancient Near East (Anatolia or Mesopotamia). While the technical term *pralambapādāsana* has been conventionally used as a legitimate alternative by art historians, we must remember that this is a neo-Sanskrit term found only in modern and secondary sources.

In contrast, we have observed that there is a good deal of Epic, Purāṇic, Śāstric, and tantric literature that refers to the term *bhadrāsana*. After analyzing its usage and context thoroughly, it seems more justified and natural to adopt this term to describe the images under study. The name of the so-called “auspicious posture” originates first and foremost as the symbol of a royal seat or elevated throne, literally an emblem of divinity and kingship. The Buddhist texts cited earlier provide sufficient evidence that they adopted the pendant-legged posture and have closely related it to the “auspicious throne” since at least the time of their composition in South Asia. Therefore, the “Bhadrāsana Buddhas” on which this dissertation focuses may be understood as icons of the Master seated on a *bhadra*-throne and simultaneously in the *bhadra*-posture, both expressions implying that the legs are pendant with feet fixed on the ground or on a pedestal. The adjective *bhadra* may further reflect the

royal and noble component of the seat or pose,⁵⁹ an essential element for understanding the imagery.

The above investigation also raises larger questions about reasons to produce such Bhadrāsana Buddha icons. It also critically engages in the description of traditional Buddhist art via the categories deployed in the extant literature. For example, what is the relationship between the various Buddhist scriptures and the practice of Buddhist art? Can Buddha images be easily read and interpreted in the light of such texts? Should the Bhadrāsana type be studied and understood solely in the context of early Buddhist narratives or through the examination of later iconographic treatises, or even ritual manuals? How shall we explain the discrepancies between the texts known to us and extant images? Do we still have sufficient preserved texts and images to even ask these questions?

Admittedly, it is difficult to assume a one to one correspondence between “Śāstric knowledge” and a Buddha image. The extant textual tradition, composed or compiled mainly during the Indian medieval period, cannot always explain the production of early Buddha statues or paintings in the Indian subcontinent, nor can it legitimately elucidate these statues or paintings outside of India. The *mudrā* (i.e. “hand gesture”) and *āsana* (i.e. “sitting posture”) terminology, for example, was probably initially limited to certain times and places and is not known to have been used broadly, in a Buddhist environment at least, before the mid-to-late first millennium CE.⁶⁰ This does not, however, undermine the importance of the *śilpaśāstras* as a whole since they still incorporate the epitome of traditional Indian art and aesthetics. In addition, the *śilpaśāstras* probably dispersed widely beyond the original provenance of their production and perhaps reflect some earlier conventions for painting and image-making in India.⁶¹ These are just some of the many thorny issues we have to keep in

⁵⁹ For example, names like Rāmabhadra — where *bhadra* is joined with the quintessentially royal name Rāma — and other compounds involving *bhadra*, suggest that the term *bhadrāsana* definitely carried “royal” connotations (Arlo Griffiths, Pers. Comm.). This notion of royalty is indeed most eloquently expressed in the following verses of the *Agnipurāṇa* which refer to the mode of performing the coronation of a new king by way of his investiture on the “auspicious throne,” after proclaiming his victory: *ghoṣayitvā jayaṃ rājño rājā bhadrāsane sthitaḥ* (II 218, 6.1–2; see also II 218, 17.3–4).

⁶⁰ To be sure, *hasta* is the traditional Sanskrit term for “hands” used in drama treatises like the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The term *mudrā*, however, literally means “seal” or “signet ring,” and was never used in iconographic texts to describe the hands of the deities, let alone that of the Buddha, represented in art. It should only be limited to “hand gestures” used in tantric texts or in a ritual context where *mudrās* are performed by the worshipper, the priest, or the visualized deity. For a preliminary study of this *mudrā* terminology and a fascinating excursus on its later development in the field of Indian art, see R. Smith 2015.

⁶¹ Such earlier visual and plastic artistic traditions are collected for example in the *Citrasūtra* (chapters 35–43) and the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* (chapters 44–85), being part of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, and most likely dating

mind. But before the historical value of this material can even be evaluated, interpreted, and analyzed, it is first necessary to compile it, and it is to this endeavor that I now turn in the following chapters.

from approximately the Gupta or post-Gupta period (*ca* 400–1000 CE). See Kramrisch 1928 and Rocher 1986: 250–252.

CHAPTER 2: GREATER GANDHĀRA AND THE NORTHWEST

1. Historical Geography

The region that has come to be known as “Gandhāra” or, rather, “Greater Gandhāra,”¹ has long been a crossroads of cultural influences. It occupies a large area traversed by ancient roads linking India with China, Tibet, and West Asia and was a renowned center of international commercial activities for centuries. The ancient region of Gandhāra was located in the Swat and Kabul River Valleys and the Pothohar Plateau in modern-day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Its main cities were modern Peshawar and Taxila. The ancient civilization lasted from approximately the early first millennium BCE to the eleventh century CE and attained its height from the first to the fifth centuries CE, especially under the Kuṣāṇa kings,² which period saw the flourishing of the so-called Graeco-Buddhist art in the region (Jansen 2008).

The boundaries of Gandhāra vary throughout history. Sometimes the Peshawar valley and Taxila were collectively referred to as Gandhāra and sometimes the Swat valley was also included. The heart of Gandhāra, however, was always the Peshawar valley. The kingdom was ruled from various successive capitals such as Begram (Kapiśa), Charsadda (Puṣkalāvati), Taxila (Takṣaśilā), and Peshawar (Puruṣapura).³ In the second century CE, large *stūpas* were built in Peshawar and helped to make the city a center of pilgrimage until the seventh century (Beal 1884: xxxiff, I, 97ff; Foucher 1901: 327–333). Further south, in present-day India (Uttar Pradesh), Mathurā probably also served as one of the Kuṣāṇa

¹ To follow Salomon’s distinction (1999: 3) between ancient Gandhāra proper and the much larger area surrounding it and which the Huntingtons call the Bactro-Gandhāran region (1985: 109ff). In this dissertation, I will use the name “Gandhāra” in a broad sense often to refer to “Greater Gandhāra.”

² The Kuṣāṇa (Kushan) dynasty is a ruling line descended from the Yuezhi, an Indo-Scythian people who ruled over most of the northern Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia during the first three centuries CE. We know from Chinese sources that the Yuezhi conquered Bactria in the second century BCE and divided the country into five chiefdoms, one of which was that of the Kuṣāṇas (Guishuang). In the first century CE, the Kuṣāṇa chief Kujūla Kadphises (Qiu Jiuque), also known on his coinage by the epithet of *maharaja rajadiraja*, written in Prakrit and Kharoṣṭhī script [Figure 2.4, reverse], secured the political unification of the Yuezhi kingdom under himself (Fussman 1974: 43–45).

³ In this chapter, I use the modern names, not their standardized Sanskrit forms. Naturally, several other spellings and variants exist for the names of cities in different languages or prakrits. For the case of Taxila, see Salomon 2005.

Empire's capitals from the first to the third centuries CE (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: 324–387). The Gandhāran city of Taxila was another important Buddhist center of learning and artistic production for centuries (Marshall 1960a; Dani 1999). After Kaniṣka I (*ca* 127–151 CE),⁴ the empire started losing territories in the east. In the west, Gandhāra came under the Sasanians, the successor dynasty of the Parthians, and became their vassal from 241 onwards until the Hephthalite (White) Huns captured it around 450 (Grousset 1965: 104ff). The Sasanians, aided by Turks from Central Asia, destroyed the Huns' power base in Central Asia and Gandhāra once again came under Iranian suzerainty in the sixth century. In the seventh century, the Sasanian Empire fell to the Arabs and from then on Gandhāra came under pressure from Muslims. By the ninth century, Buddhism disappeared almost entirely from the region, gradually leaving the field to Islam (Jansen 2008: 33–34; ed. La Vaissière 2008).⁵

2. A Graeco-Buddhist Art?

2.1 Definition

The dominant characteristics of the Gandhāran school of art were initially Hellenistic and later strongly related to Asian provinces of the Roman Empire. Gandhāra was the easternmost region of the ancient world influenced by Greco-Roman aesthetics and one of the first to seemingly portray the Buddha in human form.⁶ The art and sculpture of this region harmoniously combined Hellenistic or Graeco-Roman artistic techniques and modeling with Indian Buddhist iconography to create a recognizably Indian hybrid, probably using artists

⁴ The dates of Kaniṣka have long been disputed and no absolute consensus as to when his reign started and ended exists. Fussman (e.g. 1974: 46–50) is amongst those who argues that his era must have started in 78 CE, just as in the *śaka* era; this position was relatively favored by most scholars for much of the twentieth century. Recent scholarship, taking Cribb (2000: 46–49) and especially Falk's lead (2007: 132–135), has, however, led to significant reconsiderations in the chronology of this period starting in the late 120s CE. The starting year 127 CE seems to have now reached a certain agreement amongst scholars and will therefore be used in this dissertation. Much of the discussion on dates that follows relies on the tentative chronology and sequence of the Kuṣāṇa kings as established by Cribb (2000: Tables 5–6 and 2008a).

⁵ Verardi (2011a: 162–167), however, tells of a few sites that testify to the brief revival of Buddhism between the end of the seventh century and throughout the eighth, most likely ignited by the expansionistic policy of Empress Wu Zetian in Central Asia and the emergence of Vajrayāna in the region. For the case of late Tapa Sardār in Afghanistan, see Taddei & Verardi 1978 and Verardi & Paparatti 2005: 434–442.

⁶ See Foucher 1922. *Contra*, see Coomaraswamy 1927a. The history of this confrontation may be traced bibliographically in Deydier 1950: 46–64, and more recently in Rhi 2010. Goloubew (1923: 449–451) was actually the first to postulate the origin of the Buddha image in Mathurā in a review of Foucher's work.

imported initially from West Asia.⁷ By the second century CE, these aesthetic traditions had developed into a recognizable “Gandhāran style” (Hallade 1968).

Stucco as well as stone was widely used by sculptors in Gandhāra for the decoration of monastic and cult buildings. Stucco, often painted, provided the artist with a medium of great plasticity, enabling a high degree of expressiveness to be given to the sculpture. While sculptures in stone, usually a grayish-blue type of schist, are considered to predate those made from stucco, both materials were likely used from an early date. However, stucco was perishable and most of its early production has now disappeared (*ibid.*: 138ff). Gandhāran artists were mostly concerned with the naturalistic modeling and the rendering of garments and embellishment in realistic detail compared with the closely related Indian school of Mathurā whose main medium was much softer red sandstone.

Buddhist visual art in Gandhāra developed mainly between approximately the second and fifth centuries CE and the style seems to have thrived largely during the Kuṣāṇa dynasty.⁸ But the legacy of the stucco and clay school may have lasted well into the eighth century in bordering regions as far as Afghanistan, Serindia, Sindh, and Kashmir (Hallade 1968: 151–152, 166; Luczanits 2008b), and perhaps even at Nālandā (**Chapter 5**). The Gandhāran low-relief stone fragments presented hereinafter were part of larger narrative cycles that decorated *stūpa* drums or other early Buddhist religious structures. Sculptures in high-relief, usually deemed later, include cross-ankled or pendant-legged images of Bodhisattvas and minor deities and some of the earliest icons ever of the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana*.

2.2 Royal and Divine Portraits on Kuṣāṇa Coins

A study of the development of the *bhadrāsana* as a pose in Gandhāran art and its regal symbolism must begin with analysis of the numismatic data which furnishes one of the most secure chronological indicators.⁹ Several coins from the Kuṣāṇa period depict enthroned figures of gods, goddesses, and kings in the pendant-legged posture and betray by their

⁷ Strabo (e.g. II 3.4) tells us that “Roman” artisans at times sailed to India around the beginning of the Common Era (trans. H. Jones 1917: I, 377ff, esp. 381).

⁸ This is not to say that Kuṣāṇa kings were followers of Buddhism for, as their coinage often shows (Pal 1988; Cribb 2008b), they certainly held Brahmanical, Iranian, Greek, and other composite gods and goddesses in high esteem. For a recent study of the early emergence of “Hinduism” in Gandhāra, see Srinivasan 2008b; also Samad 2010.

⁹ Here again I rely on the chronological framework of Kuṣāṇa kings as determined by Cribb (2008a: 66–67). See also *supra*, n. 4.

iconography and inscriptions foreign and eclectic influences among which from the Graeco-Roman, Indian, and Iranian spheres.

For example, a series of late Kuṣāṇa gold coins affiliated mostly with Kaniṣka III (r. ca 267–280) and his immediate successor, Vāsudeva II (r. ca 280–320 CE), show on the reverse a tutelary goddess, dressed in Mediterranean robes, sitting enthroned in a strictly frontal position with the two legs pendant, holding a *cornucopia* in her left hand just as did Demeter, Tyche, Fortuna, or any other Graeco-Roman goddesses of prosperity or good fortune (cf. Srinivasan 2008a: 116, fig. 1; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 56; Stančo 2012: fig. 313) **[Figure 2.1]**.¹⁰ The deity has been identified as Ardoxšo (ΑΡΔΟΧՇΟ) by inscriptions, that is, “the feminine embodiment of the principle of abundance and prosperity,” and one of the most important Iranian goddesses represented on Kuṣāṇa coinage, especially during this period (Rosenfield 1967: 74–75, 109–110, 113; coins 83, 236–241, 243–248). Ardoxšo and the Indian Hārītī must have been correlated, since the latter sometimes takes on the same attributes as Ardoxšo (Hallade 1968: pl. 70; Stančo 2012: fig. 373), whose iconography, in turn, was seemingly derived from the Hellenic goddess Demeter or the like (cf. Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 347; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 64). The iconography of the enthroned Gandhāran goddess also persisted in later Gupta coinage and eventually was converted into an emblem of Śrī-Lakṣmī, another deity embodying fertility and the patroness and symbolic spouse of the Gupta kings (Raven 2010: 259–261, fig. 7; Srinivasan 2010; Stančo 2012: fig. 376).

Similarly, the reverse side of at least one coin exhibits a goddess seated in the pendant-legged posture on a lion, head turned to the right and holding a staff, perhaps a royal scepter (Rosenfield 1967: 84; coin 142). The figure has been identified as the “royal” Nanā[śao] (NANĀՇΑΟ), another common deity found among Kuṣāṇa coins of Kaniṣka I’s reign and his successor Huviṣka’s (r. ca 151–187 CE) **[Figure 2.2]**.¹¹ As a multivalent divinity and a goddess of “cosmic authority,” she appears, for example in the Rabātak inscription, to have been the principal dynastic patroness of the Kuṣāṇa kings (Sims-Williams 2004; Madhuvati Ghosh 2006; Carter 2010). Harry Falk (2015) has recently argued that the Kuṣāṇa goddess with her crescent was a local manifestation of Venus conferring royal dignity to rulers. In later times, a rare gold coin of Kaniṣka III or a successor similarly shows

¹⁰ Raven (2010: 259, n. 5) remarks: “The cornucopia is one of the most conspicuous attributes shared by goddesses related to fortune, abundance, and fertility in the Hellenized sculptural and numismatic arts of the crossroads of Asia area.” For more on the *cornucopia* in Indian tradition, see Gail 2012.

¹¹ See also a seal/intaglio kept in the British Museum collection (inv. no. 1892.1103.100). Stone sculptures of Nanā are rare but Samad (2010: 119, fig. 8.14) reports one unnoticed example (cf. Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 255) of a headless image seated on a lion throne in the Taxila Museum, which he identifies as Nanā.

a female deity dressed like Nanā seated frontally on a lion, but dressed in Mediterranean robes and holding a fillet in a manner which suggests her fusion symbolically with Ardoxšo (Rosenfield 1967: 114, fig. 14). In the early Gupta period, however, Nanā seems to have totally disappeared from the religious landscape, but may have been replaced by Śrī-Lakṣmī, or even Durgā, as is testified by a coin of King Samudragupta whose dates are uncertain but must be between 350 and 375 CE (Raven 2010: fig. 21b; Srinivasan 2010: 88–89; see also **Chapter 4**).

Rare representations of the four-armed male Iranian god known as Manaobago (MANAOBAΓO) on reverses of certain Kaniṣka I and Huviṣka's coin issues are also seated frontally with the legs pendant and the deity's head in profile (Rosenfield 1967: 79–80; coins 96–99; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 95) [**Figure 2.3**].¹² Although the exact identification of the god is still unclear and disputed amongst scholars, John Rosenfield argued with good reason that “the iconographic significance of this figure seems to be centered upon the right to rule” (1967: 79), due to the attributes he bears in his four arms, namely, a scepter or a spear, a *cakra* weapon, a torque, and a diadem. In addition, the god sits on a thick cushioned throne with lion's feet, another definite trait of royal authority. Lastly, a rare Huviṣka coin issue similarly depicts on the reverse the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis or Sarapis (ΣΑΡΑΠΙΟ) enthroned frontally in the pendant-legged pose. Serapis was the supreme deity of the sea, land, sky, and underworld in the Alexandrian pantheon and was associated with Zeus, Ammon, Helios, and Poseidon (Rosenfield 1967: 98; coin 186; Stančo 2012: fig. 298).

As Pratapaditya Pal has emphasized (1988b: 32), the Kuṣāṇa kings were concerned about the legitimacy of their rule. He argued that, through the chosen iconography of the deities shown on the reverse of the coins, attempts were constantly made to demonstrate how these kings derived their royal glory from the gods. Besides these deities, regal numismatic portraits of Kuṣāṇa kings were sometimes shown in full and enthroned with legs pendant. The motif apparently first occurred on the reverse of a coin featuring Kujūla Kadphises (r. ca 40–90 CE) (Rosenfield 1967: 13–14, fig. 1; coins 4–5; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 49), who is seated on a backless chair known to the Romans as *cella curulis* [**Figure 2.4**].

The frontal portrayal in full-length of Kuṣāṇa kings was a revolutionary change in the concept of kingship in South Asia at the time, probably drawn from Graeco-Bactrian examples or imperial Roman portraits as intermediated by the Parthians (Stančo 2007). Kujūla Kadphises's direct successor, Vima Takto (r. ca 90–113 CE), is well known for his

¹² A similar coin was recently sold in auction on September 2013. See www.goldbergcoins.com (sale 75, lot 2541).

great stone portrait in the round found at the Mat sanctuary near Mathurā [Figure 2.5],¹³ seated in a most hieratic and authoritarian manner on a lion throne, upon which, as I have already shown, only certain ranks of kings have the right to seat (Chapter 1). According to Chinese sources, this king is credited with the addition of “India” to the Kuṣāṇa realm (Cribb 2000: 49). A rare numismatic parallel of an enthroned king can also be seen on the obverse of one of his successor’s gold coins where the ruler, Vima Kadphises (r. ca 113–127 CE), is seated frontally on a low couch, his head turned to the left, and his booted feet resting on a stool; his right hand holds a stick or a scepter and flames emanate from his shoulders (Rosenfield 1967: 23; coin 19; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 88) [Figure 2.6].

This peculiar representation of the king sitting almost on his haunches and wearing long boots is reminiscent of the many squatting Sūrya images found throughout the Mathurā region from the second century CE onwards (Diskalkar 1932: 31–36; V.S. Agrawala 1951: 66–73). Conversely, a case can be made that the Sun deity also appears at times to imitate depictions of Kuṣāṇa kings.¹⁴ For example, the Gokarṇeśvara colossus image of Sūrya, sitting in the same squatting attitude, but peculiarly with two lions flanking his boots, was probably modeled after similar enthroned images of Indo-Scythian princes found at Mathurā (Gail 1994). In addition to the similar lion throne type, attributes such as the short club and the sword held in their hands are common to both depictions of the Sun god and the Kuṣāṇa rulers during this period (Frenger 2005). Moreover, Vinay K. Gupta has recently argued that the Kuṣāṇa kings venerated the Sun god as their *kuladevatā* (“family deity”) and that the Mat dynastic shrine possibly once housed an image of Sūrya as its presiding cult image (2009: 62–63, pl. 5.4).¹⁵ To further substantiate this hypothesis, a citation from Johanna van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1989: 78) may be in order:

The reason why the Kuṣāṇas promoted worship of the Sun God was not only because it was part and parcel of their own cultural heritage,

¹³ This sculpture has traditionally been identified as Vima Kadphises’s portrait (e.g. Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: 379–380; Rosenfield 1967: 144–145, fig. 1; Sharma 1994: 110), but its pedestal inscription in Brāhmī actually reads *vematakṣumasya* (i.e. “of Vima Tak[to]”) which we now know, on the basis of the Rabātak inscription, refers to Vima Kadphises’s father and Kaniṣka I’s grandfather. See Cribb 2000: 47; also Sims-Williams 2004.

¹⁴ Several scholars maintained in the past that the image from Kaṅkāli Tīla [Fig. 1.7], because of its costume, the squatting position, the mustache, etc. was a Kuṣāṇa portrait, but it has later been correctly identified as a Sūrya, only derived from Kuṣāṇa royal portraits (Agrawala 1951: 66; Rosenfield 1967: 189f).

¹⁵ By the same token, he rejects (n. 8) the idea put forward by Frenger (2005: 448) that the Sūrya images at Mathurā were not exactly cult icons during the Kuṣāṇa period. I am grateful to Gerd Mevissen for providing these articles.

but also because it fitted well into the concept of divine kingship which from now on became a typical aspect of Indian culture.

Such solar symbols as a halo or flaming shoulders which we meet in many representations of the Kuṣāṇa emperors, show that these rulers considered themselves — clearly for political reasons — to be the embodiment of superhuman powers on earth.

In addition to this royal and solar iconography, two legends read the following imperial epithets on the above coin of Vima Kadphises: *basileus* (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ) in the Greek language and script on the obverse, and, on the reverse, *maharaja rajadiraja*, i.e. “great king, the king of kings,” in a Prakrit language and Kharoṣṭhī script. As Rosenfield (1967: 23) has powerfully expressed, “this is an image of barbarous presence and majesty.” Other rare small copper coins sometimes feature the portrait of the Kuṣāṇa kings on a throne with their legs pendant and their right hand raised in a gesture of protection (Rosenfield 1967: 57, 113–114; coins 39–40, 79, 247; Tandon 2011: 394, figs 7f–g). We also know from other epigraphic evidence that, for example, Vima Kadphises or Kaniṣka I felt they held their power from the gods, hence their Sanskrit title of *devaputra* or “the son of god(s)” (Rosenfield 1967: 144; Cribb 2000: 46–47). One of their late successors (i.e. Kaniṣka III) even qualified himself as a *kaisara* (“Caesar”), suggesting at least some awareness of the Roman Empire.¹⁶ This apparent consciousness of and proximity to both Indian and western concepts of kingship is likely to explain the use of this imperial iconography and titles amongst Kuṣāṇa kings. Moreover, coins were probably the main medium to carry the subject throughout the empire.

The above associations of monarchical coins with the “auspicious posture” is therefore not surprising given the clear function that these coinages must have served in the political arena at the time to consolidate the authority of the rulers. While Rosenfield (1967: 186–188) and Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1989: 77–78) have interpreted this mode of representation of the royal enthroned figures mostly as a western (i.e. Graeco-Roman and Iranian) import, Verardi & Grossato’s suggestion (1983: 255–269) that portraits of the Kuṣāṇa rulers reflected purely the Indian imperial conception of a Cakravartin also needs consideration. In the end, however, it is expected that both models of the “ideal king” were at play during the Kuṣāṇa period and perhaps even later. Interestingly, royal portraiture did not

¹⁶ See Rowland’s foreword to Rosenfield (1967), “Rome and the Kushans: Images of Princes and Gods.” This “Kaisara Kaniṣka” was previously identified by Rosenfield (1967: 58) as Kaniṣka II (r. ca 227–246).

become an established tradition in India until much later from the seventh century onwards, as Vincent Lefèvre has noted (2011).

Lastly, it should be noted that only a few Buddha (ΒΟΔΔΟ = Boddo) and future Buddha (ΜΕΤΡΑΓΟ ΒΟΔΔΟ = Mētrago Boddo) icons are represented on the reverse of Greek inscribed coins of Kaniṣka I's reign (Cribb 1980; J. Huntington 1993; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 100). These are standing and seated in the cross-legged postures respectively, but, as far as I am aware, never in the pendant-legged pose.¹⁷ Moreover, on these Kuṣāṇa coins, the Buddha was depicted first and foremost using the raised palm gesture.¹⁸ The first Buddha sculptures in stone from the Gandhāran and Mathurān regions also followed the same pattern. It is possible that these Buddhist images on coins were based on already existing sculptures. The following discussion, however, will show that only later, possibly around the third–fourth centuries CE, were stone images and reliefs of the Buddha and Bodhisattva starting to be represented frontally in *bhadrāsana*, possibly following the example set earlier by Kuṣāṇa kings and their supreme deities often depicted in the same manner, be it in small-scale art (gems, statuettes, and coins) or in large-scale sculptures.

3. Corpus Analysis

I divide my corpus analysis into two parts: narrative and iconic art. The corpus attempts to distinguish between various representations of postures as found in narratives and religious icons and to reflect somewhat on these different registers, each with their own levels of visual discourse, hierarchical codes, and internal iconographic evolution. We have already seen in **Chapter 1** that the pendant-legged pose is closely related to the “auspicious” or “elevated throne,” that is, the *bhadrāsana*. It also relates to the four postures (*īryāpatha*) of the Buddha/Bodhisattva and, within them, to the various options for the seated posture.

3.1 Narrative Art

The genesis of narrative Buddhist art in India is traceable in the stone production of Bhārhut, Sāñci, Mathurā, and Amarāvātī from the second century BCE to approximately the second century CE. This early tradition does not represent the Buddha in human form. In Gandhāran

¹⁷ Some of the royal portraits discussed above were mistakenly labeled Buddha images in the past. See for example Coomaraswamy 1927a: 302, 323, and Rosenfield 1967: 283, n. 31.

¹⁸ J. Huntington (1993: 362, figs 1, 6) infers that a few coins illustrate, albeit rarely, the Bodhisattva or future Buddha Mētrago/Maitreya with a preaching gesture (*vitarka* or a local variant of the *dharmacakra*?).

art, however, anthropomorphic images of the Buddha started to appear in life scenes of the Master depicted in low-relief often decorating the drum of *stūpas*, generally dated to the second–third century CE. There, the Buddha is often represented seated but, with only a few exceptions, almost never in the pendant-legged posture. The same holds true for Prince Siddhārtha as a Bodhisattva. I know of only a limited series of examples where the Bodhisattva is depicted in this pose prior to his Enlightenment. In the following, I describe the reliefs that are known to me in sequential and chronological order according to the Buddhist narrative they depict, that is, from Bodhisattvahood to Buddhahood.

Jātakas and Avadānas

There are a couple of narrative fragments from Gandhāra that depict the pendant-legged Bodhisattva in a previous life. The first one is drawn from the story of the “Unicorn Saint.” The relief is in a private collection in Japan and was recently studied and identified by Nakao Odani (2010: fig. 1). The oblong panel shows, on the right, a man (i.e. the Bodhisattva) with a small conical projection emerging from the head, seated in the pendant-legged pose on a stool. In front of him, a girl (identified with Yaśodharā in a former birth) stands and offers him something like a ball-cake, in an attempt to seduce him. The scene goes on to the left, with the couple talking to each other, both seated with legs pendant on a bench. It is interesting to note that, in this story, although the “unicorn” Bodhisattva is known to be an ascetic living in the forest, he is nevertheless seated and behaves in the manner of kings and princes.

Several *jātaka* panel fragments are kept at the British Museum in London.¹⁹ One of them depicts the Bodhisattva, seated in profile with his legs down on an elevated throne, as king of the Śībis. In this story the Bodhisattva saved the pigeon pursued by a hawk in search of food for its progeny [**Figure 2.7**]. According to the narrative, when the hawk complained, the Bodhisattva-king promised in exchange a portion of his own flesh equal to the weight of the pigeon. The relief shows the dramatic moment where a scale is brought and the pigeon placed on one side of it, while pieces of flesh are cut off from the king’s body. On the right, a nimbed figure is standing and holding a thunderbolt or *vajra* in his left hand while his right

¹⁹ Some of the panels are difficult to identify. For example, one panel showing a seated male figure with legs pendant in three-quarter view holding a scroll can either be identified as an illustration of the *Mahosadhajātaka* (Jāt no. 546) or, alternatively, as the schooling of the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha (Zwalf 1996: cat. no. 297).

hand is raised. This is the god Indra bringing a happy ending to the Bodhisattva's self-sacrifice (Feer 1891: 124–127; Hallade 1968: 114–116, pl. 82; Zwalf 1996: cat. no. 136).

Another damaged horizontal framing element also in the collection of the British Museum and possibly originally forming a stair riser to the main *stūpa* at Jamalgarhi in Pakistan depicts a scene identified by Wladimir Zwalf as the *Candakinnarajātaka* (1996: cat. no. 135). On the right, a mounted warrior with sword, spear, and bow or shield worn on the back faces a flowering tree. Beyond the tree a female dancer, seen from the back, looks over her left shoulder at a turbaned male harpist seated turned towards her and with legs pendant, although no seat is visible. Beside him another, frontal, female, similarly dressed with the same ornaments, dances with raised leg and arm beside another seated male harpist [Figure 2.8]. According to this *jātaka*, the armed king of Benares (the mounted warrior) comes upon a *kinnara* couple playing and dancing beside a stream. Enamored of the *kinnarī* (female dancer), the king shoots the *kinnara* (male harpist), the Bodhisattva, but his consort refuses the king and calls upon the gods. Indra, moved by her fidelity and disguised as a Brahmin, sprinkles the Bodhisattva with water and restores him to life.

In addition to these identified *jātakas*, there is also the edifying story (*avadāna*) of the previous birth of the Buddha who was born to the merchant Mitra. The Bodhisattva was given a girl's name, Maitrakanyakā. The story of Maitrakanyakā is unquestionably old and has survived in a number of *avadāna* versions which may vary in the details. One of the oldest outlines of the story is found in the *Avadānaśataka*, an anthology of one hundred biographical stories composed in Sanskrit approximately from the first to second centuries CE (Feer 1891: 131–138). The last part of the story is depicted on a fragment kept in the Peshawar Museum (Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 144; Ali & Qazi 2008: 41–42). The central panel probably represents the moment when Maitrakanyakā, after he was washed ashore on an unfortunate sea-journey, met beautiful heavenly maidens (*apsaras*) and lived a pleasurable life in their company for several years, sitting together in the pendant-legged posture with the feet resting on a footstool. The left panel in the fragment is key to identifying the story. As the narrative goes, the longing to travel eventually drove Maitrakanyakā away from the pleasure-city to reach a new place where he saw an unhappy and squatting man carrying a revolving iron wheel on his head for having previously mistreated his mother. Having similarly mistreated his own mother in the past, Maitrakanyakā will soon face the same hardship and pain, but he would eventually be freed from such torment by making publicly known his aspiration to wear this wheel forever on his head for the sake of other fellow-

creatures who had committed the same sin. Unsurprisingly, the story happily ends with the Bodhisattva Maitrakanyakā reborn into the heaven of the Tuṣita gods.

The last *jātaka* depiction using the pendant-legged pose of which I am aware is the most famous of all, recounting the previous life of the Buddha when born as Prince Viśvantara. A relief fragment from Thareli district, now kept in the Taxila Archeological Museum, depicts one episode of the story where the prince, flanked by his two children, is shown with his raised right hand in a gesture of “fear-not,” seated with his legs pendant, presumably in a forest environment during his exile (National Museum of Tokyo 1984: 227, cat. no. 1). In front of the Bodhisattva is the standing Brahmin holding a stick in one hand and begging for the children with the other. To the left, the same Brahmin is shown beating Viśvantara’s offspring with a stick.

Life of the Buddha

One unusual relief found at the Dharmarājikā *stūpa* in Taxila may be transitional between the last life of the Buddha and his former lives. In the center of the composition a Bodhisattva is seated cross-legged holding an ambrosia or water flask (*kalāśa* or *kamaṇḍalu*) with his left hand. To his right and left, two nimbed attendant deities are seated either with legs pendant or crossed at the ankles. Sir John Marshall (1960: 79, fig. 102) interpreted this scene to be the *saṃcodana* or “entreaty of the gods” in Tuṣita heaven when they implored the Bodhisattva to return to earth for his ultimate birth in order to become the Buddha and save mankind. Christian Luczanits (2005) has discussed in detail several similar scenes found in Gandhāran art that have been subject to diverse interpretation. Given the many variations that we find for this scene in Gandhāran art, it is possible that the depiction of this topic was not yet well established at the time.

Several stone plaques depict scenes surrounding the nativity of Siddhārtha with pendant-legged figures. For example, a famous relief from the Peshawar Museum depicts a central turbaned dignitary enthroned full face in the cross-ankled posture under the royal umbrella. Next to him, two pendant-legged individuals dressed as ascetics, holding water vessels in their left hands, are identified as Asita and Naradatta. This scene is unanimously recognized as a depiction of the interpretation of the dream of Queen Māyā — who is absent from the scene — before King Śuddhodana (Grünwedel 1901: 139, fig. 7; Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 12; Marshall 1960: 42–43, figs 54, 56; I. Kim 1997: 86, fig. 53; Pal 2006: fig. 10). Another relief of dubious provenance, but today at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco

[Figure 2.9], has been similarly explained. In this case, both the king and queen are enthroned and seated frontally next to a single ascetic represented in profile also with legs pendant.²⁰ One way to deal with this possible discrepancy, explaining the presence or absence of Māyā, is to interpret the scenes the other way around. Either Śuddhodana summons his Brahmins and astrologers to explain the queen’s dream prior to the birth of Siddhārtha — and Māyā should naturally be also represented — or the king just wanted to cast the prince’s horoscope after his birth when the queen had already departed.²¹ A panel relief from the British Museum showing the interpretation of the dream and the birth in two scenes from right to left supports the latter interpretation. There, both Māyā and Śuddhodana, seated with legs pendant on a high, rectangular, draped seat with cushion, turn towards Asita [Figure 2.10].²²

Another interesting example that seems to confirm these two narrative interpretations is a three-scene frieze from a Japanese private collection published by Kurita (2003: I, fig. 17). This frieze depicts a succession of scenes divided by columns, from right to left in *pradakṣiṇa*, related to the same narrative cycle. In the right scene, the central figure is seated on a throne with his knees wide apart and ankles touching. He is flanked by two venerating male figures sitting in the same pose. This scene can be interpreted as the Bodhisattva in Tuṣita heaven.²³ The next scene in the center of the frieze is the conception, or Māyā’s dream when the Buddha-to-be appears as an elephant and enters into her womb. The left scene is the subsequent interpretation of this dream depicted in pretty much the same manner as above.

The following narrative sequence, a small fragment from Loriyān Tāngai, Pakistan, currently kept at the Indian Museum, Kolkata [Figure 2.11], depicts a nimbed and turbaned figure, seated on a high throne with his feet resting on a stool. This figure scribbles on a table board with a writing stick²⁴ and is attended by worshipping followers to his proper left. The

²⁰ The craftsmanship in this latter fragment is rather crude. For example, the king’s raised right hand is disproportionately large compared to the rest of the body. For other random scenes representing pendant-legged ascetics seated in profile, see Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 431 and Marshall 1960: figs 66, 71.

²¹ For more examples, see Ingholt 1957: cat. nos 10–11 and Shanti Lal Nagar 2010: pl. 23.

²² There are a few occurrences (e.g. Ingholt 1957: cat. nos 20–21; Stoye 2008: fig. 6, cat. no. 121; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 151) where the presence of the newborn child is shown in addition to the royal couple and Asita, all seated with legs pendant. The enthroned women next to Śuddhodana, however, could then alternatively be interpreted as Māyā’s sister Mahāprajāpatī, soon to become Siddhārtha’s stepmother at Māyā’s early demise.

²³ Luczanits (2005: 178, n. 36) prefers to interpret this scene simply as King Śuddhodana with attendants. He holds that the royal figure in the interpretation of the dream (left scene) is depicted in a similar manner. To me, this is a case where the iconography of a Bodhisattva is treated in the same mode as that of a king.

²⁴ In two other Gandhāran reliefs kept in the Lahore and Peshawar museums, the writing board actually bears a legible inscription in Kharoṣṭhī script. These texts have been recognized as fragments of the “*arapacana* syllabary,” that is simply an abecedary in Kharoṣṭhī alphabet and later known as the “Buddhist mystical

scene has been identified as an episode of the tenth chapter of the *Lalitavistara* (*lipisālāsamdarśana*), where young Prince Siddhārtha is at school and receives instructions from his teacher Viśvāmitra.²⁵ I am not totally convinced by this identification, at least not in the way it is described here.²⁶ Usually in sculptures from this period, the Bodhisattva, as a young man recognizable by his nimbus, is generally shown on the same scale as other adult figures. However, here, the emphasis is clearly on the Bodhisattva and the so-called “teacher” in *añjali* can be seen as a devotee who would also be eager to receive instructions from the Buddha-to-be. Moreover, in Gandhāran art, Bodhisattvas and fully enlightened Buddhas are often shown in much larger size than other surrounding figures (S. Huntington 1985: 145). If this relief actually refers to the schooling scene, it probably bears the mark of a later production (third–fourth century?) when Buddhas and Bodhisattvas gradually become bigger compared with the other represented persons.²⁷

Next in the sequence, quite a few reliefs are related to the crucial episode of the “Great Renunciation,” the night the Bodhisattva fled from his palace. For example, a panel from the British Museum, said to have come from Takht-i-Bāhī, depicts Prince Siddhārtha seated with his feet dangling as he steps down from his couch (*āsandī* or *paryāṅka*) while Yaśodharā remains asleep [Figure 2.12]. Another panel kept at the Lahore Museum is divided into three registers illustrating the same cycle of the “Great Departure.” The two upper registers are abbreviated versions of scenes which preceded the main event represented in the lowest part. In the middle register, the Bodhisattva is represented as above, “temporarily” seated in the pendant-legged posture, on the side of the couch but without the

alphabet” (Salomon 1990: 262–265, figs 3–6). Another inscribed relief from a Japanese private collection gives strength to this interpretation (Salomon 1993: figs 1–3).

²⁵ For a recent English translation of this text, based on the Tibetan version and checked against the Sanskrit edition, see DTC 2013: 90–94. Dharmarakṣa’s earliest Chinese version of the *Lalitavistara* (dated 308 CE), probably translated from a Gāndhārī version, contains the *arapacana* formula (Brough 1977), on which see note *supra*.

²⁶ For other scenes showing the legend of the Bodhisattva’s schooling, see Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 25; Zwalf 1996: cat. no. 163, and possibly cat. no. 297; Stoye 2008: fig. 7, cat. no. 121, and Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 152. In these various scenes, it is normally the schoolmaster who is seated with legs pendant and writing on a board held in his lap while Prince Siddhārtha stands in front of him. At any rate, we are immediately reminded here of a Plutarch passage (*Alexander* 7.3) indicating how the young Alexander would have learned philosophy from his teacher, Aristotle. Alexander and Aristotle’s seats, *hedra* (ἕδρα), and the pendant-legged postures they most likely sat in link us back to the Greek gymnasium. See Perrin 1958: 241ff.

²⁷ Alternatively, could it be an early attempt to represent Mañjuśrī, one of the most revered Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna scriptures, as the embodiment of wisdom? Mañjuśrī images often carry a scripture as a distinctive iconographic attribute. In later esoteric traditions, the *arapacana* formula (see notes *supra*) is personified as a form of Mañjuśrī (Lamotte 1976: 550) and images of “teaching” aspects of Mañjuśrī (i.e. Mañjuvara) seated in *bhadrāsana* are also known from Orissa [Figs 5.129–130]. Another seated image of Mañjuśrī, as part of a larger assemblage, has been identified in Gandhāran art by Anna Maria Quagliotti (1990).

sleeping women. In the top register, the couple is seated side by side with legs pendant and may represent the pleasurable life of the palace (Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 40; Marshall 1960: 86–87, fig. 114).²⁸ However, in other reliefs such as the one at the University of Pennsylvania Museum [**Figure 2.13**], Yaśodharā is shown seated on the couch in the pendant-legged pose, while Siddhārtha reclines. Other connected court scenes depicting a royal couple in the same pose can be tentatively identified as Prince Siddhārtha and Yaśodharā seated in the palace after marriage but before the “Great Departure” [**Figure 2.14**].²⁹

Reliefs illustrating post-Enlightenment episodes,³⁰ where the Buddha is shown seated with his legs pendant, are rare and not always identified.³¹ The three following examples are in Japanese private collections (Kurita 2003: I, fig. 566 and II, fig. 878) or in the United States (Tingley 2009b: 7, fig. 3). The example cited by Nancy Tingley is related to an indistinct preaching scene while the first two are related to the story about Devadatta throwing a rock at the Buddha in Rājagṛha in order to kill him. More precisely, the scenes have been identified as the moment where the Buddha sits on a chair while his injured foot is treated and dressed by Jīvaka, the doctor, kneeling in front of him; this follows Devadatta’s attempted assassination (Zin 2006a: 333–335, figs 2–3). According to Monika Zin (*ibid.*: 335, n. 30), several other Gandhāran reliefs depict a similar figure occupied with the foot of the enthroned Buddha, which may or may not relate to the same episode.³² This pictorial tradition is also found in the cave-murals of Kizil in Central Asia.

Finally, a relief kept at the Varanasi Museum [**Figure 2.15**] shows, in the composition’s center, a defaced figure dressed in princely garb seated frontally in the pendant-legged pose. To the left, a female figure in three-quarter view is also seated with legs pendant, with two females standing with a kneeling figure in front of her. In the foreground,

²⁸ Similar palace life scenes during the Kuṣāṇa period are seen in ivory plaques from Begram, Afghanistan. See for example AIIS # 86432.

²⁹ See also Shanti Lal Nagar 2010: pl. 42, and Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 154.

³⁰ In both the *Buddhacarita* and the *Lalitavistara*, the narrative stops right after Enlightenment or with the First Sermon. These biographies of the Buddha, at least as we know them in Sanskrit, could not therefore have been used as a direct source of inspiration for these narrative reliefs. In general, an accurate determination of the textual tradition for these reliefs does not seem possible, nor can we determine any “sectarian” affiliation for the art style. It is as if “the two traditions, literary and artistic, were living side by side but on separate planes” (Salomon 2006: 145).

³¹ See for example Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 177 where the Buddha sits in the cross-ankled posture. In another relief from Taxila, two ascetic figures (one seemingly naked, the other dressed in monastic garb) sit with legs pendant next to a cross-legged Buddha in the center. Marshall interprets this scene as the miracle of Śrāvastī (1960: 78–79, fig. 100), but I do not find this identification convincing.

³² See, for example, the relief kept in the Lahore Museum, described as attendants washing the Master’s feet after the First Sermon (Grünwedel 1901: 145–146, fig. 97).

four turbaned figures stand in an attitude of respect. To the right stands a badly worn Buddha figure. Next to him, two other male figures, equally damaged, also standing. This relief is identified by the museum label as Sundarī and Nanda's conversion story. While this is likely, the condition of the relief does not permit absolute certainty; neither the Buddha nor Nanda appear to carry the bowl that would allow for precise recognition.³³

From the foregoing study of Gandhāran narrative reliefs, it appears that the Bodhisattva or, even more so, the Buddha is only occasionally depicted with legs pendant. When he is, these depictions seem to be rather natural or circumstantial with no particular meaning beyond that of reflecting his elevated status. However, such depictions as the controversial Tuṣita episode, where the Bodhisattva is variously and rather inconsistently represented in the cross-legged, cross-ankled, or even in the pendant-legged pose, show that such human representations were not yet governed by strict iconographic rules by the time of this narrative tradition. By contrast, several fragments represent selected court scenes where unspecified princes, kings, and royal consorts are equally depicted seated with legs pendant.³⁴ Perhaps Gandhāran sculptors were already at home with this widespread iconography for certain kings and gods, which circulation is especially observable in the numismatic evidence. However, these sculptors were not yet sufficiently confident to represent the "Great Ascetic," the Buddha, in such a majestic posture. For these sculptures to appear, we have to wait until the late third–early fourth century and the rise of a devotional cult of Buddhist icons and the concomitant decline of the regional visual narrative tradition.

3.2 Iconic Art

Bodhisattvas

Several depictions of Bodhisattvas seated with legs crossed at the ankles and feet resting on stools are found in the art of Gandhāra. According to Ingholt (1957: 133, cat. no. 285) and Soper (1959: 217), the cross-ankled posture was first assigned to representations of Sasanian kings, but Rosenfield felt that this posture may well just have been a variant of the *bhadra*-posture, which he considered to be of "western" origin (1967: 312, n. 86).³⁵ In spite of these

³³ For a better-preserved example in Gandhāran art, see Kurita 2003: I, fig. 326.

³⁴ Several miscellaneous scenes show enthroned rulers seated in the pendant-legged posture (Luczanits 2008a: cat. nos 115–116). Examples of enthroned *nāgarājas* and *nāgīs* in the same pose are also known from Kāfir-kot (Marshall 1960: 60, figs 82–83).

³⁵ For a study of scenes of enthronement in Sasanian art, see P. Harper 1979.

slightly diverging opinions, all agree that the posture is related to kingship. These cross-ankled images are mainly of two kinds: independent icons made of stone or stucco [Figures 2.16–17] and stone relief compositions generally carved on a pedestal on which another independent Buddha or Bodhisattva image is, or was originally, seated [Figures 2.18–19].

The images I have managed to survey from several museum collections can be divided into two main iconographic groups. First are those Bodhisattvas who preach with their two hands raised at chest level in the Gandhāran manner [Figs 2.17–18] and, second, those who hold a water vessel or flask in their lowered left hands while their right hands — if intact — are raised, palm turned inward [Figs 2.16, 2.19].³⁶ Most of these images have been diversely identified with either Maitreya or Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven as the Buddha-to-be or even Prince Siddhārtha in his earthly realm just prior to his “Great Departure” (Lobo 1991; I. Kim 1997: 228–231; Luczanits 2005).

Generally speaking, the nimbed Bodhisattvas wear a turban or a headdress, circular earrings, and necklaces. Of what remains of their thrones, we can often see a cushion and one or two small pillars. On the left and right, worshippers or donors are sometimes represented kneeling in *añjali*. These cross-ankled images of an iconic type in Gandhāra, which I date to the third–fourth century at the earliest, are generally restricted to Bodhisattvas and could be contemporaneous with the *bhadrāsana* type normally reserved for great kings (*mahārājas*), deities, or even Buddhas. A related example is the pendant-legged seated Bodhisattva image from the Victoria and Albert Museum [Figure 2.20] who wears an elaborate headdress set against a plain nimbus and holds the ascetic’s water vessel with his left hand. On the basis of this attribute and his posture, the museum label identifies the Bodhisattva as Maitreya. However, caution is warranted in this connection since, as discussed below, the conventional assumption that these iconographic indicators were clearly established in Gandhāran art is not correct.

Of note, Bodhisattvas seated with legs crossed at the ankles became a popular iconographic theme in the repertory of early Buddhist art of Central Asia and China and it is very likely that Gandhāra served as its major stylistic and iconographic source (e.g. Härtel & Yaldiz 1982: cat. no. 27).

³⁶ This is a gesture J. Huntington erroneously calls “*namaskāramudrā*” (1984: 141, 144) and which Luczanits simply proposes to label as the “*mudrā* of deference” (2005: 182, n. 54).

Other (Semi-)Deities: Yakṣas, Yakṣīs, and “Mother Goddesses”

In Mathurā, the worship of so-called minor deities such as ogres/ogresses (*yakṣa*, *yakṣī*) and “mothers” (*mātrkā*) is ubiquitous. In the early centuries CE, these icons are often represented seated, either with their legs down (*bhadrāsana*) or in the closely related squatting position (*utkuṭāsana*). A common representation of a seated male Yakṣa at Mathurā is one of a pot-bellied,³⁷ squatting male figure, often with a cup in one hand and a round object, possibly a fruit (*bilva* or *śrīphala*), in the other, the latter a symbol of fecundity.³⁸ Many of these seated male figures represent the god of wealth, Kubera (also known as Vaiśravaṇa), and sometimes are depicted with a seated female figure alongside, which, as a couple, may be taken to represent the god’s aspects of fertility and good fortune.³⁹ Both figures are worshipped independently in their own right as well.⁴⁰ However, scholars have not been consistent with the identification of these Yakṣa figures. It may be noted that, in most cases, no inscriptions are available to facilitate their identification or provide names of these gods and goddesses. I only know of a handful of examples from Mathurā where these seated statues are inscribed with specific names of the deities; I mention these in the following paragraphs.

The first example is a fine inscribed Yakṣa, carved in high-relief, seated on a throne with both legs down, and surrounded by a large nimbus [Figure 2.21a]. This was first recorded as found at Maholi, a village near Mathurā, in 1938 (Bajpai 1947) although later sources give Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā, near Mathurā, as provenance (e.g. Mitterwallner 1989; Sharma 1994: 119–120; Jarrige & Joshi 2007: cat. nos 2, 133). The Brāhmī inscription on its base is in two lines and was first read by K.D. Bajpai (*ibid.*: 8) as follows [Figure 2.21b]:

³⁷ Doris Srinivasan argues that the pot-bellied *yakṣas* are “ideologically connected to the *pūrṇa ghaṭa* and represents the filled womb-chamber” (1997: 202). On the concept of the “Pregnant Male,” see **Chapter 4**.

³⁸ For Indian museum collections, see AHS # 25730, # 35490, # 44691, # 52539, # 52566, # 52585, # 52785, # 52820, # 54564, # 75158, # 75167. See also Pal 1986: I, 187, and Astier 2014: figs 3.II.38–44, 4.II.4–9. A squatting, headless, and harmless figure of a Yakṣa, said to be from Mathurā, is at the Musée Guimet in Paris and is approximately dated to the first or second century CE (inv. no. MA 28; cf. Astier 2014: fig. 3.II.11). Likewise, a complete seated Yakṣa sculpture is kept at the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena (inv. no. M.1975.11.04.S); it has been tentatively identified with the god Kubera and dated to the fourth–fifth century (Stadtner 2002: 29, fig. 5).

³⁹ On Kubera’s iconography, see Astier 2014. In Mhbh I 191, 6.1, Kubera or Vaiśravaṇa’s consort is called “Auspicious”: *yathā vaiśravaṇe bhadrā vasiṣṭhe āpy arundhatī*.

⁴⁰ The functions of these seated Yakṣas should be differentiated from those of the earlier standing guardians which invariably have colossal human forms and are often holding or possessing an array of weapons (e.g. Quintanilla 2007: figs 15–19, 85, 88–96, 111).

1. *mahāra[ja] grahaḥyakṣaḥdharman[i]ty[o]vi*
2. *jñyā[pa]yatikaredevaprasāta(dah) ||*

Bajpai admitted that it was difficult to decode the intrinsic meaning of the inscription and rendered the first line as “The Mahārāja, Graha Yaksha called Dharmanitya [...]” This reading was later adopted without change by several art historians who nevertheless acknowledged that this so-called Graha Yakṣa Dharmanitya was an otherwise unknown deity (Williams 1982: 14; Stadtner 2002: 29). Others have now reconsidered this image and its inscription and it has been discussed in the recent exhibition catalogue on Gupta art in Paris (Jarrige & Joshi 2007: cat. no. 2, 133). According to V.S. Agrawala (1953: 798), the first crucial words in the inscription should have been read as *mihiraḥṛha* instead of *mahārā[ja] grahaḥ*. Using this reading, Agrawala connected the sculpture to a certain *mihiravihāra* known from another Buddhist inscription at Mathurā.⁴¹ “Mihira” is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning “sun” (SED, s.v.) and is the “Sun god of the northern countries.” If this interpretation is correct, it follows that the stone sculpture would refer to the Iranian god Mithra, another name for Sūrya or Āditya (Gonda 1972: 131ff). Following this seductive interpretation, the Yakṣa would have been established in the “residence” (*prasāda*) of the Sun god, Mihira.

Harry Falk, however, has since revisited the inscription and debunked both Bajpai and Agrawala’s interpretations as cases of misconceptions based on expected readings. Indeed, the beginning of the first line of the inscription starts with the consonant letters *ma* and *ha* and is followed by *ra*; thus, everyone would expect *mahārāja*, even if the letter *ja* were clearly missing. Similarly, *mihira* cannot survive since there is no sign of a medial vowel *-i* anywhere. Falk thus proposes the alternate reading: *mahārogaḥyakṣaḥ*, i.e., “**a yakṣa who is a great destroyer of sicknesses.**”⁴² This epithet, he concludes “is certainly of importance for determining the functions of *yakṣas*” (2002–03: 31–32).⁴³ The inscription can be roughly dated on paleographic grounds as anywhere between the second and the late third centuries CE and may belong to the transitional period from late Kuṣāṇa to early Gupta. This

⁴¹ See Bühler 1894: 212. R.C. Sharma (1994: 119–120) also favored the reading as *mihiraḥṛha* whereas von Mitterwallner read instead *mihiraḥguhāḥ*, a personal name of apparently Iranian affiliation (1989: 374).

⁴² In a private communication, Falk says that a haplographic omission could also be considered for the fourth letter. If this is the case, one could alternatively read *mahāroga-grahaḥ*, “a strong repeller of illness” or “a dispeller of strong illnesses.”

⁴³ See also Astier (2014: 431–435, fig. 4.II.1) who exhaustively reviews these various interpretations and proposes the following new translation: “Un *yakṣa* du bon ordre éternel, qui est un grand destructeur de maladies, fait savoir qu’il a en main la liqueur divine” (p. 435).

Yakṣa seated image certainly provides a good model for the latter appearance of Buddha icons adopting the same benevolent posture.

Moving now to the female counterparts, Yakṣīs or Yakṣinīs were likewise originally perceived as benign divinities connected with fertility. The worship of such female deities associated with abundance and childbirth, protectresses of children with the power to ward off disease, is also an important aspect of popular art throughout the region of Mathurā to this day. In the early historical period, these functions were associated with a number of Yakṣīs.⁴⁴ We have already seen how a colossal red sandstone image in the Mathurā Museum represents the Yakṣī Lāyavā seated in the pendant-legged pose on a wicker stool [Fig. 1.11]. This inscribed image was found at Jhingki Nagara and can be assigned on stylistic and epigraphic grounds to *circa* 100 BCE. This massive stone Yakṣī from Mathurā and the profusion of other smaller stone and terracotta Yakṣas and Yakṣīs, amongst which the most prominent are Hāritī and Pañcika, clearly indicate the subsequent importance of their cult both in the public and domestic domains.⁴⁵ Upinder Singh (2004: 383–385) has demonstrated that many of these images found in and around Mathurā were already enshrined and worshipped in structural temples by the early centuries CE. These Yakṣas and Yakṣīs were at times also seen as malevolent creatures to be propitiated with offerings; they were finally subdued by the Buddha in Buddhist legends, who then converts them into benevolent deities.

Another important category of female figures from Mathurā is the numerous and often anonymous “mother” images (*mātrīs* or *mātrīkās*) found in various sites in the region (Joshi 1986). Many of these goddesses are seated in pendant-legged poses and often carry children on their knees. Sometimes they are conceived of as therianthropic and bear curious animal or bird heads.⁴⁶ In certain cases, Mātrīkās are arranged as a group, but it appears that the number of female figures depicted is not standardized during the Kuṣāṇa period. The number might vary from two to seven, or even more, possibly dependent on the discretion of the artist or the

⁴⁴ For images in the squatting posture, see for example AHS # 611, # 44436, # 44520, and also Harle & Topsfield 1987: 11–12, cat. no. 13.

⁴⁵ For Mathurā images of Hāritī squatting in *bhadrāsana*, see Agrawala 1951: 88–91; for a few representations of the seated tutelary couple, see AHS # 8460, # 52520, # 52542, # 52644, # 52675, # 52710, # 52711, # 52742, # 52769, # 52776, # 54529, # 95764; also Astier 2014: figs 3.III.1–24, 3.III.26–29, 3.III.34–35, 3.III.39–41, 3.III.45.

⁴⁶ See for example AHS # 472, # 596, # 52663, # 52714, # 52755, # 52799, # 76739, # 95766.

patron commissioning the sculpture.⁴⁷ For example, one panel represents two seated Mātṛkās with a Yakṣa on their proper right who may or may not be Pañcika [Figure 2.22].⁴⁸

Other panels may also represent Śrī-Lakṣmī forming part of Mātṛkā groups (V. Gupta 2013: 58–60, fig. 17).⁴⁹ C.R. Agrawala (1971: 80–81, e.g. figs 2, 6–8) even argues that a few of these panels may possibly depict a proto-cult of the Saptamātṛkās or “Seven Mother Goddesses,” each image identified with its characteristic emblems. Importantly, however, the find spots of these various Mātṛkā figures indicate that their cult was widely popular and accepted by Buddhists, Jains, and followers of the Brahmanical faiths, so that the entire region was under their influence (Joshi 1986: 14–15).

A unique and early dated specimen of a female Jain figure is a stone image of Sarasvatī from Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā near Mathurā, now at the State Museum in Lucknow (Ludvik 2007: 231–235) [Figure 2.24]. Lohuizen-de Leeuw pointed out (1949: 286) that this unusual sculpture is more characteristic of late Kuṣāṇa art. As with the Mātṛkā figures, this now headless “goddess of knowledge” also sits in a squatting position with knees up and spread wide apart. Umakant P. Shah has indicated (1987: 190) that this is also the posture in which Mahāvīra is said to have attained the “highest knowledge” or “permanent omniscience” (*kevalajñāna*);⁵⁰ perhaps for this reason this would be an appropriate pose for Sarasvatī. In addition, her right hand was probably raised in a certain gesture. Catherine Ludvik contends that since the image was made at the request of a Jain preacher and because a manuscript was placed in her left hand, a teaching gesture was likely intended (2007: 234). Importantly, the goddess appears on an inscribed pedestal. The Brāhmī inscription not only identifies the figure as Sarasvatī but also specifies the date of its installation to 54, presumably the year (1)54 of the Kaniṣka I’s era (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: 286–288).⁵¹ If we accept the year 127 CE as the beginning of Kaniṣka’s chronological system, the year 154 of this era would then correspond to 281 CE, thus confirming that this squatting pose was also popular in Jain art at Mathurā during the late Kuṣāṇa period.

⁴⁷ For several examples seated as a group, see AIIS # 342, # 51085, # 52695, # 52723, # 52770, # 52777, # 52798. See also Pal 1986: I, 188, Bautze 1987, and Astier 2014: 3.III.37–38, 3.III.47.

⁴⁸ This sculptural relief and another from Mathurā have been recently identified with the squatting Lakṣmī in association with her consort Kubera seated in a similar pose (Gupta 2013: 61–63, figs 19–20).

⁴⁹ For a few possibly early depictions of an enthroned Śrī-Lakṣmī holding the lotus from Mathurā, presently kept at the Lucknow State Museum, see AIIS # 352, # 51029, # 51675; also Gupta 2013: 56–58, figs 9–13.

⁵⁰ See *Kalpasūtra* 120–121; ed. & trans. Lalwani 1979: 68–69. Herein, and also in *Yogaśāstra* 4, 132, the posture is known as the “cow-milking pose” or *godohikāsana*. On the intrinsic meaning of the Jain technical term *kevalajñāna*, see Jaini 1974: 73ff.

⁵¹ The inscription actually reads the year 54 but Lohuizen-de Leeuw convincingly argued that the number for 100 years was voluntarily omitted here.

In Gandhāra, a good number of deities are also seated in *bhadrāsana*,⁵² the prime examples discussed here being those of Hārītī and Pañcika. Madeleine Hallade (1968: 95) has argued that the integration of these semi-deities in the local Buddhist pantheon “must have been made as a result of popular pressure.” In a way, the integration of these semi-deities also reflects the changing iconic character of Gandhāran sculpture during this period, which I would place in the third–fourth century. The benign aspect of their characters could easily explain the sculptors’ choice of the *bhadra*- or “auspicious” posture.

One of the earliest known representations of Hārītī is shown in repoussé on a silver roundel kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [Figure 2.23]. On this roundel, the goddess nurses a child, sitting on a throne with high back, flanked by lotuses, and surmounted by two facing wild geese (*hamsa*). Stylistically the roundel can be related to first-century finds from the ancient city of Sirkap, near Taxila in today’s Pakistan (Czuma 1985: cat. no. 74; Behrendt 2007: cat. no. 7). It is reminiscent of other silver roundels kept at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (inv. no. EA 1997.202), at the British Museum in London (inv. no. 1937.0319.4), and at the Taxila Museum in Pakistan (inv. no. TX-1001; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 106).

Another representation of the goddess Hārītī seated with her two legs pendant is a stone sculpture in excellent condition kept at the British Museum [Figure 2.25]. It was imported and given to the British Museum by Colonel A.C. Walker in the late nineteenth century and is said to be from the Yusufzai region, the northwest frontier of today Pakistan (Zwalf 1996: cat. no. 92).⁵³ Holding a child, the goddess has been correctly identified as Hārītī, the former fierce ogress (*yakṣī*) who, in Buddhist lore, stole and devoured children (Foucher 1901: 341–344). The story has it that, by his teaching, the Buddha was able to convert her into a protector of children.⁵⁴ Her consort Pañcika, lord of the ogres (*yakṣa*), is also frequently depicted in the same majestic posture. He is often dressed in a warrior’s tunic, similar to that of a commander-in-chief (*senapati*); for this reason he generally carries a spear

⁵² For example, a curious animal-headed female deity, kept in the British Museum, has tentatively been identified as the Vedic goddess Saramā (Samad 2010: 109–111, fig. 8.5). Another relief in Zurich with a pendant-legged seated figure holding a *triśūla*/trident was tentatively identified as a “syncretic image” of Śiva, Poseidon, and Zeus (Quagliotti 2004: cat. no. 19).

⁵³ For more examples from Gandhāra, see also Astier 2014: figs 3.VI.180–183, 185.

⁵⁴ For a thorough study of this story and its textual sources in Indian art, see Zin 2006b: 35–53. In summary, Hārītī, mother of five hundred sons nourished on human flesh, once stole children every day in order to devour them — thus her name Hārītī (i.e. “the one who steals”). One day the Buddha took her last born and hid him from her. When the desperate mother approached the Buddha he replied, “You have five hundred sons. When you lose only one how can you be so desolate and afflicted as you pretend? In the world men have sometimes one, sometimes three or five sons, yet you kill them.” On hearing this, Hārītī took the five precepts (Chavannes 1911: 115–116, no. 413; my translation).

or staff as in, for example, the carved panel from the British Museum (Zwalf 1996: cat. no. 90) [Figure 2.26] or the famous monumental carving from the Lahore Museum, Pakistan (Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 338; Marshall 1960: 104–105, fig. 143; Srinivasan 2008a: fig. 3).⁵⁵ This tutelary pair is often represented sitting side by side in the “auspicious” manner as in the fine example from the Peshawar Museum (Ingholt 1957: cat. no. 342; Marshall 1960: 105, fig. 144).⁵⁶ Yet, in other examples, Hāritī holds a horn of plenty (*cornucopia*),⁵⁷ while Pañcika holds a purse or money container, both symbols of wealth and fertility (e.g. Rosenfield 1967: fig. 78; Hallade 1968: 95–96, pl. 70; Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 103; Gail 2012: fig. 3) [Figure 2.27]. On these grounds, Rosenfield (1967: 246–249) relates the pair to the Iranian deities of Ardoxšo and Pharro.⁵⁸ This linkage, Rosenfield explains (1967: 96), is “consistent and symbolically meaningful — to conjoin the emblem of royal legitimacy and good fortune with that of the prosperity of the state.”

Late Stucco Images of Attendants and Guardians

The medium of stucco became popular after the fourth century for works made for Buddhist sanctuaries, especially in the desert regions of Afghanistan where stone was less available. The more malleable material allowed sculptors to create sensitive and realistic modeled forms as, for example, with the sculpture of an attendant figure kept at the Cleveland Museum of Art [Figure 2.28]. The adorant with his hands folded in *añjali* and seated in the pendant-legged pose may represent a rich donor since he wears the attire of a princely person. The stucco was probably covered with a thin coat of lime-based whitewash and then painted, since traces of original red pigment are apparent in some areas (Czuma 1985: cat. no. 122).

Finally, one pair of Gandhāran armored male pendant-legged seated figures, with one possibly once holding a spear, comes from the site of Thareli in the Peshawar valley (Behrendt 2004: 195, 233). The pair, made in stucco, flanked the doorway of a monastery where one figure remains *in situ* (Behrendt 2004: fig. 77). This nimbed figure sits on a lion, his vehicle or *vāhana*, which may indicate his divine status and his significance as a protective deity for the monastic complex. A similar “door guardian” also in stucco and

⁵⁵ For more examples from Gandhāra, see Astier 2014: figs 3.VI-147, 149–158, 160.

⁵⁶ In addition, see also Astier 2014: figs 3.VI-55–67, 69, 71–98, 100–102, 129–135, 137, 139, 142.

⁵⁷ In a few instances, Hāritī holds grapes (cf. Luczanits 2008a: cat. no. 105; also Astier 2014: figs 3.VI.177–179).

⁵⁸ Several sculptural examples of Śrī/Ardoxšo in *bhadrāsana* are also known from Gandhāra. See Astier 2014: figs 3.VI.231–238, 241, 243–245.

possibly dated to the late fourth or fifth century, is currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Behrendt 2007: cat. no. 56). However, his nimbus and *vāhana* have disappeared [Figure 2.29]. Such temple “protectors” may have been a growing symbolic necessity for self-defense in the late Gandhāran monastic complexes, which saw continual pressure and the threats of nomadic invasions, including that of the White Huns in the fifth–sixth century CE.

Stone Buddha Icons

Non-narrative iconic stone Buddhas made for independent worship and seated in the *bhadra*-posture are rare in Gandhāran art and Northwest India. Those that do exist are of a rather modest size. Only a handful of examples, mostly in the preaching attitude, are known to me and discussed below.

The most well-known icon from Gandhāra is a fine stone carving in high-relief said by Zwalf (1996: cat. no. 30) to be from the Swat valley, is currently kept in the British Museum [Figure 2.30]. Here the Buddha sits on a raised throne and performs the preaching gesture with two hands. This is a local variant of the so-called *dharmacakra* hand gesture, a late appearance in Gandhāran art, where the palm of the right hand is kept inwards and only the thumb and first two fingers of the lower hand touch the bottom of the upper.⁵⁹ The head, in high-relief, emerges from a large plain nimbus missing almost its entire left side and slightly chipped off on the right. The wavy hairstyle, including the cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*), is shown as a series of striations. A low tuft of hair (*ūrṇā*), another special characteristic of Buddhas, appears on the forehead, as well as three concentric lines incised around the neck. The over-robe (*saṃghāṭī*) covers both shoulders, a mode of wearing which in Gandhāran art is otherwise reserved for scenes of meditation, usually not of teaching (Filigenzi 2005: 108–109). The two other garments seen above the ankles are the lower (*antaravāsaka*) and the upper (*uttarāsamga*) under-robos, while a piece of drapery remains hanging from under the left forearm. The drapery folds are primarily defined by incised paired and curved pleats, the origins of which may be found in Sasanian art (Ingholt 1957: 39). This drapery style perhaps provides a clue for dating this sculpture to the late fourth century. The Buddha’s knees are set well apart and the legs end in large feet resting on a

⁵⁹ J. Huntington (1984: Appendix 1, 155–157) remarks that this local variant seems very similar to the *bodhyagrī* or “Enlightenment-tip” hand gesture usually associated in later tantric literature with (Mahā)Vairocana.

footstool, quite similar to that seen in the composition from the Museum für Asiatische Kunst that includes a cross-ankled Bodhisattva [Fig. 2.19].

A related model with the two shoulders likewise covered, said by Kurita (2003: II, fig. 249) to be from Kapurkot, Pakistan, is now in a Japanese private collection. The principal difference is in the more volumetric treatment of the garments' folds.⁶⁰ A comparable Buddha image, now without head and hands, but probably once making the same preaching gesture with two hands, was found at Takht-i-Bāhī and displayed, with other fragments, inside a shed at the site in 1970 [Figure 2.31]. A fine and similar, yet complete, example recently appeared in an auction in Germany [Figure 2.32]. The main difference between the latter piece and other aforementioned sculptures is that the hairstyle in the latter piece, should the head really belong to the original sculpture, is in small snail-shell curls instead of the usual waves. This style is closer to the Indian-Gupta style and might be a significant indicator of later production closer to the fifth century CE.⁶¹ A possible earlier headless high-relief in stone from the Dharmarājikā *stūpa*, in Taxila, shows the Buddha seated in the same manner, but this time with the right hand raised, albeit now broken (Ingholt 1957: 114, cat. no. 226) [Figure 2.33].

Last, but not least, a grey sandstone sculpture in high-relief, the exact provenance of which is unknown but is now preserved in storage at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin (Härtel 1960: 72, fig. 40), displays the same combination of the *bhadra*-posture with a raised hand gesture [Figure 2.34]. Although the sculpture is unfortunately somewhat effaced, it is unique in many respects. Firstly, the Buddha is seated on a large lotus flower in full-bloom which seems to function as an “auspicious” throne.⁶² He is attended by two lions, one on each side of the pedestal, and two eroded *makaras*, with possible *hamsas* emerging from their mouths. Secondly, the *saṃghāṭī* covers both shoulders while the *antaravāsaka* adheres to the legs as if the Buddha were clad in Kuṣāṇa style trousers with high boots. Finally, the nimbus is typical of Mathurā Buddhist and Jain art in its late stage, *circa* the late third–early fourth century CE, and is comparable, for example, to a Jina/Tīrthaṅkara bust in the British

⁶⁰ Two other related specimens, also from a private collection in Japan, have the right shoulder bare (Kurita 2003: II, figs 248, 250).

⁶¹ That is, if the piece from Nagel's, of unknown provenance but curiously very close to the fragment from Takht-i-Bāhī [Fig. 2.31], is considered genuine and complete. Only a close analysis of the stone and its craftsmanship would solve the problem or allow it to be correctly formulated. One other Bhadrāsana Buddha reported by Kurita (2003: II, fig. 248) also has snail-shell curls, but I find the sculpture problematic in several instances.

⁶² Could this be an allusion to the *padmabhadrāsana* described in the *Mānasāraśilpaśāstra* (Chapter 45)? Of note, while common in later Gandhāran art, lotuses do not generally occur in depictions of the Buddha from Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period.

Museum (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: 215, 240, fig. 57). Although the nimbus is worn and broken away on the viewer's top right, we can safely ascertain that it once had the customary scalloped edge, while the inner surface seems filled with ornamental bands possibly signifying radiance of the sun from its center.⁶³

Herbert Härtel (1960: 72), despite having acknowledged the strong resemblance of this Buddha with earlier Kuṣāṇa portraits of Mathurā, dated the sculpture to about the sixth–seventh centuries CE. This must be much too late considering the image's presumed correspondences with depictions of Kuṣāṇa rulers, discussed above, and other earlier Mathurā stylistic traits. Furthermore, we have also seen the evident connections between royal Kuṣāṇa iconography and depictions of the Sun god, especially in frontal representations seated in the squatting pose and dressed in “northern guise” (*udīcyaveśa*).⁶⁴ We may likewise discern in this Berlin sculpture an attempt to liken the Buddha to the Sun god. If we compare this Buddha stylistically and iconographically with other stone figures such as the well-known early seated Āditya or Sūrya in the Mathurā Government Museum [Fig. 1.7], or later examples which may also belong to the transitional phase between the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods [Figure 2.35], we can see a decided resemblance.⁶⁵

Sun worship in human form was assuredly important in ancient Vraja (Mathurā), as testified by the sheer number of Sun god images found there. From the late Kuṣāṇa period onwards, these were often depicted in the squatting position (V. Gupta 2009).⁶⁶ Solar symbolism also permeates the Buddhist literature of the same period.⁶⁷ Thus, it may not be mere coincidence that the Buddha himself is often designated by the epithet of *ādityabandhu*

⁶³ For a fuller analysis of this Buddha image and a discussion of its solar connotation, see Revire forthcoming a.

⁶⁴ A description of Āditya's iconographic features is given in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* III 67, 2, where the northern style ornament is enjoined (trans. P. Shah 1961: III, 171).

⁶⁵ See Rosenfield 1967: 190, fig. 44; also the Sūrya image kept at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (inv. no. 21.1706). Sonya Rhie-Quintanilla tentatively dates the Berlin Buddha sculpture to *circa* 300 CE. She also conceives the possibility that some early Sūrya depictions were meant to stand in for the presence of the Buddha before the latter image had fully developed (Pers. Comm.).

⁶⁶ For more sculptural examples, see AIIS # 479; 591; 35492; 52548; 52550; 52591; 52797. For other specimens from the later medieval period also produced in Mathurā, where the deity is drawn in a chariot of seven horses, see Sharma 1994: 164–166, figs 67–68; also AIIS # 52606. For a fine example carved in marble from Khair Khanah in Afghanistan, see AIIS # 87134; also Rosenfield 1967: 192, fig. 96.

⁶⁷ According to “Pure Land” Buddhist textual traditions, the Buddha of “Infinite Light” (i.e. Amitābha) actually outshines the Sun and the Moon and is often seated on a miraculous “lotus throne” (*padmāsana*). In Mahāyāna texts, the lotus is generally understood as a cosmic flower, radiant as the Sun, symbolizing a transcendent essence or a miraculous birth. See *inter alia*, Inagaki & Stewart 2003. It follows that, in the art of Gandhāra, Buddhas represented seated on lotus flowers generally are thought of having either a transcendent or a miraculous nature as in the case of the famous, albeit controversial, “Muhammad Nari stele.” On this piece and other complex steles, see most recently, Harrison & Luczanits 2011; also Rhi 2011.

(P. *ādiccabandhu*), i.e. “relative/brother/kinsman of the Sun” (SED, CPD, and PED, s.vv.; see also **Appendix A**).⁶⁸

This Berlin sculpture, I propose, thus emphasizes a mixture of late Kuṣāṇa art features combined with early elements of Gupta style. These features are notably manifest on the head — unfortunately largely defaced — and the arrangement of the tightly curled hair. Later we shall see that the right hand raised associated with the *bhadra*-posture is virtually absent from Gupta art and the rest of northern India and this might be another indication of its early production.⁶⁹ However, this feature has a long legacy in Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan, and even as far as Southeast Asia during the mid-to-late first millennium CE (**Chapter 6**).

Of course, further contextual evidence is needed to fully understand the function of these few independent Buddha icons presented above. For example, we do not know whether these statues were placed on *stūpa* drums or niche bases, or affixed to the walls of sacred shrines or monasteries, or just considered additive. Later reuses will almost certainly have occurred and obscured their original placements at specific sites. In terms of chronology and sequence, I am inclined to place the relief found in the vicinity of the Dharmarājikā *stūpa* first [**Fig. 2.33**], before the Berlin sculpture [**Fig. 2.34**]. Finally, I date the other preaching Buddha icons [**Figs 2.30–32**] in around the mid-to-late fourth century or even later in the early fifth century, when image shrines became much more popular in Gandhāra and narrative imagery adorning *stūpas* was in decline. As Kurt Behrendt argues (2004: 14, 245–246, 274–275), an apparent separation in time and function between the narrative cycles and the devotional cult of Buddhist icons and this transition must already and gradually have

⁶⁸ Might there be a further implicit equation between the Buddha and the Vedic god Agni — the sacrificial fire who excites *buddhi* (reason and intellect) — as the earthly equivalent of his heavenly manifestation, the Sun? On this possible textual connection between the Buddha and Agni, see Masefield 2008: 156–158; also Snodgrass 1988: 172ff. For some artistic evidence of an early anthropomorphized cult of Agni at Mathurā, see Quintanilla 2007: 84–87, 214–216, figs. 86–87, 280. Incidentally, a rare and enigmatic brass sculpture, said to come from the area of Kauśāmbī and now kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (inv. no. 1984.499), is identified by the museum label as a seated ascetic or a deified king with a proposed date to the third century CE. This male figure is bearded, has the hairstyle and jewelry of a king, but holds the flask of a Brahmin ascetic and sits in the pendant-legged posture on a wicker stool, with a strap across his knees similar to that of a Yogi. Kossak and Lerner identify it as Agni (2006: 24, fig. 12), whilst Elizabeth Rosen Stone (2007) interprets it as an ascetic form of Maitreya, but I am not convinced by the latter identification. Of note, moreover, a couple of Pāla-period squatting images of Agni with his distinctive flamed aureole are known from Bihar [**Figs 5.13–14**].

⁶⁹ I know of only a couple of early examples in low-relief from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Andhra Pradesh, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. In these examples, however, the right raised hand is performing the “assurance” not the “teaching” hand gesture. Generally speaking, the latter pose is rare in early Indian Buddhist art. No more than a couple of extant bronzes from a later period from Tamil Nadu are known to me [**Figs 3.22–23**].

taken place as early as the mid-third century and this is where I would place the Dharmarājikā relief. Without doubt, this gradual shift to more evolved preaching imagery is a reflection of changing Buddhist ideology.

A Unique Buddhist Triad

The production of Buddhist triads appears rather late in Gandhāran art. However, the abundance of these pieces may be seen as important testimony to an evolving religious milieu. They generally consist of a central Buddha figure preaching in so-called *dharmacakra* with two attending Bodhisattvas often seated or standing on a lotus. These triads project a strong statement and may well reflect significant doctrinal changes in Gandhāran Buddhism, perhaps echoing the growing development of a regional Buddhist Mahāyāna visual culture (Rhi 2008: 245–246; Miyaji 2008).

In this context, a unique Buddhist triad in grey schist was found at Takht-i-Bāhī (Spooner 1911: 145, pl. 44d) in the northern part of the Peshawar valley. It is currently in the Peshawar Museum [Figure 2.36].⁷⁰ The central Buddha is seated on a throne in *bhadrāsana* with his feet resting on a footstool while his hands make the local variant of the “turning of the wheel” gesture. In many respects, including facial and hair features, this figure is similar to the above cited British Museum Buddha sculpture allegedly from the Swat valley [Fig. 2.30]. I do not think that there can be a large temporal gap between the two images. The only noticeable difference between the two is that, in the triad discussed here, the monastic drapery leaves the right shoulder bare; in contrast, in the British Museum example, both shoulders are covered.⁷¹ The nimbed and bejeweled attendants stand in bare feet on a lotus, a new iconographic innovation. The triad, as described by David Spooner (1911: 145), represents the Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas. More precisely, he notes that the figure on the Buddha’s proper right is Maitreya because of the flask he is holding in the left hand — presumably signaling his Brahmanical status,⁷² while the other turbaned figure, on the Buddha’s proper left, holds a lotus flower or a garland in his upraised right hand and must therefore be Avalokiteśvara as Padmapāṇi, “the Lotus bearer.” This identification was

⁷⁰ The provenance is erroneously given in a recent publication as Sahrī-Bahlol (Rhi 2008: 248, fig. 9).

⁷¹ Griswold (1963: 110–111) contends that, in Gandhāran art, the “open mode” is generally preferred on seated Buddha images, especially when both hands are raised in preaching. Some authors such as Piriya Krairiksh (2012) have speculated that “sectarian affiliations” were possibly indicated by the different ways of wearing the monk’s robe in South and Southeast Asia, but this hypothesis is not devoid of important biases and misconceptions. See my review of Piriya (Revire 2013: 235–237).

⁷² The head is unfortunately defaced and the usual ascetic topknot cannot be seen here.

recently taken for granted in Rhi's (2008: 248, fig. 9) contribution to a catalogue on Gandhāran art. Spooner, who first made this suggestion, also noticed the unusual permutation of sides of the two Bodhisattvas as compared to other triads he had studied from Sahrī-Bahlol.

This identification for the triad cannot be absolutely certain, however, and needs to be qualified. Indeed, attempts to locate Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya in Gandhāran art with figures bearing certain symbols in their headdresses (i.e. small seated Buddhas and *caityas*) or carrying particular attributes such as a flask or a lotus underwent the scrutiny of many art historians throughout the twentieth century until the present with varying results, often reaching different conclusions.⁷³ Buddhist textual scholars Gregory Schopen (2005a: 301–302, n. 12) and Daniel Boucher (2008) have respectively contested the identification in Gandhāra of early devotional Bodhisattva images of Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara prior to about the fifth–sixth century CE. This seems to be in accordance with other evidence from the Indian subcontinent.⁷⁴ Given this uncertainty, I cautiously propose to label this triad merely as a Buddha with two non-specific Bodhisattvas. During this early period of Buddhist art, Bodhisattva images, just as with Buddha images, are hardly distinguishable from each other; it is doubtful that there was originally any intention to make them differ individually, that is, beyond their more general appearance as representatives of the two classical Bodhisattva types (i.e. *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriya*).⁷⁵ Thus, the underlying meaning in this triad appears quite manifest: The two Bodhisattvas and the Buddha are combined as objects of devotion and visualization, perhaps indeed embodying early generic Mahāyāna ideals, whereas the primacy of the historical Buddha is diminished.⁷⁶

Probably because of the above assumption, Juhyung Rhi (2008a: 248, fig. 9) dated this triad to a late appearance of the “Mahāyāna” visual culture in Gandhāra in the fifth–sixth

⁷³ Most recently see Miyaji 2008. This thorny issue has also been recently revisited by Boucher (2008: 312–318) who concludes that “such iconic markers have done little to ameliorate the uncertainties of Gandhāran bodhisattva identifications” (p. 318). In the same vein, see I. Kim 1997: 66–69, 122.

⁷⁴ On the lateness of epigraphic references to Indian Avalokiteśvaras, see Schopen 2005b: 264. For a similar argument in favor of a fifth–sixth century date regarding the visual emergence of Mahāyāna in Gandhāra and India, see Morrissey 2009.

⁷⁵ The two types of Bodhisattvas would thus simply reflect the two highest castes in Indian society from which future Buddhas are born.

⁷⁶ Alternatively, if we interpret the central Buddha as Śākyamuni, and the flask-bearing Bodhisattva of a Brahmanical type to one side as Maitreya, it follows that the paired Bodhisattva on the other side may be identified as prince Siddhārtha, the Kṣatriya type *par excellence* (Rhi 2003: 166–167). Accordingly, a linear scheme of “Past-Present-Future” may be assumed in this relief to explain the triad. Miyaji (2008: 131–133), however, contends that the iconographic type of the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha before his Enlightenment should be represented with empty hands only, and not wearing a garland.

century. But, because the archeological context for this piece is lacking, no firm date can be given for this triad. A stylistic comparison with other Gandhāran pieces and with more securely datable Buddhist art from other sites in China and India might indicate a somewhat earlier date to the late fourth–early fifth century. The triad, which has two attending Bodhisattvas on a lotus, would thus be perhaps slightly later than the few independent Bhadrāsana Buddhas discussed earlier. But such an assignment would still have to be sufficiently early to allow for this nascent iconographic scheme to continue its development to spread outside of Gandhāra, possibly through a perishable stucco or clay tradition. This triadic model was, indeed, exported and assimilated soon afterwards in a transitional period of evolving Buddhism. It is most notably found in the Buddhist grottoes of China along the Silk Road and in the late western Deccan caves of Maharashtra, India. The rapid appearance of decidedly Mahāyāna-inspired triads in the late fifth and throughout the sixth century, especially in the cave complexes of western India, is discussed at length in **Chapter 4**.⁷⁷

Late Clay Buddha Images

Three plaques or panels in terracotta depicting a Buddha seated within a shrine in *bhadrāsana*, on an elaborate lion throne with leogryphs and *makaras*, are known to come from the Sindh region in today’s Pakistan. These are currently at the Mumbai Museum (formerly known as Prince of Wales Museum) [**Figure 2.37**]. These are often described as coming from the large brick *stūpa* of Kahujo-daro, near Mīrpur Khās, which seemingly provides important evidence of a synthesis between Gandhāran and Gupta traditions (Cousens 1914; M. Chandra 1964). However, the exact provenance and dating of these terracotta plaques are controversial and discussed below.

Jeannine Auboyer, for example, illustrated, in the frontispiece of her book (1949), a plaque which she said was from “Mirpurkhas” and which she hesitantly dated to the fourth–fifth century. However, according to Johanna van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1979: 156, n. 21), the plaque is virtually the same as one from another *stūpa*-site at Thūl Mīr Rukān, with only one or two “very minor differences.” On these grounds, she wondered whether the plaque

⁷⁷ One Japanese female scholar talks in the same terms about Buddhist triads at Ajañṭā, some of them with the central Buddha in *bhadrāsana*. She bases her discussion regarding Gandhāra and Ajañṭā link on late-Gandhāran Mahāyānic Buddhas in triads (i.e. the “complex” scenes). See Fukuyama 2014. I thank Ken Ishikawa for drawing this reference to my attention and for providing an English synopsis of the text. In the same vein, see also Rhi 2003: 171, 179, figs 10, 15.

described as coming from Mīrpur Khās might not be from Thūl Mīr Rukān. Lohuizen-de Leeuw, moreover, dated the plaques between the late sixth and early eighth centuries, basing her reasoning primarily on Ajaṅṭā stylistic evidence, but for which there is also disagreement on chronology. Following Walter Spink’s “short chronology” of Ajaṅṭā (**Chapter 4**), Pratapaditya Pal (2008a: 54ff) recently suggests a date of around 500 CE, arguing that these plaques are actually from Sudheranjo-daro, not from Mīrpur Khās as stated previously by Auboyer and others. Whatever the ultimate provenance, other associated finds at these sites, often belonging to a later period, prove that these places were considered important Sindh religious centers and continued to be in worship for centuries from the fifth–sixth century onwards, after the so-called “Buddhist period” was supposed to have ended (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1979).

In this vein, later manufactured and molded tablets made of sun-dried clay also come from Sindh and show the Buddha flanked by *stūpas* of various sizes seated with legs pendant, both hands reunited at chest level in a preaching gesture. Along the bottom of these tablets the *Ye dharmā* verse in Nāgarī script is inscribed. One such tablet was discovered at the same *stūpa* of Kahujo-daro, near Mīrpur Khās (Cousens 1914: 87–88, pl. 39) cited above, and another similar tablet was discovered near the *stūpa* of Koriani to the west of Talhar, in the Tando Muhammad Khan tehsil, district Badin, now at the Provincial Museum of Sindh in Hyderabad (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1979: 169, pl. 86). As I note with other examples from Bodhgayā, Pagan, etc., both tablets belong to a much later transregional type widely distributed in South and Southeast Asia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries [**Figs 5.93–96; Table 1, no. 18**].

Further evidence for the existence of unbaked clay images of the Buddha, possibly in *bhadrāsana*, come from the site of Tapa Sardār in today’s Afghanistan. Several chapels excavated in the 1960s and 1970s surround the main *stūpa*; clay sculptures from the *stūpa*’s original decoration have been published almost in their entirety (e.g. Taddei & Verardi 1978). What remained of the iconographic imagery left *in situ* at the time of the excavation has now been nearly completely lost. In one or possibly two instance(s), remains of feet and legs of the Buddha have been described as originally seated in the “European fashion” (i.e. *bhadrāsana*). Thus the central Buddha statue of Chapel 17 had survived up to the knees, but, according to the analysis of the excavators based on an examination of the folds of the drapery at the sides, the figure was originally seated with legs pendant, not standing: “[I]ts feet were resting on the lotus flower which is shown in relief at the top of the pedestal,

jutting out slightly from it, but in actual fact it was sitting on the vault over the corridor that runs along the back of the chapels” (Taddei & Verardi 1978: 82, fig. 116).

Working from only a black and white photograph [**Figure 2.38**], I am not completely at ease with the suggestion that the Buddha was seated in the pendant-legged pose. I question this primarily because of the unusual height of the legs and the equal width between knees and ankles. But, in the absence of other evidence, it is preferable to follow the reasoning of the excavators. They (*ibid.*: 83, fig. 118) further suggest comparing and imagining this Buddha image with a painted terracotta plaque from Dunhuang, China, now in the National Museum in New Delhi, depicting a similar representation of a pendant-legged Buddha. However, a major iconographic difference between the two Buddhas exists with the hand gestures. In the Dunhuang example, the Buddha holds his two hands on the lap in meditation — a combination of posture and hand gesture practically unknown in South and Southeast Asia,⁷⁸ whereas at Tapa Sardār the image had his right hand raised.⁷⁹ Perhaps somewhat more convincing is a comparison with the stone relief fragment from the Dharmarājikā *stūpa* in Taxila briefly discussed above [**Fig. 2.33**]. Lastly, the presence of a miniature *stūpa* found nearby Chapel 17 has caused Taddei and Verardi (1978: 82–84, n. 51, fig. 124) to speculate that the Buddha must be identified with Maitreya. Here again I am reluctant to make this forced connection and identification. The authors date the images from Chapel 17 to the late seventh–early eighth centuries (*ca* 680–720 CE) based on stylistic and iconographic considerations and see in them an evident “Indian flavor” clearly dependent on post-Gupta models (Verardi & Paparatti 2005: 436).

The same solution was adopted for a now-missing colossal statue of a Buddha that was located in the middle of the brick rear wall of Chapel 100.⁸⁰ Only the Buddha’s right foot, measuring 1.60 m, survived at the time of the excavation. The excavators assumed that the image may have been seated in “European fashion” against the vault of the corridor that

⁷⁸ There is one noteworthy exception for this combination found depicted on some metal tablets from Chedi Pakarang in peninsular Thailand. Their archeological context, however, suggests a late deposit date close to the fifteenth century CE. See Revire 2015a: 303–304, fig. 26.12.

⁷⁹ A preaching gesture (*vitarka*) has been suggested because this is “the basic gesture related to this way of sitting” (Bautze-Picron 2010a: 49, n. 21). In fact, the association of the *bhadra*-posture and the raised palm gesture is much more common in Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia (**Chapter 6**).

⁸⁰ Many colossal Buddha images were carved out of the cliff in Central Asia and along the Silk Road in China. As we shall see in **Chapter 6** [**Figs 6.31–36**], several of these were depicted in the pendant-legged posture. Closer to Gandhāra, one is reminded of the giant wooden sculpture of Maitreya (now lost) from Darel, a valley to the north of the Indus River, said to depict the future Buddha in Tuṣita heaven (Soper 1959: 268–270). However, the literary evidence here seems to suggest that the image was originally seated cross-legged and not in the pendant-legged pose (Carter 1990: 31).

runs at the back of the room. On its sides were two other images, probably Bodhisattvas, of which all or part of the feet survived as well as part of the drapery. Here, the authors dated this material to an earlier phase around the sixth–early seventh century (Verardi & Papparatti 2005: 422–424, fig. 23).

4. Summary and Discussion

4.1 From Auspicious Yakṣas to Bhadrāsana Buddhas?

In ancient India, Yakṣa were deities connected with water, fertility, trees, the forest, and the wilderness, and were initially perceived as benevolent and powerful (Coomaraswamy 1928–31; Mitterwallner 1989). Tracing the development of the Yakṣa cult in the early plastic arts, Coomaraswamy pointed out the antiquity of their imagery and saw them as precursors to the life size Buddha standing images. He held that the Buddha standing images were later modeled on the same pattern as those of the Yakṣa images with the artists likely drawing their inspiration from the latter. The hypothesis that early standing Buddhas in human form made at Mathurā (e.g. Quintanilla 2007: fig. 173) may have been derived from the old colossal statues of the guardian Yakṣas has been widely debated in scholarly circles. However, to my knowledge, no one has paid any attention to the similar iconographic resemblance of the squatting benevolent Yakṣa and Yakṣī with later Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana*. This is surely no coincidence. Taking the images of seated Yakṣa/Yakṣī figures as possible models after which other Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* were later fashioned adds weight to Coomaraswamy’s hypothesis and strengthens the case that it is not unlikely that the region of Mathurā, along with Gandhāra, produced the first Buddha icons ever.

Likewise, the sitting pendant-legged posture gradually adopted by the Buddha icons in the Northwest around the late third–early fourth century is reminiscent of Sūrya and Mātṛkā imagery as found in the late Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta periods. These acquaintances need not surprise us since the cults of Sūrya and that of the Mātṛkā are probably interconnected. Sun worship is an ancient religious way of thinking, accepting the Sun as the “Mother,” the symbol of creation, fertility, and unity. Such worship may differ from locale to locale, but the basic essence remains. A strong case can be made that the local Yakṣa, Mātṛkā, and Sūrya cults in the region of Mathurā, during the period under study, enjoyed unparalleled popularity and had a profound impact on the emerging Buddhist iconography.

Yakṣa, Yakṣī, and Mātṛkā icons at Mathurā form a part of the Buddhist and Jain pantheons, but there is an overwhelming number of sculptural representations of these divinities that were presumably worshipped in their own right, as is the case with the Sun god Sūrya or Āditya. I thus suggest that the early popularity of these deities encouraged Buddhists to assimilate them into their religious iconography and represent them more often in Buddhist art and architecture of the region, even though at no time does Buddhism supersede their popularity. On the contrary, these cults probably continued to run parallel to the Buddhist one and coexisted in the same landscape presumably enjoying generous patronage from the local population. That is to say, there is no evidence of contestation or confrontation between the cults, but only a harmonious sharing of the same space, as well as a healthy artistic and religious interaction.

4.2 On the Appearance of the First Preaching Bhadrāsana Buddha Image

In his masterpiece on Kuṣāṇa art, J. Rosenfield felt that the *bhadrā*-pose has been iconologically interpreted as “imbuing sacred images with a majesty and presence lacking in the rather compressed outline of the regular ascetic seated pose” (1967: 186). In addition, while the “protection-granting” single hand gesture (later known as *abhaya*) was commonly used in early Gandhāran narrative art as a preaching gesture, it was generally supplanted in devotional images around the third–fourth century by several others, including a regional variant of the preaching gesture with two hands, i.e. *dharmacakra*. The latter hand gesture, possibly drawn from the Indian repertoire of classical dance, rarely appears in early narrative art.⁸¹ Sheila Weiner (1977: 57) even contends that the “*dharmacakra*” does not appear in Kuṣāṇa art, but only occurs in post-Kuṣāṇa images at Mathurā.⁸² This is probably a bit of an exaggeration, for several sculptures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas performing this hand gesture have come from Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol in the Peshawar valley (J. Huntington 1984: 143, fig. 5; Behrendt 2004: 222–223), including several of the Bhadrāsana Buddha images discussed earlier.

The rather late dating of such devotional preaching Buddha icons is nevertheless archeologically and architecturally corroborated in Gandhāra (Behrendt 2004: 276) and, so it

⁸¹ In early narratives of the “First Sermon,” the Buddha is seen turning the wheel with his right hand or else in raising his right hand (e.g. Bautze-Picron 2008a: figs 4–5). A couple of reliefs from Andhra Pradesh, however, show a figure with both hands kept at chest level, presumably in a regional variant of the preaching gesture [Figs 3.3–4].

⁸² In the same vein, Lohuizen-de Leeuw asserts that “if the *dharmacakramudrā* was introduced from India into Gandhāra, then presumably this happens only towards the Gupta period” (1949: 127).

would seem, for their association with the *bhadra*-posture as well. With some exceptions, all Bhadrāsana Buddhas found in Gandhāra and the Northwest are preaching with their two hands, thus much closer to the later northern Indian tradition. In Central and East Asia, however, as we shall briefly see (**Chapter 6**), this gesture is not as common and, at any rate, is never represented in combination with the pendant-legged pose.

The reasoning behind the joint appearance of the “First Sermon” hand gesture and the “auspicious sitting posture” in Gandhāran art perhaps reflected the wish to visually reinforce the royal and spiritual authority of the Buddha and his teachings on earth according to the Indian concept of the “wheel-turner” monarch (*cakravartin*). As Lokesh Chandra put it (2012: 362), the “regalisation” of the Buddha’s iconography during this early period was perhaps nothing less than an expression of pride and power by the Kuṣāṇa kings who also adopted the *bhadra*-pose. In addition, the Buddha’s hand gesture in so-called *dharmacakra* held at the solar plexus level is in keeping with his radiant and solar nature and may stand for the turning of the cosmic sun-wheel signifying that the Buddhist doctrine lights the whole world. The gesture of “turning of the wheel” and the *bhadrāsana* were thus both combined in Gandhāra and it is the combination of both that becomes common in the Buddhist imagery from Sārnāth and the western Deccan caves of India from the late fifth century onwards and further away in time and space (see *infra*).

CHAPTER 3: ANDHRA PRADESH AND THE LOWER EASTERN DECCAN

1. *Historical Geography*

Geographically, Andhra Pradesh is composed of part of the eastern half of the Deccan Plateau and the plains to the east of the Eastern Ghats. The region comprises major early Buddhist sites and monastic complexes, two of which will be the focus of this chapter: Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, located on the right bank of the lower Krishna River Valley. Two other important sites, Phanigiri and Kanaganahalli, although these are now administratively located in the neighboring states of Telangana and Karnataka, are included here for their important discoveries published in recent years. Brief mentions of the early sites of Bhārhut and Sāñcī, in the northern part of the Deccan, will likewise be made as a background to the art of Amarāvātī.

Historical accounts of the “Andhra country” seem to begin with the rise of the Sātavāhanas (also known as Śātavāhana, Śālivāhana, Sālavāhaṇa, etc.) as a political power.¹ There is some controversy about when the dynasty began and came to an end, but the most liberal estimates (known as the “long chronology”) suggest that it started around 230 BCE and lasted until 229 CE. According to another interpretation (the “short chronology”), the beginnings of Sātavāhana ascendancy can only be dated to the mid-first century BCE.² At any rate, whether in the first or second century BCE, the third ruler of the dynasty, Sātakaṇi I, is described in the Nanaghat inscription from Maharashtra as an “emperor” (*samrāj*) and “Lord of the Deccan” (*dakṣiṇāpati*) who performed two *aśvamedhas* or “horse sacrifices” (Verardi 2011b: 99–100). Yet, according to a later epigraph at Nāsik, under Gotamīputa Sātakaṇi (r. ca 106–130 CE)³ the Sātavāhana ruler defeated the Śaka (“Indo-Scythian”), Yavana

¹ An early reference to Andhra (*andarāe*) by Pliny the Elder (ca 77–79 CE), which may or may not refer to the Sātavāhana polity, indicates that their ruler possessed 100,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, 1,000 elephants, and had more than thirty well-built fortified towns (*Naturalis Historia* VI 19).

² The *Purāṇas* mention between seventeen to thirty kings of this dynasty who ruled over the Andhra country for some 300 to about 450 years. Needless to say, the historical evidence derived from them, whose testimony is often frustratingly divergent, is not always reliable and the epigraphic and numismatic evidence does not accord all the time with the Purāṇic traditions. On these chronological issues, see Pradhan 1994, Dhavalikar 1996, Cribb 2000: 43–46, and Shastri 2001.

³ Hereafter, I use spellings for the names of kings as these are usually found in original Prakrit inscriptions, not their Sanskritized reconstructed orthography used in later scholarship. The regnal dates proposed in this chapter for the Sātavāhanas follow the scholar consensus (e.g. Mirashi 1981; Verardi 2011b). Although Shastri (2001:

(“Indo-Greek”), and Pahlava (“Indo-Parthian”) chiefs, also called Western Satraps (Kṣatrapas), and restored the prestige of the dynasty by reconquering a large part of the former Sātavāhana dominions. These included most of the southern portion of the Indian Peninsula and some southern or eastern parts of present states such as Maharashtra, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. In the Andhra country, the first Sātavāhana king mentioned in the inscriptions and coins is Sātakaṇi I’s son, Vāsiṭhīputa Siri Pulumāvi (r. ca 130–158 CE).⁴ At this time, the centre of Sātavāhana power shifted from the northwest part of the Deccan to this southern region. We learn of this shift from one inscription found at Kanaganahalli, in which it is written that King Pulumāvi handed over Ujjain to the “Non-Victorious.” Oscar von Hinüber tentatively identifies this man as a ruler of the Western Satraps (2014: 24–25, 33–34).⁵ The city of Dharaṇīkoṭa or Dhānyakaṭaka, about half a kilometer from Amarāvati on the banks of the Krishna River, subsequently became a provincial capital for the empire. The language used by Sātavāhanas in these inscriptions was essentially Prakrit. Buddhism flourished throughout this age and several Buddhist *stūpas* or *caityas*, including the Mahācetiya of Amarāvati, were constructed or renovated several times during this period. These constructions and renovations occurred even though the kings thoroughly followed Vedic rituals with possible personal adherences to Brahmanism.

The fall of the Sātavāhana Empire left Andhra in political chaos. Local rulers and feudatories carved out small kingdoms for themselves and several dynasties dominated parts of Andhra over the centuries. Amongst these, the Ikṣvākus ruled the eastern Andhra country along the Krishna River Valley during most of the third century and possibly the first quarter of the fourth.⁶ Although the *Purāṇas* state that seven Ikṣvāku kings ruled for 100 years in

65, n. 16) has discarded as pure myth the existence of a second Sātakaṇi before the advent of Gotamīputa Sātakaṇi, the epigraphic evidence from Kanaganahalli, now recently published, attest to a certain “*rāyā sudara sātakaṇi*” which can be identified as King Sundara Sātakaṇi on the basis of the Purāṇic lists (Zin 2012a: 159; Hinüber 2014: 30).

⁴ The dates of this king and the late Sātavāhanas in general, so crucial for dating the refurbishment of the Amarāvati monument and its railings, are equally disputed. I follow here the interpretations of D. Barrett 1954: 16–17 and Knox 1992: 13–14 who propose that most of these reconstructions ought to take place with this king and his successors in the second century CE onwards. *Contra*, see Cribb 2000: 43–45 and Shastri 2001: 65 who prefer to place the reigns of Gotamīputa Sātakaṇi earlier in the mid-late first century CE. Cribb’s revised chronology of Vāsiṭhīputa Siri Pulumāvi, however, is problematic inasmuch as it would place the appearance of Buddha images with hair in snail-shell curls found at Amarāvati some seventy years before Mathurā which, according to Akira Shimada (2006: 133 and 2013: 112), is highly unlikely.

⁵ Monika Zin (2012: 159), however, contends that “if the inscription is not a later edition, it cannot be the famous King Vāsiṭhīputra [*sic*] Pulumāvi” and proposes that it may refer instead to another earlier Sātavāhana king listed in the *Matsyapurāṇa* and bearing the same element Pulumāvi in its name.

⁶ Some scholars have suggested that this dynasty was related to the ancient Ikṣvākus of Hindu epics and the *Purāṇas*. For example, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma of Ayodhya belonged to the Ikṣvāku “solar lineage”

total, only four names are known from inscriptions. We know, for example, that Vāsiṭhīputa Siri Cāntamūla (hereafter Cāntamūla I, r. ca 225–250 CE),⁷ the possible founder of the line, is repeatedly referred to as a performer of Vedic rituals such as *agnihotra*, *agniṣṭoma*, *vājapeya*, and including the most significant of all, the *aśvamedha* (Vogel 1929–30: 3–4, 21 and 1931–32: 62–67; Sircar 1963–64: 3), probably with a view to a *de facto* proclamation of his independent and imperial status. In a sense, the Ikṣvākus mimicked a number of the religious and political practices of their imperial predecessors, the Sātavāhanas. Moreover, it became a common practice among the rulers of the subsequent Indian dynasties to perform the *aśvamedha* as declarations of their independent status. From this, we can infer that Cāntamūla I first declared his independence and established the Ikṣvāku dynasty. The relative short span of this kingdom, however, is countered by the richness of the archeological record recovered during the twentieth century (Stone 1994: 1–20). Excavations and inscriptions indicate that Vijayapurī (Nāgārjunakoṇḍa) was probably their capital and that they were large sponsors of Buddhism, although they also followed the Vedic rituals. Prakrit was still predominantly the language adopted in Buddhist inscriptions (Vogel 1929–30 and 1931–32; Sircar 1963–64), but pure Sanskrit inscriptions also made their appearance, especially in relation to the Brahmanical temples located along the Krishna River banks (A. Ghosh 1957: 36, pls LVIII and LIX). The Ikṣvākus were eventually supplanted by the Pallavas in the lower Deccan in the fourth century CE.

The Pallavas extended their rule from southern Andhra to the northern Tamil regions and established their capital at Kāñcīpuram around the fourth century. The Pallavas are mostly noted for their patronage of architecture, mostly witnessed today in Mahābalipuram (also known as Māmallapuram), especially during the reigns of Mahendravarman I (ca 590–630) and Narasimhavarman I (ca 630–670). They established the foundations of classical Dravidian architecture, leaving behind magnificent stone sculptures, monuments, and cave-temples (Francis 2009: 35ff, 60ff, 325ff). The Chinese traveller Xuanzang visited Kāñcīpuram *circa* 640 CE and extolled the benign rule of the Pallavas towards all faiths, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmanism (Beal 1884: II, 228–230). The pilgrim also described the city as the birth-place of Dhammapāla, presumably the great Pali commentator. Throughout their reigns the Pallavas were in constant conflict with both the Cālukyas of

(*sūryavamśa*). In the *Buddhacarita*, composed by Aśvaghōṣa in *circa* the second century CE, the Buddha-to-be is compared to “the moon of the Ikṣvāku race” (Buddhac 12.1; trans. Olivelle 2008: 328–329). For more on the fictional origins of the dynasty, see Rao 1967: 1–8.

⁷ For the reigns of the Ikṣvāku kings, I follow the tentative chronology given by Stone 1994: 7.

Bādāmi, in Karnataka, and the Tamil kingdoms of Cōlas and Pāṇḍyas in the south and were finally defeated by the Cōla rulers in around the late ninth century. The Cōla territories stretched from the islands of the Maldives in the south to as far north as the banks of the Godavari River in Andhra Pradesh. One of the last Buddhist strongholds in southern India was Nāgapattinam, which also served as an important port for commerce and east-bound naval expeditions, especially during the period of medieval Cōlas in the ninth–thirteenth centuries CE (Kulke *et al.* 2009).

2. Corpus Analysis

Throughout the early period, Buddhist art remained “non-anthropomorphic” at Amarāvātī and other sites, denying human representation of the Buddha, even in highly descriptive and narrative scenes. This remained true until approximately the early third century CE. I shall therefore begin this section with a cursory examination of the empty seats or chairs (*āsanas*) depicted in the early visual art of the region, sometimes called the “aniconic” period. The study of these *āsanas* as a conjectural “indexical sign” of the Buddha is necessary to better apprehend the gradual transition from the *bhadra*-throne to the *bhadra*-pose already noticed elsewhere in ancient textual sources and discussed *supra* in **Chapter 1**.

2.1 The Early Period (ca 200 BCE–200 CE)

A Note on “Aniconic Art”

French scholar Alfred Foucher, one of the first to publish research on the subject of “aniconism,”⁸ suggested that the initial non-appearance of the Buddha in Buddhist art was not the lack of technical skill, but the absence of the idea of representing an anthropomorphic Buddha. According to him, Vedic texts had nothing to say on the issue, “either for or against: and their silence is explained precisely by the fact that the idea of it had not even presented itself to the Indian mind.” Furthermore, Buddhist texts, “from an iconographical point of view,” were similarly empty, “as sterile as the researches on the spot” (Foucher 1917: 8–9).

⁸ The words “aniconism” or “aniconic” do not appear in Foucher’s pioneering essay “The Beginnings of Buddhist Art” (1917: 1–27), but “aniconic” does appear shortly thereafter in Coomaraswamy’s “The Origin of the Buddha Image” (1927a: 290–297). The latter went so far as to claim that anthropomorphic traditions were of Dravidian, or southern, origin, while the so-called aniconic tradition was Aryan, or northern.

Foucher thus argued implicitly for what Tryggve Mettinger (1995), in his study of Jewish art, has later described as “*de facto* aniconism,” that is, a non-prescriptive absence of an anthropomorphic deity. The accepted wisdom in Buddhist art, until it became an issue of some contention in recent decades, was that visual signs such as a wheel, a tree, a seat, or footprints, represented scenes from the life of the Buddha, or even, perhaps, represented the Master himself without depicting him physically.

A series of publications by Susan Huntington (1990, 1992, 2012, 2014) has, however, focused attention on the presumed absence of a Buddha figure in early Buddhist art and called into question the traditional theories of “aniconism.” Her most effective strategy involves reading early narrative panels as devotional processions, re-enactments, and even “portraits” of the famous sites of Buddhism after the lifetime of the Buddha, rather than as the original events. Instead of straightforward depictions of episodes in the Buddha’s life, she thus interprets the majority of early Indian reliefs as representing the activities of *darśana*, that is, “seeing” a sacred place, person, or objects, and the associated events contemporary to the sculptor as well as portraying important pilgrimage sites. If correct, these depictions then would be a record of secondary celebrations and lay devotional practices of the primary events of the Buddha’s lifetime. Accordingly, the altars (*mañcas*) or seats (*āsanas*) often placed in front of *bodhi*-trees or wheel-pillars in Bhārhut, Sāñcī, Amarāvātī, and so on would represent actual relic-thrones at the major pilgrimage sites as well as the “sacred nuclei” of worship.⁹

We, like the countless pilgrims who have visited Bodha Gaya since the time the great sage sat there in deepest meditation, cannot expect to see him there in the flesh. Yet we should not be disappointed at the sight of an empty seat, for the power of the sacred *pīṭha* still resonates and can be felt by anyone who stands in the presence of the spot where the Buddha-to-be sat and was sheltered by the sacred tree on the day of his awakening (S. Huntington 1990: 407).

⁹ Of note, there are no elaborate thrones or seats depicted in the early art of Bhārhut and Sāñcī (see *infra*). The stone slabs or platforms seen in many of the reliefs there may better be called altars or platforms for worship since it is not really known whether they were intended to be sat upon. Conversely, we will see below that these stands are later made in the Andhra country as proper armchairs or even lion thrones for the Buddha or its relic-casket to be placed upon.

Thus the vacant throne would show not so much the “presence” of the Buddha *per se* but rather remind us of his “sitting place” and leave us with his inexplicable “absence” (S. Huntington 1992: 116). Appealing as it may sound, her innovative writing has been received with informed criticism (Dehejia 1991). Vidya Dehejia, in her rejoinder (1992), terms this “absence” of the Buddha the “absent signifier.” She also points out that Huntington’s new interpretation and the traditional one need not always be mutually exclusive, as Dehejia emphasizes (1991) the multiplicity of meaning apparent in early Buddhist art. Put simply, the “Buddhist emblems” may be read as “aniconic presentations” of the Buddha and may, at the same time, represent “sacred spots” or *tīrthas*,¹⁰ as well as the devotions performed there. According to Rob Linrothe, the issue was not so much a theological problem but rather an artistic one:

[...] aniconism is a perfectly reasonable, effective way of visually saying: this is beyond words. It coincides optically with the notion of the Buddha’s enlightenment itself, but it is essentially the solution to an artistic problem, and not a theological one. [...] Aniconism then, as an artistic, rather than theological convention, was a valid visual metaphor for the transcendence of the Buddha’s enlightenment. Its acceptance in the discipline of art history remains equally valid (Linrothe 1993: 253–254).

Adding to this reasonable statement, I argue below that the “presence” of the sitting and missing Buddha was precisely implied artistically through the scene of worship focused on a sacred empty throne, which had a long pre-Buddhist history.

The Cult of Empty Thrones in Pre-Buddhist Art

The worship focused on an empty throne in India had a large distribution strikingly similar to that found centuries earlier in the Near East, the West Semitic, and Mediterranean worlds (Danthine 1939; Kanoko Tanaka 1996). For example, Mettinger (1995: 139) has successfully described the “empty space aniconism” associated with the “empty cherub throne” in the Solomon’s temple of Jerusalem:

¹⁰ A term which Susan Huntington prefers to replace by *pīthas* for “holy seats/places” (see *supra*; also 1992: 149, n. 52). On the distinction between *pītha* and *tīrtha*, see also John Huntington 1985: 46–47.

The classic ark theology has its center in the notion of the aniconic God. **The throne is empty: the place of the image is occupied by the unseen God.** The official Jerusalem cult was imageless in the sense that it lacked a direct symbol for JHWH. [...] The absence of images is here early a fact [...] the official cult was early aniconic: over the cherub throne and ark, **the god of Israel was enthroned in unseen majesty.** The place usually occupied by the deity is empty (Mettinger 1979: 22, 27).

The notion that Yahweh was invisibly enthroned above or between the cherubs acting as an empty throne or the deity's footstool also finds resonance in Biblical poetry (*Samuel II* 22, 11 = *Psalms* 18, 10, as well as *Samuel II* 6, 2). Moreover, according to *Exodus* 25, 22, the Ark of the Covenant was built at the command of God, in accordance with the instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai. There, Yahweh was said to have communicated with Moses from "between the two cherubs" on the Ark's cover. This is further literary support that the god of Israel, although unseen, was indeed to be envisioned as sitting enthroned on top of the cherubs.

In the same vein, an Assyrian relief of *circa* 1243 BCE from Āshūr, modern-day Iraq, and now kept in Berlin, shows King Tukulti-Ninurta I kneeling before the empty throne of the god of fire and light Nuska (identified therein by an inscription), which appears occupied by a flame (Aruz *et al.* 2008: cat. nos 123, 209–210).¹¹ Likewise, the Hittites (*ca* 1600–1178 BCE) put thrones in important shrines for the spirit of dead persons to occupy and the Etruscans left an empty seat at the head of the table at religious feasts for the gods to join the company (Hall 1983: 94–95). The Achaeans, according to Homer, were similarly known to place empty thrones in the royal palaces and temples so that the gods could be seated when they wished to be. According to Pausanias (*ca* 110–180 CE), the most famous of these was the throne of Apollo in Amyklai (*Hellados Periegesis* III 6). The motif of the empty throne continued as a secular symbol of power in ancient Greek culture since at least the time of Alexander the Great and later by the first Christian emperors. Indeed, the imagery was one of many aspects of imperial iconography taken up by early Christians after the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, when the depiction of Jesus as a human figure, especially as a large icon detached

¹¹ Incidentally, the association of the flaming radiance emerging behind the empty throne is also seen in later Buddhist art from Andhra Pradesh (e.g. Knox 1992: cat. no. 28; Stone 1994: fig. 123; see also **Fig. 3.2**).

from narrative contexts, was still a matter of controversy within Christianity.¹² Byzantine imagery subsequently powerfully conflated the symbolism of the imperial and divine power together with the concept of the empty and “prepared throne” or *hetoimasia* (ἑτοιμασεν: “to prepare” or “to make ready”) as a symbol for the Second Coming of Christ or the Last Judgment (Beckwith 1979: 116–118; Hall 1983: 95).¹³

If empty thrones were generally accepted outside of India as the seats of ineffable gods and unseen enthroned figures in pre-Buddhist art, as well as in later Byzantine art, might it be conceivable that the *bhadrāsana* or “auspicious/elevated throne” without its occupant had a similar significance in early Buddhist art, namely that it was typically considered as pointing to the sacred presence of the invisible Buddha? Shall we not assume with Auboyer (1949: 61ff) that the ancient tradition of depicting empty thrones in religious art also pervaded early Indian Buddhist art?

The Empty Throne as an Indexical Sign of the Buddha

In **Chapter 1**, I have already highlighted the ancient royal and divine symbolism attached to the *bhadrāsana* or auspicious throne and shown how it came to be associated at times with the lion throne, the Buddha, or its footprints, and also with the auspicious or pendant-legged pose. But in order to address the above questions, particular attention should now be paid to the features of the *āsanas* often conspicuously represented in front of trees or wheel-pillars in early Buddhist art.

In this regards, several inscribed reliefs from Bhārhut (*ca* second–first century BCE) may be instructive. There, the worship of the Buddha is often associated with sculptures in which a vacant “altar-throne” is depicted. For instance, two labels in Prakrit specifically mention the worship offered to the “Blessed One” by the kneeling *nāga*-king Erapata (Skt, Elapattra; P. Erakapatta) or “King Ajātasatu” (Skt, Ajātaśatru; P. Ajātasattu) represented

¹² At the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, an empty throne had the imperial insignia on it, representing the Emperor Constantine I (r. 306–337 CE) when he was not present in person. Within a few decades, however, an empty throne with a book of the gospels on it was placed in the chamber of church councils to indicate the presence of Christ, as at the First Council of Ephesus in 431 CE.

¹³ It may be that the iconographic inspiration for the *hetoimasia* as a non-representational image of Christ came from the Roman habit of depicting Jupiter and Juno by vacant thrones with thunderbolt and peacock respectively. Whether this was so or not, the Christian justification for the type lay prominently in the *Psalms*, especially 9, 7: “The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment.” See also *Psalm* 89, *passim*.

before the sacred altar. The inscriptions¹⁴ appear to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that the Buddha figure, although not manifest in the narrative reliefs, was considered present in essence, not absent.¹⁵ Perhaps this is what Susan Huntington had in mind concerning the second relief when she wrote:

If this scene represents King Ajātaśatru's visit to the Buddha himself, then I propose that **the Buddha's presence is indicated by his absence**. [...] This scene might [alternatively] show the king venerating a place where the Buddha once sat but after the Buddha was already dead and therefore not to be expected in the composition. In this case [...], the footprints, throne, and parasol would be part of the paraphernalia installed at the place of veneration rather than symbols indicating the Buddha's person (1992: 117–118).

She further adds that although the Buddha might be gone, the places (and the monuments and relics enshrined therein) may “preserve something of his presence” (1992: 129). I agree with Susan Huntington to a certain extent. Like her I do not see the altar-throne as a symbol or “aniconic substitute” for the physical form of the Buddha; but I do not accept her suggestion that the above scenes may just be a re-enactment or portray a mere devotional tableau after the Buddha had already departed. On the contrary, I see the altar-throne rather as an artistic means to indicate his invisible and ineffable presence at sacred sites even during his lifetime. In this fashion, the empty thrones and other associated components become elements of primary importance in the iconographical arrangement of the life scenes of the Buddha. In my opinion, the role of the Buddha, albeit here a non-manifested figure presumably seated on the “empty throne,” was not to be re-enacted on stone reliefs.

Interestingly, both Jeannine Auboyer (1949: 35) and Klemens Karlsson (1999: 166–167) observe that the art of Andhra Pradesh clearly represents the ubiquitous *āsana* as an armchair or back-chair in contrast to the earlier stone slabs or simple platforms shown in Bhārhut and Sāñcī. In these scholars' views, a gradual (and probably intentional) development of the platforms or altars seen depicted earlier evolved into more elaborated

¹⁴ The first inscription reads: *erapato nāgarājā bhagavato vadate* (Tsukamoto 1996: 569, Bhar 68); the second label is tentatively given as: *a[jā]tasat[u] bhagavato vāmdate* (Tsukamoto 1996: 575, Bhar 89).

¹⁵ Could this reflect the concept of *avyakta-* and *avyaktamūrti*, meaning “not manifest,” “invisible,” “of imperceptible form,” etc. (SED, s.v.), as found in ancient Vedic and Purāṇic traditions of not representing gods anthropomorphically (Béguin 2009: 39–40)? Along the same lines, see Krishan 1996: 16–17.

seats or chairs. Karlsson (*ibid.*) further contends that the reason why altars were depicted in the earlier artistic phase together with a tree may be that they were originally there to pinpoint the sacredness of the site. He concludes (1999: 171) that the motive behind such depictions of altars in front of sacred trees in early Buddhist art might come from the ancient worship of *yakṣas* and local tree-deities. This is by way of saying that these ancient “auspicious signs” (*maṅgalas*) such as altar-thrones, trees, and even wheels were probably not yet — at least in the earliest phase of Buddhist art — directly connected to the life and teachings of the Buddha, but mainly associated with pre-Buddhist cults of fertility, wealth, and abundance.

From approximately the second century CE onwards, however, a large number of reliefs adorning the railings and drums of Buddhist *caityas*, mainly in Andhra Pradesh, show crowded scenes of worship of a new kind. As stated above, the flat, linear, and simple carvings of altars seen on earlier panels (e.g. Knox 1992: cat. no. 60) were superseded by deeply engraved seats or vacant thrones depicted in a new unified perspective and fashion. These new, empty, three-sided seats, often portrayed with cushions and footstools, were frequently placed in registers under *bodhi*-trees or in front of wheel-pillars and flanked by large groups of worshipping male or even ecstatic female figures all depicted in naturalistic proportions (e.g. Knox 1992: cat. nos 6, 8, 26–28, 38, 63, 81–82, 88–89). While many of these reliefs can be understood as generic scenes of worship, they are frequently supplemented by other iconographic devices as well as inscriptions that help associate it with the life of the Buddha.¹⁶

Philippe Stern and Mireille Bénisti (1961: 43–46) have noticed an abrupt transition in the mature art of Amarāvātī with the appearance of a more elaborated throne-type adorned with lions and/or *makaras* prefiguring Gupta-period thrones. Drawing on Auboyer’s conclusion (1949: 44), they affirm that the new “lion throne” seen in Andhra Pradesh¹⁷ probably derived from western art in the early centuries of the Common Era, either through direct interactions with the Roman Empire or possibly through Gandhāra. These undeniable cultural and artistic contacts, however, are much more likely to have been filtered through

¹⁶ Several slabs from Kanaganahalli, in Karnataka, similarly depict the empty throne worshipped by laymen or women (e.g. CL # 36,43, # 37,33, # 42,32, # 42,46, # 42,47). In one case, a panel (slab no. 10) apparently shows Sujātā offering food to the Bodhisattva, shortly before his Enlightenment (Zin 2011a: 17). The accompanying inscription tentatively reads: *suj[ātā senāpa](ti)kaduhu[tā mahākā](lo ca nāgarāyā* (Hinüber 2014: 94–95), and the presence of the Buddha-to-be is indicated by the footprints.

¹⁷ For a detailed study of thrones, seats, couches, etc. in the art of Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, see Sivaramamurti 1942: 135ff, and Krishna Murthy 1977: 158ff.

Mathurā or the Western Satraps — nominally under the rule of the Kuṣāṇas — in the Northwest of the Deccan (see *supra*).

Another important observation in Andhra Pradesh is that footprints of the Buddha (*buddhapādas*) were often located on a footstool (*pādapīṭha*) placed before the throne. By comparison, few *buddhapādas* are seen in the early art of Bhārhut and Sāñcī. This conspicuous association of footprints with thrones may again emphasize the connection with the Buddha as an expression of auspiciousness or sovereignty. But more to the point, it may also specifically indicate his manifestation as an unseen enthroned figure. Indeed, should the missing image of the Buddha have been revealed physically to its viewers, he would in most instances have been seated on the throne with the two legs pendant and feet firmly fixed on the ground or a footstool. A couple of narrative examples that illustrate this detail are given below.

First, a famous depiction found at Ghaṇṭasāla and now at the Musée Guimet represents a battle scene with demons and grotesque figures raising arms on the viewer's left, with possibly a standing female figure on the right of a central empty throne with footprints under the *bodhi*-tree to indicate the Buddha's presence [**Figure 3.1**]. This worn relief, dating approximately to the second century CE, can only represent the assault of Māra on the eve of Buddha's Enlightenment (Malandra 1981: 123; Sivaramamurti 2007: 4, pl. IX).¹⁸ Indeed, Māra is mounted on his war elephant on the top-left assailing the Buddha; he is also duplicated on the other side of the throne but, this time, in the *añjali* posture after conceding his defeat. The standing female under him on the right, unfortunately badly damaged, could perhaps be interpreted as one of Māra's daughters. If this is correct, we would have here a conflation of several episodes relating to the life of the Buddha, more particularly pertaining to the cycle of Enlightenment. Accordingly, the empty throne of this relief can only be identified with the *bodhi*-seat on which all previous Buddhas are believed to have been sitting and which Māra also claimed as his own (e.g. Jayawickrama 1990: 94, 97). Although it is later referred to as *vajrāsana* or the indestructible "diamond seat,"¹⁹ the nineteenth chapter of the *Lalitavistara* on "approaching the seat of Enlightenment" (*bodhimaṇḍagamana*) mentions several times a lion throne (*siṃhāsana*) established at the root of the *bodhi*-tree, and describes

¹⁸ Similar scenes figuring Māra's attack are depicted at Amarāvātī (Bautze-Picron 1998b: 21, pl. VIIb), and at Kanaganahalli (CL # 42,30).

¹⁹ The notion of the "diamond seat" is nowhere mentioned in the earliest traditions. The term *vajrāsana* occurs in a sixth or seventh century inscription from Bodhgayā (Tsukamoto 1996: 140, BoGa 16.1), and is also described at length in Xuanzang's travelogue (Beal 1884: II, 114–116). The equivalent Pali term (*vajirāsana*) does not occur in the Tipiṭaka but only in later commentaries and sub-commentaries.

it as the seat where previous Buddhas attained Enlightenment (Lal 288–289; trans. Foucaux 1884: 247; DTC 2013: 218).²⁰ Of note, the empty throne in this relief is precisely decorated with a pair of lion’s feet as supports, emphasizing the above connection. While it is true that the seated Buddha upon reaching Enlightenment under the *bodhi*-tree ought to be, and generally is, depicted with crossed legs,²¹ it is certainly possible to envision the Master also as an enthroned figure in the pendant-legged pose, accenting his renunciation of the austerities and the magnificence of his noble spiritual achievement.²² At least this is what a series of later clay sealings from Bodhgayā and elsewhere — probably conflating both the Enlightenment scene and the First Sermon episode — suggest in actually representing the Buddha in the pendant-legged pose on an elaborated throne within the Mahābodhi temple [Figs 5.93–97; Table 1, no. 18].

Similarly, a railing crossbar from the Great Stūpa in Amarāvātī is depicted in a way that reminds us about another story of the Buddha [Figure 3.2]. In a typical manner, the presence of the Blessed One is implied by an empty armchair that looks similar to a lion throne. In front of the *āsana* is a pair of *buddhapāda* while, on the back of the throne, a flaming pillar²³ is surmounted by a kind of trident (*trīsūla* or *triratna*?). Dehejia argues that Amarāvātī artists often made use of a series of “emblems” in combination to build up an “emblematic body” for the Buddha (1991: 55). In the present case, she goes as far as to suggest that the footprints may represent the feet, the cushioned throne, the limbs, the pillar of radiance, the torso, and the crowning element, the head of the emblematic seated Buddha. This forced interpretation has been, rightly I think, questioned by Susan Huntington (1992: 123–124). At any rate, below to the viewer’s left, a man presents a young boy, which we reckon as Rāhula, in front of the *āsana*. Before the *buddhapāda*, a woman who can only be Buddha’s former wife Yaśodharā kneels in homage with her head down to the ground as if using her hair to wipe the unseen Master’s feet. Karlsson (1999: 121) notices that the

²⁰ See also Lal 356, 366, v. 50 (trans. Foucaux 1884: 298, 305; DTC 2013: 269, 278). The *Mahāvastu* equally refers to a *siṃhāsana* on which the Buddha was seated after the Enlightenment (Mvu III 281; trans. J. Jones 1956: 268).

²¹ Several examples from Andhra Pradesh are given in Bautze-Picron 1998b: pls IXb–XV. Interestingly, footstools and *buddhapādas* are never represented before the throne once the Buddha is depicted anthropomorphically.

²² I refer here to a passage from the *Lalitavistara*, quoted at length in my discussion below, where the newly enlightened Buddha gives up the cross-legged posture and sits on a lion throne/*bhadrāsana* to receive his “royal consecration” (*mahābhīṣeka*).

²³ The fiery pillar probably carries into early Buddhist art from the old concept of Agni, the Vedic god of fire, as a messenger between earth and heaven. On this possible association between the Buddha and Agni, see Coomaraswamy 1935: 10, 23ff; also Chapter 2, n. 68.

combination of indexical signs in this relief has been used to illustrate a rather uncommon event in Indian art, the presentation of Rāhula before his father, the Buddha.²⁴ But this episode, as a remarkable example of narrative transmission, also appears later in the art of mainland Southeast Asia with the Buddha often seated, significantly, in the pendant-legged pose [Table 1, no. 9]. According to Karlsson, the above indexical signs “presaged the making of the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha” (1999: 190), a subject to which I now turn.

2.2 The Later Period (ca 200 CE–Onwards)

In *circa* the third century CE, perhaps echoing what has already happened in Gandhāra and the Northwest (Chapter 2), a sudden outburst of creativity emerged in Andhra Pradesh with the appearance of anthropomorphic images of the Buddha. Various seated figures with both legs pendant also start to appear prominently in low-relief narratives mainly from Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa.²⁵ However, it is only at the latter site, with one exception from Goli and another from Phanigiri, that the Master himself is occasionally represented in the pendant-legged pose. In the following, I describe in biographical order the reliefs of the life of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha that are known to me. A concise study of a handful of later bronze and stone sculptures in the same pose from the lower Deccan will also be offered in this section for the sake of completeness.²⁶

Buddhist Narrative Art

A Possible Jātaka and the Birth of the Bodhisattva

While Buddha images seated with their legs down are not depicted in Amarāvātī reliefs, one rare medallion shows a person majestically enthroned full face with legs pendant and both hands reunited at chest level in the centre of the scene. This worn relief in the Chennai Government Museum has been identified with an episode of the *Vidhurapaṇḍitajātaka* (Jāt no. 545; see Sivaramamurti 1942: 239, and 2007: 13). The central person is attended on either side by kneeling figures in the *añjali* gesture [Figure 3.3]. According to the above

²⁴ A slab relief from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa also appears to depict Rāhula’s encounter with the Buddha (see *infra*).

²⁵ Stone describes at length an inscribed pillar erected for a deceased queen in the eleventh year of the fourth Ikṣvāku king at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (ca early fourth century CE). The main figure represented on the memorial pillar is a female seated in profile with legs pendant, possibly a posthumous portrait of the deceased queen at her toilet and holding a mirror of foreign inspiration (1994: 77–79, figs 230–231).

²⁶ A couple of pendant-legged Buddhas are also known from Sri Lanka but these are clearly imports from India or Bangladesh and so will be discussed in Chapters 4–5 [Figs 4.26, 5.123]. See also Fräsch 2013.

identification, the attendants have been acknowledged as Varuṇa, the *nāga*-king, and his queen and princesses in human forms, but with *nāga*-hoods, showing their respect to the Great Seer Vidhura for his exposition of the Dharma. This identification can reasonably be accepted as a couple of other similar depictions of this scene from Amarāvātī are available for comparison in which the Bodhisattva typically wears a jewelled turban **[Figure 3.4]**.²⁷ These reliefs can be safely attributed to the mature phase of Amarāvātī art which reached its heights during the latter part of the second or the early part of the third century CE.²⁸

Later carved slabs adorning the drum of *caityas* from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa depict episodes from the life of the Buddha. With few exceptions, the exact find spots of the pieces are unknown. All are stylistically dated to approximately the late third or early fourth century CE (Stone 1994: 21–82). One such slab, currently in the National Museum of New Delhi, depicts several scenes surrounding the Birth of Siddhārtha. The lower register portrays, on the viewer’s left, a royal couple which I take to be King Śuddhodhana and Queen Māyā. Next to them, on the right, figures are seated full face, in the “auspicious” manner, in front of a wicker stool. They probably represent the Four Great Kings — i.e. the divine guardians of the four quarters — or other gods who are watching over the scene. Below them, an old hermit or astrologer is depicted as he is summoned by the king to explain the queen’s dream prior to the nativity of Siddhārtha (Longhurst 1938: 25–26; Stone 1994: 70; Sivaramamurti 2007: 11) **[Figure 3.5]**. The above register shows the subsequent Birth at Lumbini, thus confirming the preceding interpretation since the slabs are generally read from bottom to top. In the previous chapter, similar depictions of Māyā, Śuddhodana, and the astrologer, seated on an elevated

²⁷ I am grateful to Monika Zin for sharing photographs of the Amarāvātī reliefs located in the Chennai Government Museum. Another parallel is from a frieze register kept at the British Museum (Knox 1992: cat. no. 55e). There also exists an attested depiction of Vidhura in a two-register slab from Kanaganahalli which is labelled “*jātaka(m) vidurapuṇakiya(m)*” by inscription (Zin 2011a: 18; Hinüber 2014: 89). In one of the reliefs, the wise minister is apparently shown with the same peculiar hand gesture in front of his chest where the right hand holds the fingers of the left. This gesture, possibly a regional variant of what is usually known as the *dharmacakra* hand gesture, is repeatedly displayed in Andhra Pradesh, predominantly in scenes where a monk is relating the parable of the “Man in the Well” (Zin 2011c: figs 1, 3, 5).

²⁸ Other stories depicted at Amarāvātī where the Bodhisattva is seated in the pendant-legged pose include the *Viśvantara-* or *Vessantarajātaka* (Jāt no. 547). See Stone 1994: fig. 48 (right). Another relief, possibly from Goli and now at the Musée Guimet (inv. no. MA 1895), shows an ascetic kneeling in front of an enthroned royal couple with their legs pendant. The scene has been identified as part of the *Viśvantarajātaka*, the moment when the kneeling Prince Viśvantara, his wife Madrī, and both their children say goodbye to the king and queen in the royal palace (Zin 2011b: 178, 189, fig. 1).

throne in Gandhāran art, were discussed.²⁹ A similar scene is represented at the neighboring site of Kanaganahalli in Karnataka and could be interpreted in the same fashion [Figure 3.6].

The Cycle of Enlightenment

As time passed, the Bodhisattva eventually reached Omniscience. A series of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa panels, now in the Archeological Museum on site, show the Buddha at the moment of his Enlightenment, seated in the pendant-legged pose, often beneath a tree. In the first panel examined here, reported to be from Site 2, the nimbed Buddha is attended by a kneeling figure on the right-hand side and four standing females on the left, one of whom pours water from a vase in the Master's right hand [Figure 3.7]. Albert Longhurst (1938: 56) identified this scene as the first offering of food to the Buddha following Enlightenment by the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika. Two cows and a cart shown in the background seem to confirm this interpretation, but several other details depart from the story at least as we know it in the Pali Vinaya.³⁰

Firstly, on the fourth week after Enlightenment, the Buddha is said to experience the bliss of liberation seated in a cross-legged posture at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, not in the pendant-legged pose.³¹ Secondly, only one male kneeling figure is depicted in the relief instead of two for the merchants Tapussa and Bhallika, who became later the first lay disciples of the Buddha.³² Thirdly, apart from the goddess (*devatā*) who encourages them to offer a meal to the Blessed One, no other female characters are mentioned in the text; conversely rice-cakes and honey were given by the merchants in a bowl provided by the Four Great Kings, who do not appear here. Longhurst (*ibid.*) explained the latter discrepancy by inferring that “the actual offering of the food was done by her [the goddess] and her attendants, the merchant only supplying the meal” and that the sculptors probably deviated from the text at hand for the sake of “artistic effect,” that is, of course, unless a different version of the legend was known and prevailed in Andhra Pradesh.

²⁹ Incidentally, there are several passages in the *Lalitavistara* which recount Queen Māyā and King Śuddhodana as being seated upon, or arising from, an “auspicious” throne (*bhadrāsana*). See Lal 41, 55 and trans. Foucaux 1884: 43, 56; DTC 2013: 34, 47.

³⁰ The same scene may also be depicted at Kanaganahalli (CL # 35,01) where, however, the merchants are worshipping an empty throne.

³¹ *atha kho bhagavā [...] rājāyatanaṃ sattāhaṃ ekapallaṅkena nisīdi vimuttisukhapaṭisaṃvedī* (Vin I 3). The Pali Vinaya speaks of only four weeks, not seven.

³² Also known as Tapassu and Bhalluka or Bhalliya (DPPN, s.vv.).

Could the scene alternatively represent the gift of milk-rice by one or several local women just prior to the Buddha's awakening?³³ The presence of women in our relief and the two panels shown immediately above, depicting the assault of Māra and an undetermined preaching scene of the Dharma, could favourably indicate this if our panel, placed in the lower register, is considered first in the chronological sequence, as is generally the case. The offering of milk-rice by Sujātā was also considered important because it marks the start of the actual Enlightenment process which ends precisely four or seven weeks later, depending on traditions, with another meal offering by the two merchants. As John Strong reveals (2001: 69), these two special meals literally “serve as a dietary frame for the enlightenment narrative.”

Another relief from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Site 2 depicts the nimbed Buddha in a similar attitude and posture [Figure 3.8]. Longhurst interprets this as the same post-Enlightenment episode in which the “two merchants gave to the Buddha his first meal after the fast of seven weeks” (1938: 62). This is most likely correct given that the panel is found in the middle register of a larger slab containing other episodes, both immediately preceding and following the Buddha in the period after his Enlightenment.³⁴ These are, chronologically, the walking meditation and the legend of Nāga Mucilinda/Mucalinda sheltering the Buddha represented in the lowest panel with the subsequent delivery of the First Sermon in the Deer Park depicted in the topmost panel (Stone 1994: 75, fig. 229). In the middle panel that concerns us, two scenes, reading apparently from left to right, are illustrated. On the viewer's left, the Buddha is seated almost in profile on a *simhāsana* with the legs down fixed on a lotus pedestal.³⁵ The depiction of the Buddha in side view, rather than full face, is rather peculiar, but other visual examples from Andhra Pradesh (see *infra*) are available. The Buddha sits under a tree, which is evidently meant to be the *rājāyatana* or the *tārāyaṇa* tree of the texts, while receiving a bowl from each of the Four Great Kings. The Buddha accepts all four bowls and fuses them into a single container (Strong 2001: 79; Granoff 2005). On the right hand side, the Blessed One is seated on the same lion throne, but is represented full face. One person, perhaps clad as a monk, steps forward on the Buddha's right and pours water from a vase onto the Master's right hand while the Buddha holds a bowl with his left hand. This

³³ In some traditions, she is called Sujātā, in others Nandabalā, while in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* two women, Nandā and Nandabalā, are involved. For different versions of the tale, see Strong 2001: 67–70.

³⁴ Textual traditions vary somewhat in their descriptions of what events occurred in the weeks following Enlightenment up to the First Sermon. For a useful summary, see Strong 2001: 77–81.

³⁵ Variant readings surrounding this episode in the *Lalitavistara* inform us that the Bodhisattva was seated on either a *bhadrasana* (Lal 376, v. 69) or a “lion throne” (trans. DTC 2013: 289). See also quote *infra*.

evidently represents the symbolic act of the donation of food by one of the two leading merchants. The other merchants stand behind with their hands in *añjali*. If the identification is correct, it follows that the previous panel, also said to be from Site 2, cannot represent the same episode of the two merchants and must therefore be taken as the gift of a meal by Sujātā preceding, or perhaps even succeeding, the Buddha's Enlightenment.³⁶

In a relief from Phanigiri, the surviving section of one architrave beautifully depicts, albeit in abbreviated fashion, the same narrative from right to left with the assault of Māra, followed by the gift of bowls by the Four Great Kings, and the first offering of food by the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika (Skilling 2009a: 42-43, fig. 17). As in the previous example, to the left, one merchant standing before the Blessed One and pours water onto his hands to mark the symbolic act of making a gift. The nimbed Buddha is seated in profile on a low stool. No tree is visible here, but that may be due to the abridged nature of the carving [Figure 3.9]. The scene compares well with a worn frieze from Goli where the Blessed One also sits in profile on a square stool as he receives an offering from a female figure pouring water over his unfolded hands [Figure 3.10]. The woman is reckoned by T.N. Ramachandran (1929: 14–15, pl. VIIIc) as Sujātā, here possibly attended by other female assistants as recounted in the *Lalitavistara*.³⁷ But these females perhaps represent instead the gift of milk-rice by Nandā and Nandabalā to the Buddha, according to another version of the story known in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*.³⁸ The problem faced here is that not a single Buddhist text is known to have circulated in Andhra Pradesh and thus no explanation whatsoever can be absolutely given on this basis. It is fair to assume, however, that certain narratives and episodes of the life of the Buddha might have circulated orally or visually in southern India, on the basis of such sculptured relief panels.

According to Stone (1994: 89–90), the above site of Goli yielded sculptures that mostly relate to the late tradition of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and at times even look forward to the art of the Gupta period with its elongated figures moving independently within their own spaces. She thus assigns the major works at Goli, including the above frieze, to the first half of the fourth century CE and even considers them as “further evidence of the transmission of the Andhra style into the Gupta-Vākāṭaka era,” the focus of the next chapter.

³⁶ In some sources, the story of Sujātā is placed after the gift of Trapuṣa and Bhallika (Granoff 2005: 135).

³⁷ Nine other girls are mentioned in Lal 265 (trans. Foucaux 1884: 228; DTC 2013: 200).

³⁸ For a succinct summary of this episode in English, see Strong 2001: 67–68.

Conversion Stories

I now introduce a series of three-tiered slabs from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, all kept in the Archeological Museum on site, which recount conversion stories by the Buddha and in which the Master is seated in the pendant-legged pose.

The first slab of this series is rather worn and so far unpublished. The museum label identifies the upper panel, where the Buddha sits in all his glory on a throne, as “the visit of King Ajātaśatru,” but the source for this identification is unclear [Figure 3.11]. The two lower panels are interpreted as Yaśodharā and Rāhula visiting the Buddha, presumably after his return to Kapilavastu. The latter identification is more likely as we seem to see, in the lower register, an adult (female?) bringing the boy to the Master, his father. The boy appears to hold a corner of the Buddha’s robe and cling to it as recounted in the *Great Story (Mahāvastu)* of Rāhula’s conversion (Mvu III 254–272; trans. J. Jones 1956: 242–261). Accordingly, the middle panel perhaps represents, on the right, Rāhula asking an enthroned king viewed in profile, presumably his grand-father Śuddhodana, permission to go forth as a novice, and, on the left, the subsequent ceremonial procession of the two relatives on the back of a state elephant (*ibid.*: 254–256). The top panel with the enthroned Buddha could thus either depict the scene at the ordination of Rāhula, the latter possibly on the right side of the relief standing amongst other new ordinands seated in an attitude of respect, or else, a following discourse on Dharma given to King Śuddhodana, Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, Yaśodharā, and her attendants (*ibid.*: 260–261). It is said that because of this conversion, Śuddhodana, possibly portrayed seated with his hands clasped in *añjali* on the left of the relief, followed by his retinue of court ladies, extracted a promise from the Buddha that, from now on, no young boys would be admitted into the Saṅgha as novices without their parents’ consent (Strong 2001: 98).

The lowest scene of the next slab from Site 2, although damaged, shows the nimbed Buddha equally seated on a magnificent throne, the over-robe covering both shoulders and his two feet probably resting on a stool (now lost). His left hand is raised to the level of the chest and turned inward, presumably holding the robe, while the right hand is lowered and rests on the outer part of the right knee, perhaps to execute the gesture of generosity, compassion, and boon granting. On each side of the throne seated figures, each with a single serpent rising from behind, join their hands in gestures of respect [Figure 3.12]. The upper panel of this slab has been identified as the conversion of the *nāga*-king Apalāla (Stone 1994:

74, figs 219–220).³⁹ Thus this lower panel may presumably belong to the same narrative and indicate the episode in which Apalāla kneels in front of the Buddha who, after claiming to be a *dharmarāja*, converts him and his family by placing a hand on the *nāga*'s head (Zin 2009: 77). According to G.P. Malalasekera, the story of the conversion of Apalāla does not occur in the Pali canonical books (DPPN, s.v.). However the story is found in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* and the *Divyāvadāna* as well as other Sanskrit sources known only through Chinese translations (Strong 2001: 118–120; Lamotte 2003a: 21–27; Zin 2006: 54–68). Xuanzang also gives the story in detail (Beal 1884: I, 122). As Strong recalls (1994: 26–27), this subjugation of the *nāga*-king is among the many performed by the Buddha in the course of his (apocryphal) journey to the Northwest, prior to his arrival at Mathurā and the introduction of the prediction about Upagupta. In other words, the story represented at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa echoes some Gandhāran reliefs and Northwest traditions (Stone 1994: 74).

The next slab appears to relate to the same conversion story of Apalāla shown in the lower panel (Stone 1994: 74, fig. 218; Longhurst 1938: pl. XLb) and to connect it with another cave event depicted in the two registers shown above (Longhurst 1938: pl. XLIV). The upper panel that concerns us represents, on the viewer's left, the Buddha enthroned under a tree attended by numerous beings. His right hand is raised in a teaching gesture. On the far right, a standing figure is noticeable by his peculiar cylindrical headdress. In front of him, another character is playing a stringed instrument or lute known as *vīṇā* or *vallakī* (Zin 2004a). Between these two persons and the Buddha six nimbed celestial beings stand or sit. Three stand and show their respect to the Buddha; three others sit at his feet and appear to close their ears with their hands so as to indicate that they may not listen to inappropriate songs presumably recited by the minstrel on the right [Figure 3.13]. The scene has been successfully identified with Indra's visit to the Buddha while he was staying in the cave named Indraśaila (Longhurst 1938: 48–49). The cave associated with the story is well known to Buddhists and was described in Faxian and Xuanzang's times as a pilgrimage site (Beal 1884: lviii; II, 180–182).⁴⁰ The story is also found in the Pali Canon in the *Sakkapañhasutta* (D II 263ff; trans. Walshe 1995: 321ff). Therein, Sakka is said to have visited the Buddha in Indasālaguhā, a cave on the VEDIYA mountain, east of Rājagaha (modern Rajgir), and to have asked him a series of questions on Dhamma. According to the

³⁹ Similarly identified scenes are described in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (Longhurst 1938: 45–46, pl. XL).

⁴⁰ Both pilgrims noticed marks on the rock-cave. According to Faxian they were the answers to Indra's questions written by the Buddha with his finger, while Xuanzang says that both questions and answers were written on the stone. See also Deeg 2005: 401–404.

story, Sakka sent in advance his musician the Gandhabba Pañcasikha with his *vīṇā* to attract the Buddha's attention by playing and singing a love-song and to obtain permission for him to later visit the Master. The Buddha agreed and a Dhamma talk ensued in the course of which Sakka is said to have become a *sotāpanna*, that is, he reached the first path of Buddhist spiritual attainment. It is also said that on the completion of the preaching of the *Sakkapañhasutta*, eighty thousand devas realized the same Truth.

A last slab of great interest represents in its upper panel the pendant-legged Buddha, nimbed, and in the attitude of preaching with the right hand raised [Figure 3.14].⁴¹ On the left hand side of the same panel the Buddha is again seated on an elaborate throne under a tree. Longhurst (1938: 61, pl. La) tentatively identified the scene as the conversion of King Kappina the Great as described in the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*. Although there is no compelling evidence for identifying with Longhurst this relief according to this Pali commentary, on the basis that follows, I concur that it should represent the aforementioned story. The king would thus be on the right hand side on the back of a kneeling elephant. Two shaven head figures dressed in monks' garb also appear in front of the elephant and are seated on one side. These may either represent the king's retinue during its admission to the Order or else a duplication after his ordination. The Buddha seen under a tree is attended by deities, one of whom may be, according to Longhurst, Vajrapāṇi, bearer of the "thunderbolt."

The story of Kapphaṇa/Kappina the Great is ancient and well known in both Sanskrit and Pali Buddhist literature. Though there are differences in detail, the outline is the same. Some aspects in this relief, however, deviate significantly from the narrative as we know it from the Pali commentaries and it is very unlikely that this relief represents this version of the conversion at all. For example, in the *Dhammapada* commentary, the king is said to go forth to see the Buddha with his retinue riding on "Sindh horses," not on the back of an elephant (Burlingame 1921: II, 172).⁴² Moreover, Vajrapāṇi does not appear in the Pali sources of the story, although other stories compiled in the *Avadānaśataka*, composed earlier in Sanskrit, depict him in the form of Yakṣa Guhyaka, actually Śakra in disguise (e.g. Feer 1891: 129–130, 146–147).

As Étienne Lamotte has explained (2003a: 4–9), in early Buddhist traditions, a close relationship links Vajrapāṇi to Indra/Śakra when the former did not yet constitute a proper entity and is generally perceived as a mere manifestation of the latter. Buddhaghosa, the fifth-century commentator of the Pali Canon, accepted this interpretation and even said that

⁴¹ I wish to thank Monika Zin for sharing her photographs and opinions on this panel.

⁴² Two peeping horses, however, are seen in the background of the relief.

Vajrapāni was identical with Sakka,⁴³ before proceeding to describe further his fierce and threatening appearance as a Yakkha. On this ground, Vajrapāni is usually represented in early pictorial scenes of difficult conversions by the Buddha where he is assumed to be much more than just the Buddha’s guard (Tanabe 2005; Zin 2006 and 2009). Indeed, the manner in which the *vajra* is generally held in the right hand, as in this relief, signals his active role in the conversion plot.⁴⁴ But whatever the exact identity of Vajrapāni/Vajirapāni, as the following makes clear, Indra or Sakka is also clearly made manifest or at least metaphorically alluded to in both the *Avadāna* and *Apadāna* recensions of Kapphiṇa/Kappina’s legend.

If my interpretation of the panel is correct, and if the sculptor followed any text with fidelity, the source would seem to combine elements found in several versions. Perhaps key to identifying the source of our relief is the sitting posture assumed by the Buddha during his encounter with Kapphiṇa/Kappina. In all versions of the story, this posture is said to be similar to that of a “wheel-turner” king as this excerpt from the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* for example demonstrates:

*punadivase cakkavattī viya [...] candabhāgāya nadiyā tīre
nigrodharukkhamūle chabbaṇṇarasmiyo vissajjento nisīdi* || (Dhp-a II
119).

On the following day, **like a Universal Monarch** [...] **he** [the Buddha] **sat down** on the bank of the river Candabhāgā under a banyan-tree and there he remained, diffusing rays of six colors (trans. Burlingame 1921: II, 171).

The *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā* is more specific regarding the sitting posture of the Buddha in its prose introduction to the verses of Mahākappina:

*candabhāgāya nadiyā tīre [...] mahānigrodhamūle pallaṅkena
nisinno chabbaṇṇabuddharasmiyo vissajjesi* || (Th-a II 232)

⁴³ *vajiraṃ pāṇimhi assāti vajirapāṇi* || *yakkho ti na yo vā so vā yakkho | sakko devarājā ti veditabbo* (Sv 264). For an English translation of the verse, see Lamotte 2003a: 7. Vajirapāni/Vajirahattha’s conquest of the Asuras is also alluded to in the Tipiṭaka (D II 259), thus, again according to Buddhaghosa, firmly establishing his identity with Indra or Sakka (Sv 689).

⁴⁴ Zin (2009: 75) pointed out the striking parallel with Indra who is described in *Ṛgveda* as “with the *vajra* in his right hand” (*vajradakṣiṇa*) before the assault at Vṛtra.

On the bank of the Candabhāgā River [...], **he** [the Buddha], **seated in a cross-legged position** under a banyan-tree, emitted rays of six colours (my translation).

Because of the subtle addition of *pallaṅkena*, the instrumental case of *pallaṅka*, “in a cross-legged position,” it is clear that the Pali textual tradition cannot have served as a source for this panel. Having noted this, moreover, the Pali commentaries composed *circa* the fifth century onwards were probably too late for the purpose of identifying the narrative scenes depicted in the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa reliefs, which are stylistically dated to approximately the third–fourth centuries.⁴⁵ The story recounting the conversion of King Kapphiṇa in Sanskrit, however, was already known and compiled earlier in the *Avadānaśataka*. Therein, the stunning manifestation of the Buddha as a Cakravartin before King Kapphiṇa’s messenger is made even more explicit than in the Pali sources, a miracle which is later reproduced verbatim before the king himself:

*tato bhagavatā dūtāgamanamavetya jetavanam catūratnamayam
nirmitam devānāmiva sudarśanam nagaram | atra catvāro
mahārājāno dauvārikāḥ sthāpitā airāvatasadrśā hastino
bālāhakasadrśā aśvā nandīghoṣasadrśā rathā vyādayakṣasadrśā
manuṣyāḥ svayam ca **bhagavatā cakravartiveṣo nirmitaḥ
saptatālodgataḥ ca siṃhāsanam yatra bhagavānniṣaṇaḥ** ||*
(ed. Speyer 1909: 104)

Alors Bhagavat, s’attendant à la venue du messager, transforma Jetavana en ville des dieux faite de quatre espèces de pierres précieuses et admirable à voir. Il y installa les quatre grands rois comme portiers, (y fit apparaître) des éléphants semblables à Airāvata, des chevaux semblables à Bālāhaka, des chars semblables à Nandīghoṣa, des hommes semblables au Yakṣa Vyāḍa ; enfin

⁴⁵ Buddhaghosa is widely known as the greatest Pali commentator and it was he who, according to the tradition, composed the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*. However, the *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā* is attributed to Dhammapāla whose exact dates are unknown but are generally thought to be after Buddhaghosa (DPPN, s.vv.). Naturally, the latter commentators did not write those texts as such, but merely compiled them on the basis of already extant, and often quite ancient, materials that they had at their disposal. On this subject, see Hinüber 2015a and Cousins 2015.

Bhagavat lui-même se transforma en roi Cakravartin ; et un trône d'or^[46] s'éleva à la hauteur de sept arbres tāla, sur lequel siégea Bhagavat (trans. Feer 1891: 337; with minor stylistic changes).

In the latter account, the Buddha is described in glowing terms and his metaphorical association with Śakra/Indra is obvious throughout the episode of Kapphiṇa's conversion (Feer 1891: 336–340). First it is said that the residence of the Blessed One in Jeta's grove outside the city of Śrāvastī is miraculously transformed to appear like Sudarśana, the city of the Thirty-three, to impress King Kapphiṇa. When the latter appeared before the Buddha, the Master was seated on the lion throne (*siṃhāsana*), in his guise as “king of kings” (*rājādhirāja*), symbolically taking pride of place in Indra's abode on the summit of Mount Meru. Seeing the Buddha in all his glory, Kapphiṇa's pride soon vanished, but his strength still needed to be tested. The Buddha had Indra's bow brought and offered it to him, but in his awe Kapphiṇa could not bend, let alone string it. Then the Buddha took the bow, strung it and shot an arrow which pierced through seven metal drums, making a tremendous noise. Having thus mesmerized Kapphiṇa, the Buddha threw off his imperial disguise and gave him a Dharma talk; King Kapphiṇa thus understood the futility of a mundane lifestyle and subsequently became a monk.

Interestingly, in the original and probably very ancient *Apadāna* verses of Mahākappina in Pali, the Buddha is also directly compared by Kappina to Vāsava, another name for Sakka (DPPN, s.v.):

*nisinnam addasam buddham udentam va pabhaṅkaram | jalantam
hemaselam va | dīparukkhāṃ va jotitam || sasīva⁴⁷ tārā sahitam
sāvakehi purakkhataṃ | vāsavam viya vassantam desanājala-
nandanam⁴⁸ || (Ap II 470, vv. 30–31)*

Je vis le **Buddha assis**, tel que le soleil levant, **resplendissant** comme un rocher d'or, éclatant comme un arbre divin, comme la lune

⁴⁶ The Sanskrit gives *siṃhāsana*, i.e. the lion throne, with no mention of it made of gold although that is a logical assumption. I have shown in **Chapter 1** that the term *bhadrāsana* as a “throne type” can be a generic term for the *siṃhāsana* and is often explicitly or implicitly described as made of gold in Indic literature.

⁴⁷ Variant readings in PTS ed. are *sasim va* or *sasi va*.

⁴⁸ Variant readings in PTS ed. are *desanājāladantaram*, *desanā jalantam tadā*, or *desanañjala-*

accompagnée des étoiles, à la tête de ses auditeurs, et **comme Vāsava**
brillant dans la séance des dieux (trans. Feer 1891: 341).⁴⁹

The word *viya* unambiguously means “comme/like” or “similar to,” so this passage is clearly drawing a simile. Thus, presumably following a certain textual or oral tradition of Kapphiṇa/Kappina’s conversion, the sculptors of our relief were perfectly authorized to represent the enthroned Buddha said to be sharing the splendor of a Cakravartin or Śakra in order to convert the great king, full of pride, albeit with the help of Vajrapāṇi. This story is also further evidence for the intrinsic relationship between the Buddha, the Cakravartin, and its ideal prototype, Indra. But it is not clear if the visual appearance of Vajrapāṇi next to the Buddha in the relief is aimed to be a secondary form of Śakra or a separate deity of its own. At any rate, we can probably conclude that the above visual representation, even if based on an unknown textual or oral version of the story, is predictably closer to the *Avadānaśataka* description composed earlier in Sanskrit than that recounted in the later Pali commentaries.

What’s more, among the above narrative events found both in the Pali scriptures and in Sanskrit works, in no case is the Pali version closest to the reliefs that we have examined. Thus we can with certainty conclude that a Theravāda version of the Buddha’s life was not so influential for the Andhra Pradesh sculptors despite what has been written in the past. That the above reliefs may be more closely related to the so-called “northern” Sanskrit recensions and not the “southern” Pali accounts was probably the reason why Longhurst and others often failed to recognize their original sources.⁵⁰ We have seen for example that Longhurst usually accepted the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* as the literary basis for the reliefs he studied, despite having noticed some deviations from that same Pali text, and also having detected the peculiar presence of Vajrapāṇi as in the case of the story of King Kapphiṇa. To conclude, even though no single preserved text can be selected as the ultimate source for the sculptors of these reliefs in Andhra Pradesh, this instance of a possible presence of northern traditions in southern India is not an isolated occurrence as the conversion story of Apalāla studied above has shown us

⁴⁹ The last part of the verse seems rather corrupted and it is not clear which edition of the text Léon Feer actually used for his translation. The Pali term *vassanta*, however, means “raining” not “shining/brilliant,” so perhaps the Buddha, just like Sakka, is “raining down the teaching from within the interior of a rain-cloud” (*vassantaṃ desanājalanandanam?*). According to Peter Masefied (Pers. Comm.), the metaphor of “raining down” the Dharma is quite common in Buddhist texts but this can only be a tentative interpretation in the absence of a commentary for these verses.

⁵⁰ There might be other geographic considerations in the stories that help explain this possible connection with the Sanskrit tradition. Ironically indeed, Kapphiṇa is said in the *Avadānaśataka* to be king of the “southern region,” i.e. Deccan (*dakṣiṇāpatha*), whereas in Pali sources, Kappina ruled over the city of Kukkuṭavatī, presumably in the Northwest.

[Fig. 3.12].⁵¹ An interesting subject for future research might be indeed the particular relationship in art between the two regions of Andhra Pradesh and the Northwest.

Other Deities

Few stone icons of deities seated in the pendant-legged pose remain from southern India. The only early sculpture in the round of which I am aware from Andhra Pradesh is a headless female deity originally found housed inside a shrine located on a hill in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (A. Ghosh 1955: 22–23; Stone 1994: 18). The image has been associated with Hārītī by Indian archeologists, but this identification is rather speculative since the torso is missing and none of her attributes are visible [Figure 3.15]. Sources do not adequately indicate if the temple where the image was found was a Buddhist shrine, but, based on the decorative features, the structure may post-date the Ikṣvākus and thus attest to the continuation of religious practices at the site after their decline in the mid-fourth century CE.

Further south, however, several sites in Tamil Nadu yielded high-reliefs of a mysterious brahmanical triad with a central goddess depicted as full-bodied and seated prominently in *bhadrāsana*, flanked by a bull-headed character on her right and a younger and slimmer lady on her left [Figure 3.16]. The central goddess is identified with Jyeṣṭhā, “the eldest” or “elder” sister and antithesis of Lakṣmī (also known as Śrī), the goddess of good fortune. Jyeṣṭhā is thus sometimes identified with Alakṣmī, the goddess of inauspicious things and misfortune *par excellence*.⁵² Her worship is found at its peak in Tamil Nadu under the Pallavas in the seventh–eighth century (Francis *et al.* 2006: 467–471, fig. 25).⁵³ Although perceived as “inauspicious,” her status and authority is clearly affirmed in images and texts by her habit of “**sitting comfortably on an auspicious throne with her legs hanging down**” and feet fixed on the ground.⁵⁴ According to Julia Leslie (1992: 119), Jyeṣṭhā was often invoked to remove obstacles in ancient India, a role normally akin to Gaṇeśa in later times. Emmanuel Francis even postulates that a reason to carve the representations of this

⁵¹ Along these lines, see Zin 2004b who also warns us against drawing hasty conclusions regarding the identification of narrative reliefs in Andhra Pradesh based on their presumed “textual” or “school” affiliations; see also Zin 2012b.

⁵² On the antagonism between the two sister-goddesses, see Leslie 1992. On the concept of Alakṣmī, see Redij & Joglekar 2010–11.

⁵³ One sculpture of the goddess is also found in ancient Sri Lanka at the National Museum, Colombo.

⁵⁴ Leslie (*ibid.*: 115, n. 20) gives the following quote from the *Kāśyapaśilpam* to justify the characteristic posture for Jyeṣṭhā: *bhadrapiṭhe sukhāsīnā dvipādaṁ caiva lambitām* (48.9). The same holds true for Alakṣmī (Redij & Joglekar 2010–11: 118).

negative deity at the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñcīpuram might have been for the Pallavas to cause discord among enemy lines (Francis 2009: 426, n. 555, fig. 189).⁵⁵

Other popular scenes of an enthroned goddess during the Pallava period show the royal Śrī (*rāja-* or *rājyaśrī*), often called “Gajalakṣmī,” the name by which the goddess of royal fortune is known when depicted seated on a lotus and showered with water from pots wielded by a pair of elephants (*gajas*).⁵⁶ Although technically a Hindu goddess, she is also often represented in early Buddhist sites at Bhārhūt, Sāñcī, and Bodhgayā. Indeed, the images of the goddess in this form demonstrate her connections with fertility, rain water, and royal power associated with elephants. Depictions of this goddess in the pendant-legged pose are found in Tamil Nadu and carved on free-standing steles or directly on Pallava temple walls or caves.⁵⁷ Charlotte Schmid has clearly demonstrated the royal connotation set behind the iconography of this enthroned Rājyalakṣmī at Mahābalipuram (2005: 493, 495–497, 502, 504, 510, figs 7, 9). There is certainly a strong parallel between these scenes of “consecration” (*abhiṣeka*) of Goddess Lakṣmī [Figure 3.17] and the royal ideology of Pallava kings as evidenced in inscriptions and art (Francis *et al.* 2006: 466–467, fig. 24; Francis 2009: 414–417, figs 161, 203, 218–223). At any rate, the artistic fame of this pendant-legged type of Lakṣmī lasted at least until the late Cōḷa period [Figure 3.18].

Later Bronze Images from Nāgapattīnam

Hundreds of Buddhist bronzes, some inscribed, have been found in Nāgapattīnam, Tamil Nadu, between 1856 and the 1930s, many of which seem to belong to the late Cōḷa period, *circa* 1070–1250 CE (Ramachandran 1965). Amongst the finds, a few miniature ornamented *caityas* acquired by the Madras (modern Chennai) Government Museum in 1934 deserve special notice since they represent the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* as part of their ornamentation.

The miniature *caityas* are on average 20–25 cm in height and are all in the shape of a shrine consisting of two parts. The lower part is a square base supported on four lions with three niches besides a doorway provided with a revolving door. One of the three niches shows the Buddha sitting in the “auspicious pose” with legs down; the right hand is raised in

⁵⁵ In the same vein, see Francis *et al.* 2006: 470–471.

⁵⁶ On the distinctions and fusion of Śrī and Lakṣmī, see Gonda 1969: 212ff. The term “Gajalakṣmī” has no early textual authority, being a later appellation given only to this visual rendering. Doris Srinivasan prefers to refer to such depictions as “*abhiṣeka* Lakṣmī” (2010).

⁵⁷ There are also other similar examples known to be from Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh [Figs 5.15–17].

a teaching gesture while the left is placed on the lap. The other niches represent a seated Bodhisattva (Avalokiteśvara?) with only one leg pendant and another has the Buddha seated cross-legged with his right hand also in a gesture of exposition. Given that the latter is seated between two deer and with a *dharmacakra* shown below his seat, the figure may be interpreted as the First Sermon. Accordingly, the other images may also represent “frozen events” from the Buddha’s life. The upper part is the shrine *per se* with four spikes that go into the lower part by means of holes. When let down, it consists of a globular part surmounted by a finial in several tiers. When raised, however, it reveals a Buddha seated cross-legged in the gesture of subduing Māra (*māravijaya*) [Figures 3.19–20]. Stylistically, T.N. Ramachandran (1965: 61–62; cat. nos 72–75) saw similarities between these so-called “votive *stūpas*” and some pieces from Nālandā and Kurkihar in Bihar. He also speculated that the Buddha figure in *māravijaya* actually represents the transcendental Akṣobhya, but this is clearly reading beyond the evidence.

Two of these miniature bronzes (*ibid.*: cat. nos 73–74) actually bear short inscriptions in Tamil language and script, datable to around the thirteenth–fourteenth century on paleographic grounds [Figure 3.21]. These may or may not shed some light on the identification of the Buddha(s) depicted here. The first inscription reads and translates as follows:

(1) *periyānācci*

(2) *nāyakar* |

“The Nāyakar (of or gift or set up by or donated by) Periya Nācci”

(Ramachandran 1965: 62).

Admittedly, Ramachandran explains that this is simply a dedication made to the “Buddha” (i.e. Nāyakar) by a “venerable” or “elder” lady. The second dedication is even shorter and does not add much to the issue of identification of the icon as it only seems to praise the Master:

(1) *āḷuṭaiyaṅā-*

(2) *-yakar* |

“The Nāyakar (i.e., Lord Buddha) who was the Lord of people”
(Ramachandran 1965: 62).

The epithet *nāyakar* usually means “lord, master, chief” and can either designate a king, a god, or a highly venerated person, such as the Buddha, depending on context.⁵⁸ The second inscription, *āluṭaiyaṅāyakar*, can be understood as *āluṭaiya nāyakar* “the Lord who is the lord of [possessing] people” as did Ramachandran, where *ṅ-* equals *n-*. A second reading is possible, if we interpret *āluṭaiyaṅāyakar* as the result of *saṁdhi*, that is, the phonological process of joining the two words *āluṭaiyaṅ* and *nāyakar*. If the second interpretation is retained, the translation would then be “the Lord [installed/given by] the lord of men [a king?].”⁵⁹ At any rate, given these uncertainties, and until further evidence is given, it would thus be more prudent in general to identify the Lord Buddha in different attitudes and postures depicted in Nāgapattīṇam merely as Śākyamuni, the archetype of all past, future, and transcendental Buddhas, while admitting that one image can sometimes be interpreted on several levels.

Last but not least, a unique and magnificent metal sculpture of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* was found in 2004 among 42 other Buddha bronzes and three stone Buddha artefacts in Cellūr village, Tamil Nadu. These objects were put on display for the first time at the Chennai Government Museum only recently (Subramanian 2011).⁶⁰ Stylistically, they share many affinities with Buddhist bronzes from Nāgapattīṇam and are roughly datable between the eleventh to the thirteenth century CE. The metal sculpture examined here is about 52 cm in height. The Buddha is seated on a throne in the pendant-legged pose with his right shoulder bare and right hand raised in preaching attitude, while the left is on the lap. A flame of knowledge is emerging from the cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*) as in almost all Nāgapattīṇam bronzes and an umbrella stands high above his head. The creepers around the umbrella presumably represent a tree (of Enlightenment?). Around the Buddha, in the outer row, are several figures of celestial beings playing musical instruments. Four devotees are in

⁵⁸ For example, the idiom *tiru-vīti-nāyakar* describes a “deity of a temple intended for carrying out in procession during festivals” (MTL, s.v.). One of the Buddha bronzes from Cellūr (see *infra*) is inscribed with a similar phrase: *irācar nāyakar*, “the Lord [given by or named] Irācar” or possibly “The Nāyakar/Buddha who is king”, i.e. “The King Nāyakar/Buddha” (Emmanuel Francis, Pers. Comm.).

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Emmanuel Francis for his assistance in reading and reinterpreting these inscriptions. The transliteration is given here according to the principles laid down by the Madras Tamil Lexicon (MTL).

⁶⁰ I have not had a chance to see the Cellūr collection, but I am told by Emmanuel Francis (Pers. Comm.) that the Commissioner for Archeology at the Chennai Government Museum, R. Balasubramanian, is currently preparing a monograph on these bronzes.

the inner circle, two standing and two kneeling, all with clasped hands. A pair of two prancing lions near the throne completes the scene [Figure 3.22]. Four more devotees (not seen in the picture), each kneeling in a corner, bear on their shoulders the lotus pedestal. The Buddha image reminds us of another miniature bronze, hitherto unpublished and recently exhibited at the National Museum in New Delhi, also hailing from southern India, perhaps Nāgapattīṇam [Figure 3.23].⁶¹ These various discoveries are important inasmuch as they increase our knowledge of late Buddhist art in Tamil Nadu.

3. Summary and Discussion: From Empty Thrones to Enthroned Buddhas?

In this chapter, I began by contending that, with the depiction of empty thrones in stone reliefs, the Buddha was already conceptually present, not absent, in the early art of Andhra Pradesh. I further argued that these thrones, often seen in combination with other symbols of sovereignty such as the lion, the wheel, or the state umbrella, carried strong royal connotations. Together with the footrests bearing footprints of the Buddha, the imagery of the vacant seat invariably suggested his imperial manifestation as a spiritual or earthly king enthroned in “unseen majesty,” also known as the auspicious pose or *bhadrāsana*.

This royal iconography became gradually more manifest with the latter appearance of enthroned Buddha images in narrative art, *circa* the third–fourth century CE, especially through the depiction of several conversion stories from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, in which the Buddha is depicted full face seated in all his glory. However, it is also interesting to notice that two variant episodes of food offering to the Master while practicing the austerities, whether immediately preceding or following his Enlightenment, were visually depicted in Andhra Pradesh with the Buddha in the pendant-legged pose, although usually shown in profile. These representations could be confused at times if attention is not paid to details and sequential order. It was suggested to me by Monika Zin (Pers. Comm.) that perhaps the Buddha sits with the legs down during these episodes simply to indicate that he is no longer practicing the austerities communicated by a cross-legged posture.

There is at least one textual reference that corroborates this suggestion. In the *Lalitavistara*, the Buddha is reported to have proclaimed such poignant verses upon reaching Enlightenment. These are known in Sanskrit as follows (Lal 376, vv. 65–68):

⁶¹ I am grateful to Debdutta Ray for sharing his photograph of this bronze.

yā bhāṣitā ca vāgme mārasyehāgatasya sasainyasya |
bhetsyāmi na paryaṅkaṃ aprāpya jarāmaraṇapāram ||

bhinnā mayā hyavidyā dīptena jñānakaṭhinavajreṇa |
prāptaṃ ca daśabalatvaṃ tasmātprabhinadmi paryaṅkam ||

prāptaṃ mayārahatvaṃ kṣīṇā me āśravā niravaśeṣāḥ |
bhagnā ca namucisenā bhinadmi tasmāddhi paryaṅkam ||

nīvaraṇakapātāni ca pañca mayeha pradāritā sarvā |
tṛṣṇālatā vichinnā hanteha bhinadmi paryaṅkam ||
(ed. Vaidya 1958)

A recent English translation, albeit drawn from the Tibetan edition, renders this passage thus:

The words that I said
Before Māra and his army were:
**“I will not get out of the cross-legged position
Until I bring an end to old age and death.”**

I destroyed ignorance
With blazing, vajra-hard wisdom,
And attained the state of the ten powers.
That is why I now abandon the cross-legged posture.

I attained the level of a worthy one,
Exhausted all of my defilements,
And destroyed the demon horde.
That is why I now get out of the cross-legged posture.

Here I rent asunder
The closed doors of the five obstructions
And cut through the vines of craving.

Now I get out of the cross-legged posture (trans. DTC 2013: 288–289).⁶²

It is immediately recounted in the next Sanskrit verse (Lal 376, v. 69) that:

atha so manuṣyacandraḥ savilambitamāsanātsamutthāya |
bhadrāsane niṣīdanmahābhīṣekaṁ pratīcchamśca ||
(ed. Vaidya 1958)

At this point, the Sanskrit and Tibetan editions, as well as their modern translations in English or French, differ slightly as to the terminology of the throne. A translation from the Sanskrit for example reads:

Then **that Moon amongst men**, slowly arose from his seat, and
seated on (another) **excellent seat**,^[63] **accepted his great**
consecration (trans. Goswami 2001: 343).

Whereas another translation from the Tibetan is given as:

Then **this moon among men** [the Buddha]
Rose slowly from his seat,
Accepted the ceremonial anointment,
And took his seat on a lion throne^[64] (trans. DTC 2013: 289).

In other words, while the Sanskrit edition has *bhadrāsana* (“excellent seat”), the Tibetan version reads “lion throne” (Tib. *seng ge khri*; **simhāsana*).⁶⁵ I have indicated in **Chapter 1**, however, that both throne types are often considered equivalents in texts; so it

⁶² For another English translation from the Sanskrit, see Goswami 2001: 343; for an earlier translation in French, see Foucaux 1884: 313.

⁶³ The French translation simply reads “trône” (Foucaux 1884: 313).

⁶⁴ The earlier translation in French also reads “siège du lion” (Foucaux 1868: 351).

⁶⁵ In another passage of the Sanskrit edition (Lal 270–271), a *nāga*-girl is praised to have joyfully and devotedly erected a “splendid” or “magnificent” throne “made of jewels” (*maṇimaya bhadrāsana*) to the Bodhisattva while the latter was still seated near the Nairāṅjanā River just prior to his proceeding towards the “seat of Enlightenment” (trans. Foucaux 1884: 232–233; cf. DTC 2013: 203–204). The Tibetan version, however, seems to read “siège de lion” (trans. Foucaux 1868: 260).

would seem in this narrative unfolding the “great consecration” (*mahābhīṣeka*) of the newly Enlightened One, that is, in a true sense, the Buddha’s real Birth into the world. Thus there is good reason to postulate that, in artistic terms, the “consecration” leading to the majesty of the Buddha right after his Enlightenment can be depicted as a scene of enthronement in the royal or “auspicious” pose.⁶⁶ This was later communicated with the production of pendant-legged images of Rājyalakṣmī from Tamil Nadu. As we shall see in the next chapter, depictions of the enthroned Goddess Lakṣmī as well as Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* will also be very popular under the Gupta-Vākāṭaka kings.

⁶⁶ A popular television series about the Buddha’s life was broadcast on Zee TV and Doordarshan in India in 2013. Incidentally, the scene when Siddhartha attains Enlightenment is shown as a prodigious miracle with the Master depicted in gigantic proportion, and sitting on top of a mountain in the pendant-legged pose. See: <https://buddhistartnews.wordpress.com/2014/06/08/buddha-on-screen-propagating-buddhism-in-india-through-digital-media/#more-14635> [Accessed on 20 May 2015].

CHAPTER 4: NORTH-CENTRAL INDIA AND THE WESTERN DECCAN CAVES

1. *Historical Overview*

1.1 The Gupta Period (ca 320–550 CE)

The Gupta Empire, covering at its apex much of the northern Indian subcontinent, officially started from around 320 CE when Candragupta I (r. ca 320–350) took control and accessed the throne. The Gupta era dates from his formal year of coronation and has been widely used since then (Falk 2007: 131). Scholars agree that his marriage to the Licchāvi princess Kumāradevī strengthened his position and increased his land holdings. Perhaps, after this territorial extension, he assumed the imperial title *mahārajādhirāja* for himself and his successors. His son, Samudragupta I (r. ca 350–376), in addition, adopted the imperial ideal of *digvijaya* — the conquest in all directions binding the country in to a single unit.¹ Kings of this dynasty however claims their origins with a certain Mahārāja Śrī Gupta (or Śrīgupta, “protected by Śrī”?).²

The peace and prosperity created under the leadership of the imperial Guptas during the fourth and fifth centuries enabled the pursuit of scientific and artistic endeavors. As a result, this period is often called the Golden Age of India (e.g. Jarrige & Joshi 2007) and was allegedly marked by extensive inventions and discoveries in science, technology, engineering, art, literature, logic, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy that crystallized the elements of what is generally presented as Hindu culture (Ingalls 1976).³ The earliest available Indian Epics, major *Purāṇas*, and iconographic treatises such as the

¹ For the political history of the Gupta dynasty, I refer mainly to Agrawal 1989 and Ferrier 2008. For a study of primary sources and inscriptions of this period, see *inter alia* Fleet 1888 and Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981.

² On this dynastic genealogy and lineage, see for example the Allahabad panegyric inscription of Samudragupta, verse 28, which reads: *mahārājaśrīguptaprapautrasya* (Fleet 1888: II, 8; Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 214). John F. Fleet (*ibid.*: n. 3) favored reading this simply as “the illustrious Gupta,” with the honourific “Śrī” not an integral part of the name. For a review of the arguments, see Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 2–3. This name also appears in the Bhitṛī inscription of Skandagupta (Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 314, v. 2), the metal seal of Samudragupta also from Bhitṛī (Willis 2005: 134, l. 1), and the Nālandā clay seals of Budhagupta, Narasimhagupta, and Kumāragupta II respectively (Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 351, v. 1; 355, v. 1; 357, v. 1).

³ A recent critical assessment of some of these assertions, and useful counterbalance from these euphoric modern writings on Gupta history, can be found in Fussman 2008. For another interpretation of the development of India’s Golden Age, intrinsically linked to the fate of the western Vākātakas, especially that of King Hariṣeṇa, see Spink 2005a.

Viṣṇudharmottara, are also thought to have been written or compiled around this period. However, there is almost no monument or work of art directly attributed to the Gupta kings⁴ even though they left us a rich coinage, often minted in gold, to work with (e.g. Allan 1914; Altekar 1954).

Accordingly, this coinage indicates that Candragupta I, Samudragupta I, and Candragupta II (r. ca 376–415) were the most notable rulers of the Gupta dynasty.⁵ The fifth century CE Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa, if credence is to be given to the *Raghuvamśa* (4.60–75; trans. Johnstone 1902: 33–35; Ingalls 1976: n. 1), credits the Gupta kings with having conquered about twenty one kingdoms, both inside and outside of modern India, including the kingdoms of the Pārasīkās (Persians), the Hūṇa (Huns Kidarites), and the Kāmbojā (Indo-Scythians) tribes located in the west and east Oxus valleys. A well-established legend of the imperial Guptas is that Lakṣmī, the goddess of good fortune and post-Vedic consort of Viṣṇu, self-selected the greatest monarch as her “husband” as testified by epigraphy (Fleet 1888: 59, 62, v. 5) and possible further numismatic evidence. Indeed, Ellen Raven (2010) observes that on certain coin types, Gupta kings repeatedly enjoy the company of their dynastic patroness or “divine consort” as giver of royal glory and who is often shown on the reverse seated majestically and frontally in *bhadrāsana* on a lotus throne, a wicker stool, or even a recumbent lion [**Figure 4.1**]. Raven further argues that during the Gupta period Śrī- or Rājyalakṣmī frequently holds a horn of plenty in her left hand (*cornucopia*) and thus takes on the same distinctive attribute as Ardoxšo, the Iranian goddess of prosperity and royal splendor formerly venerated by the Kuṣāṇas of ancient Northwest India (**Chapter 2**).⁶ “Such a specific combination of a royal or royalty-related image,” Raven contends, “apparently became a basic ‘building block’ in the Gupta numismatic program” (2010: 259). According to her, this numismatic type of the “seated lady” survives well into post-Gupta coin design.

However, the Gupta Empire gradually declined after the reign of Kumāragupta I (r. ca 415–447) or Skandagupta (r. ca 456?–467), seemingly because of many factors such as substantial loss of territory and imperial authority caused by their own former feudatories, possible internal struggles for succession, and the invasion by the Huns from Central Asia

⁴ To be sure, a number of well-known inscriptions at Udayagiri, not far from ancient Vidiśā in central India, and incised in or beside the hill’s cave-shrines, mention King Candragupta II and members of his court. Moreover, an inscription on the Great Stūpa at Sāñcī records the dedication of land by a protégé of the same Gupta king (Fleet 1888: 21ff, 29ff, 34ff, 258ff; Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 242ff, 255ff). The possible use of religious and iconographic rituals to further imperial Gupta agendas at Udayagiri has been explored by Michael Willis (2009).

⁵ I follow here the chronological and genealogical reconstruction of the Gupta kings by Willis (2005: 135, fig. 1) and Ferrier (2008: Appendix I).

⁶ See also Allan 1914: lxx–lxxii, lxxviii, lxxxiii, pls 1–4, 6, and Altekar 1954: pls 1–3, 5, 8–9.

(Agrawal 1989: 264–269; Ferrier 2008: 214ff; Tandon 2014). After the collapse of the empire in the late fifth or early sixth century, a minor line of the Gupta clan continued to rule, possibly in Māgadhā and the Gangetic plain (Willis 2005 and 2014). These later Guptas were mostly confined to eastern India and ultimately overthrown by local and regional powers paving the way for King Harṣavardhana (r. ca 606–647), who established an empire in northern India during the first half of the seventh century.

1.2 The Vākāṭaka Empire (ca 250–477 CE)

The Vākāṭaka Empire originated from the central Deccan in the mid-third century CE. The Vākāṭakas were the most important successors of the Sātavāhanas in the northern part of the Deccan (which forms today the state of Maharashtra) and were contemporaneous with the imperial Guptas in northern India, although their exact origins are mysterious and little is known about Vindhyaśakti I (r. ca 250–275 CE), the alleged founder of the Vākāṭaka dynasty.⁷

Territorial expansion began in the reign of his son Pravarasena I (r. ca 275–335), the real founder of Vākāṭaka glory, who was referred to as emperor (*samrāj*) since he performed four *aśvamedhas*, i.e. horse sacrifices (Mirashi 1963: 95–98). The Vākāṭaka dynasty divided into four branches after Pravarasena I. Two branches are known and two are unknown (cf. Bakker 1997: Appendix II, “Genealogy”). The known branches are the Nandivardhana branch (i.e. eastern Vākāṭakas) and the Vatsagulma branch (i.e. western Vākāṭakas).

From the inscriptions we note that the imperial Guptas allied themselves with the Vākāṭakas of the Nandivardhana branch, masters of the Vindhya hills. The Gupta King Candragupta II married his daughter Prabhāvatī Guptā (or Prabhāvatīguptā?) to King Rudrasena II (r. ca 395–405), when Gupta influence increased gradually in the eastern Vākāṭaka kingdom. A long period of peace and prosperity ensued (Bakker 1997: 15–28; Bakker 2002). However, after the Guptas became involved in a war against the Huns, the Vākāṭakas expanded into central India, especially during the reigns of King Pravarasena II of the Nandivardhana branch (r. ca 422–457) and King Hariṣeṇa who ascended the throne of the

⁷ For the general history and chronology of the Vākāṭakas, I have consulted, among others, Mirashi 1951 and 1963, Bakker 1997 and 2002, as well as Spink 2005a and 2006. The Vākāṭakas are not known to have issued their own coinage although they naturally allowed the use of the coins issued by other earlier or contemporary dynasties such as the Guptas (Goyal 2006). Moreover, unlike the imperial Guptas, they did not start their own era.

Vatsagulma branch *circa* 460 (Bakker 1997: 22ff).⁸ At this juncture, political power may have shifted from the eastern to the western Vākātakas (*ibid.*: 31ff; Spink 2008). The latter Hariṣeṇa (r. *ca* 460–477) is the latest western Vākāṭaka ruler of whom we have any knowledge. He is often described as a great conqueror since, his territory at its peak, according to Walter Spink, presumably spread from sea to sea, viz. from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in the east. To be sure, Spink’s statement that Hariṣeṇa was “the last great ruler of India’s so-called Golden Age” (2006: 20) must be a bit of an exaggeration.⁹ The Ajaṅṭā Cave 17 inscription likewise presents Hariṣeṇa hyperbolically as “the moon among the princes” (Mirashi 1963: 129, v. 21). Although we may surmise from other epigraphic evidence that he certainly had some sort of control and prestige over the regions of Ajaṅṭā, Ghaṭotkaca, and Bagh, his control certainly did not go much beyond those regions (Bakker 1997: 38–39).

The Vākātakas are also noted as great patrons of arts, architecture, and literature. They sponsored a great amount of public works and their Hindu and Buddhist monuments are a visible legacy. Several rock-cut Buddhist caves of Ajaṅṭā were built during the time of Hariṣeṇa, although not a single cave contains a dedicatory inscription by the king.¹⁰ Most of the sculptures and paintings in Ajaṅṭā belong to the end of the fifth century and are thus coeval with the zenith of the Gupta style. For example, Hariṣeṇa’s minister Varāhadeva, a pious Buddhist, commissioned the excavation of Ajaṅṭā Cave 16. After the death of the king, the power of the Vatsagulma branch almost immediately fell and was probably shortly thereafter followed by that of the Aśmakas (Bakker 1997: 45ff; Spink 2005a: 200ff), as well as other “post-Vākāṭaka” dynasties, such as the early Kalacuris, the Viṣṇukunḍins, the

⁸ See Ajaṅṭā Cave 16 inscription for a genealogy of the rulers of the Vatsagulma branch, who also styled themselves with the epithets Hāritīputra, i.e. “son(s) of Hāritī,” and Dharmamahārāja (Mirashi 1963: 95ff, 103ff; Cohen 1995b: 361–362).

⁹ Similarly, Mirashi who translated the badly mutilated Cave 16 inscription (*ibid.*, v. 18) probably overstated the case when he claimed that the king “conquered” the various lands of Avanti (Malwa) in the north, Kosala (Chhattisgarh), Kalinga and Āndhra in the east, Lāṭa (central and southern Gujarat) and Trikūṭa (Nashik district) in the west, as well as Kuntala (southern Maharashtra) in the south. Bakker 1997: 34–35, and Cohen 1997: 138–140 have quibbled about the proper rendition of this crucial verse. Indeed, the verb “conquered” is not present in the original Sanskrit and is only Mirashi’s proposed reconstruction. The inscription, therefore, does not necessarily fall into the *digvijaya praśasti* genre and may not even be a celebration of military conquests. For a different translation of Cave 16 inscription, see Cohen 1995b: 361–362.

¹⁰ For the question of patronage, see *infra*.

Kadambas, the Traikūṭakas, the Cālukyas of Bādāmi, and even perhaps the early Rāṣṭrakūṭas,¹¹ equally present in western India from the sixth century onwards.

2. The Religious Environment

2.1 The Sudden Growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism(s)

Although Mahāyāna texts may go back at least to the first centuries CE, the dearth of art, epigraphic, or early archeological evidence suggests that it became a major cult only in later centuries.¹² In the words of Gregory Schopen: “In India, it appears more and more certain that the Mahāyāna was not institutionally, culturally or art historically significant until after the fifth century, and not until then did the Mahāyāna doctrine have any significant visible impact on the intentions of Buddhist donors” (2005b: 12). As the following discussion makes clear, the positive and datable evidence of full-blown Mahāyāna Buddhism seems to appear only in north-central India and the western Deccan caves rather dramatically, around the end of the “Middle Period,” that is, in the fifth–sixth centuries.

Schopen (2005b: 223ff) has clearly demonstrated that evidence from inscriptions is of major significance for Mahāyāna history. Starting mainly from about the fifth century CE, a considerable number of Indian inscriptions bear witness to the existence of the Mahāyāna. For example, expressions like *mahāyānika/ā* and *mahāyāna(nu)yāyin*, i.e. “Mahāyānist” or “follower of the Mahāyāna,” occasionally appear in inscriptions. In particular, one region stands out as a possible Mahāyāna source: the western Deccan. David Seyfort Rugg (2004: 13) has further emphasized that, beginning for the most part with the Gupta period, the new idea often set in stone is that “all sentient beings” may attain the *anuttara(buddha)jñāna*, i.e. “supreme gnosis (of a Buddha).” According to Seyfort Rugg this concept is completely in accordance with Mahāyāna doctrine in general and the *tathāgatagarbha* creed in particular.

¹¹ An elusive and now nearly illegible inscription found between Ajaṅṭā Caves 26 and 27 refers to a certain “Nanarāja born of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa family ‘in Dakṣiṇāpāṭha’, i.e. in South India” (Yazdani 1955: Appendix, 121–124, pls 3–5). Malandra (1982 and 1983: 396ff) places this inscription in the late seventh century CE.

¹² Until recently, the oldest Mahāyāna documents at our disposal were Chinese translations of Indic texts made during the late second century CE. For a discussion of these early *sūtras*, see *inter alia* Vetter 1994 and 2001. The recent discovery of Gāndhārī manuscripts has corroborated the Chinese evidence and even pushed back the development and presence — albeit probably still marginally — of Mahāyāna *sūtras* in the region of Greater Gandhāra to *circa* the first century CE (Allon & Salomon 2010). For a recent survey of early Mahāyāna in India, see Seyfort Rugg 2004, Morrissey 2009, and Skilling 2013.

During this period, moreover, inscriptions in north-central India and the western Deccan caves are often found in conjunction with the appellation *śākyabhikṣu* and with the *yad atra puṇyam* donative formula which Schopen (2005b: 223ff) and several other scholars link to the Mahāyāna.¹³ A word of caution, however, should be expressed here. In all likelihood, however, monks and nuns who presumably adhered to Mahāyāna texts and motives in India both lived in the same monastic communities as Śrāvākayānists and followed the Vinaya of an old *nikāya* (monastic school). We know, this, for instance, from Xuanzang (602–664), who constantly referred to them as the *Mahāyānasthāviras (Ch. *dasheng-shangzuo*), literally “Mahāyāna elders” or “elders who follow the Mahāyāna,” on his travels through seventh-century India (Beal 1884: II, 133, 229, 247, 260, 269; Deeg 2012: 150ff).¹⁴

The obvious conclusion is that no specific monastic orders or schools (*nikāya*) of Indian Buddhism can be identified as the single source of the Mahāyāna as a whole, or even as its main source. Likewise, Mahāyāna Buddhism should no longer be perceived as an entirely uniform and monolithic movement since, in India alone, distinct Mahāyāna communities were based on different scriptures, developing in various places and at different times. As Jonathan Silk aptly expressed, “we must stop referring [...] to ‘the Mahāyāna’ in the singular.” Rather, “we should speak of these Mahāyānas in the plural” (2002: 369, 371).

¹³ Not all monks who went by the epithet of Śākyabhikṣu, Sakyabhikkhu, Sākiyabhikkhu, etc. were *de facto* Mahāyānists. Lance Cousins (2003), for example, opines that this is a generic term used for Buddhist monks; others propose that this distinct appellation was the outcome of a “new trend” which aimed at emphasizing the importance of the Śākya clan and best served the Bodhisattva ideal (e.g. Cohen 2000). Moreover, it is true that the name is often associated with expressions that explicitly contain the term *mahāyāna*, and that it is frequently linked to the donations of Buddha and Bodhisattva images dedicated to “the attainment of *anuttarajñāna* by all living beings.” On this issue, see also Cohen 1995b: 202ff; Seyfort Rugg 2004: 13–14; Schopen’s rebuttal of Cousins in his 1979 reprinted article (2005b: 244–246); Morrissey 2009: 68ff, Appendix; and Tournier 2014: 42, n. 161. For a unique case of the *yad atra puṇyam* donative formula blended in a Śaiva inscription from Nepal, dated 476/477 CE, see Acharya 2008: 36.

¹⁴ In canonical texts as well as Indian inscriptions, the Sanskrit term *sthavira* (P. *thera*) was used mainly as an epithet or a honorific title based on ordination age and not employed in a denominational sense, i.e. denoting a specific *nikāya* affiliation (*Sthaviravāda or *Theravāda). A later inscription found in Lop Buri, Thailand (K. 410 or LB 2), written in Old Khmer, refers to “those who have been ordained as *bhikṣu mahāyānasthāvira*” (Cœdès 1961: 10–12, inscr. no. XIX, l. 6–7). However, I contest Cœdès’ rendition that those monks (*bhikṣu*) belong either to the “Mahāyāna sect” and/or “the Sthavira sect” (*mahāyānasthāvira*). This is technically impossible in the context of Buddhist monastic practice, since there is no such thing as a Mahāyāna Vinaya and hence no specific Mahāyāna monastic order or ordination lineage (Skilling 2013: 99, n. 149). Thus, the Sanskrit compound *mahāyānasthāvira* can only refer here to “elders [not necessarily Theravādins] who follow the Mahāyāna path.” Put simply, the dichotomy made by Cœdès and others between Mahāyāna and Theravāda monks is wrong. On this basis, moreover, the hypothesis put forward by Deeg that the same compound was an invention or even an attempt by Xuanzang “to upgrade the otherwise, at least in a Chinese context, low-ranked Hīnayāna-*sthāviras* to the respected status of Mahāyāna-monks” (2012: 153) is difficult to sustain in South and Southeast Asian environments. See also Tournier 2014: 43–44, esp. nn. 164 and 166.

Additionally, as Peter Skilling puts it, “the canopy of the Mahāyāna sheltered a wide range of different positions and practices.” In short, the Mahāyāna had “no single voice, (...) no single position” (2013: 98).

As we shall see below, celestial Bodhisattva images — a sure sign of Mahāyāna popular cults and activity at any one site — gradually gained more significant roles in the visual arts during this transitional period of Buddhist iconography spanning from the fifth through the eighth centuries. At Ajanṭā and Sārnāth, we can see these Bodhisattva images as mere attendants of the Buddha arranged in triads. None of these images were placed in prominent or highly visible locations in the caves. However later, for example at Auranṅābād and Ellorā, these images were also shown as individual deities. We will also see that a series of painted and sculpted imagery at Ajanṭā and other caves possibly illustrated themes which might have been drawn from Mahāyāna literature, such as the influential *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* (hereafter, *Lotus Sūtra*). This important corpus of Mahāyāna inscriptions, texts, and images certainly provide a religious context for the appearance of Bhadrāsana Buddhas during this period.

2.2 The Question of Buddhist Patronage

Patronage in India has often been associated with the ruling dynasties; even the periodization of artworks is labeled after these dynasties, such as Gupta art, Vākāṭaka art, etc. These categorizations are the result of an emphasis on political history and the urge to establish a relative chronology of art and architecture. Relationships between patrons, the Buddhist Saṅgha, and artisans are mostly exemplified through inscriptional records such as at Sārnāth, Sāñcī, or the western Deccan caves. These inscriptions often mention social groups, professions, and even the names of donors who gave this art to monasteries for their construction or maintenance.

Recent studies have shown that during the early phase of Buddhism in western India, donations were mainly made by four groups of people, viz. royalty, merchants, craftspeople, and members of the monastic community (Alone 2002: 93–122). The category of “royalty” may refer to monarchs themselves, members of their family, or government officials where a close relationship to the king was explicitly mentioned. Nāsik (e.g. Caves 3 and 10) is nearly the only early Buddhist cave complex where numerous royal patrons are recorded in the inscriptions. There, for political reasons, royal patronage began in the first century BCE and continued in the first century CE, although most of the donations were recorded in the second

century CE after a short hiatus in cave construction (Rees 2009; Ray 2013). I need to make clear, however, that for the period that concerns us in this chapter (fourth–eighth century CE), kings are never recorded as “donors” of such Buddhist establishments or artworks.

However, what might be said about court entourages and consorts? Indian monarchs often ruled according to Brahmanical principles, while support for the Buddhist community and temples frequently came from their wives and ministers (Narain 1983). This division of ritual responsibilities between male and female representatives of a dynasty seems traditional for ancient India. Much evidence indicates that the main political powers of the time, the Guptas and the Vakāṭakas, did not become direct patrons of Buddhism since their kings were traditionally Vaiṣṇavas or Śaivas (Bakker 2010; Bisschop 2010). Their queens, sisters or the ruler’s mother may, at times, have led the congregation of Buddhists. To give an example, the dedicatory inscription of a fine and rare bronze image of the Buddha from Dhanesar Kherā in Uttar Pradesh, now kept at the British Museum, records that it is “the *deyadharmā* [religious gift] of Mahādevī the queen of Śrī Harirāja born in the Gupta lineage.” Queen Mahādevī, a Buddhist supporter, was probably married to the ruler Harirāja who, as his name implied, was probably a Vaiṣṇava ruling in the early sixth century (Willis 2014: 108).

At Ajaṅṭā, in the late fifth century, King Hariṣeṇa’s minister Varāhadeva was the chief patron of the Cave 16 excavation (Mirashi 1963: 103ff; Cohen 1995b: 361–362). At the same time, the Śākyaabhiksus Dharmadatta and Bāpuka contributed intrusive Buddha images to this cave (Cohen 2006: 315–318). Varāhadeva also financed the cave excavation at Ghaṭotkaca (Mirashi 1963: 112ff). Similarly, Buddhahadra, a powerful monk and close friend of Bhavvirāja, the minister in service to the “great and mighty king of Aśmaka” mentioned in verse 9 of Ajaṅṭā Cave 26’s inscription, patronized the excavation (Yazdani 1955: Appendix, 114–118; Cohen 1995b: 380–381 and 2006: 333ff).¹⁵ Spink’s reading of the site (second phase) suggests indeed that each cave was individually funded by a single major donor,¹⁶ in stark contrast to the collective patronage found at the earliest Buddhist sites. This new pattern of elite and exclusive patronage at Ajaṅṭā is attested by epigraphical evidence made during the programmatic phase of excavations (see *infra*), recording the donation of a

¹⁵ Incidentally, Cohen stated that: “It is, in fact, possible that the great and powerful Aśmaka king to whom Cave 26’s inscription refers is Hariṣeṇa himself” (1995b: 62; his emphasis). *Contra*, see Spink 2006: 97ff.

¹⁶ See *inter alia* Spink 2006: 149ff. I disagree with Spink’s argument that Cave 1 was patronized by King Hariṣeṇa himself, based on the mural scenes depicting royalty on the exterior as well as the interior of the cave (e.g. Spink 2005a: 184ff; 2006: 174ff). Such “royal scenes” are represented in other painted caves as well, for example in Cave 17, known as the cave of the Vākāṭaka feudatory Upendragupta (Mirashi 1963: 120ff; Wood 2004).

full cave by single donors. However, many of the later intrusive painted and incised records of donations found throughout the site, made after the collapse of the programmatic phase, were from many different monks or lay followers (e.g. Yazdani 1946: Appendix, 85ff; 1955: Appendix, 111ff). These examples give evidence that the nature of late patronage at Ajañṭā, in its twilight after the fall of the Vakāṭakas, was ultimately not limited to one single donor. The many intrusive images which have been made in several other caves of western India may also indicate that the works might not have been completed in a single building stage.¹⁷

While patronage is an important factor in the making of a monument or a cave in art and architecture, a word of caution should be raised about the relationships between patrons and artisans and also about aspects of artisans' visual language not governed by the economics of patronage. In other words, although the power of an image lies in a specific congruence of religious and social institutions, all of the information with which artisans work may not be available to the donor. Artisans work with conventions, arriving at visual formulae reflecting their ideas and attitudes toward decorative vocabularies at particular points in time. Naturally, these stylistic and iconographic conventions will evolve over time and space, as we shall see in the case of the Bhadrāsana Buddhas and their related attendants.

2.3 The Rise of Hinduism

During the fourth–sixth centuries, Buddhism was not the only important religion in contemporary India. A revival of Brahmanism and the rise of new Hindu movements also took place during this period (Bronkhorst 2011; Verardi 2011b).¹⁸ Both the Vākāṭaka and Gupta kings were devoted supporters of Brahmanism and several performed Vedic rituals and sacrifices of the highest kind, such as the *aśvamedha*, either to legitimize their power or to affirm their royal domination as a *cakravartin* or *samrāj*, i.e. “Universal Monarch” (see *supra*; also Ferrier 2008: 86ff). While most Gupta rulers were Vaiṣṇavas,¹⁹ the

¹⁷ In the same vein, Suraj Pandit who has studied the question of patronage at Kaṇherī in detail (2003), emphasized the collective effort required to produce the art in these late caves.

¹⁸ In this dissertation, the term “Buddhism” simply reflects the religion and philosophy that developed from the teachings of the Buddha, while Brahmanism denotes a religion of ancient India that evolved out of Vedism. Brahmanism takes its name mainly from the predominant position of its priestly class, the Brahmins (*brāhmaṇas*). Brahmanism is generally distinguished from the classical Hinduism that succeeded it by the enhanced significance given to individual deities, such as Śiva and Viṣṇu, and to lay devotional worship (*bhakti*).

¹⁹ Mann (2012) has argued that a few Gupta rulers such as Kūmaragupta and Skandagupta were possibly early devotees of Mahāsena or Skanda-Kārttikeya, the god of War, and son of Śiva according to some traditions.

Vākāṭakas were predominantly staunch Śaivas with the possible exception of Rudrasena II and his wife Prabhāvatī Guptā, equally Vaiṣṇavas (Bisschop 2010).

Thus, the cult of Viṣṇu was preponderant at Udayagiri in central India, the only surviving imperial site of the Gupta dynasty, dated to the early fifth century (Willis 2009). Conversely, Śaiva monuments and caves dated to the fifth–sixth centuries are increasingly apparent in western India (Bakker 1997: 80ff). This period was also known for introducing new religious and ascetic sects to this region, such as the Pāśupatas under the early Kalacuris. Several major caves established in the sixth century, e.g. Jogeshvari and Elephanta, were Śaiva-Pāśupata centers.

How did Buddhists react to this new rivalry threatening the patronage of their own sites in the same areas? The growing popularity of ascetic Śaivism in the western and central Deccan does, indeed, pose the question of the complex relationships between the Hindu and Buddhist traditions as well as the impact of Śaivism on Buddhism.²⁰ According to Pia Brancaccio:

The rising popularity of Śaiva-Pāśupata cults in the western Deccan led to important changes in the local Buddhist tradition, but at the same time it dealt a fatal blow to the Buddhist patronage and practice in the Aurangabad area. Aside from the eighth century Buddhist caves at Ellora, no other major Buddhist rock-cut complex was established in the Ajanta-Aurangabad region during the seventh and eighth centuries, when Buddhism declined in this area where for the first 600 years of the current era it had thrived (2011: 216).

To be fair, the possible impact of Buddhism on the formation of the Pāśupata movement and the iconography of its head teacher Lakulīśa has also been acknowledged before its near total demise in the region (Bisschop 2010: 486f). But, although the Gupta-Vākāṭaka culture was clearly under the growing influence of two “higher” forms of Hinduism, the Bhāgavata (i.e. Vaiṣṇava) and Māheśvara (i.e. Śaiva) faiths (Bakker 1997: 58ff), the continuity of Sun worship has also been attested in the region of Vidiśā (Vidisha). Moreover, patronage was sometimes extended to religious popular movements other than the

²⁰ Incidentally, a few squatting and/or strapped figures of ascetics are depicted in murals at Ajaṅṭā (cf. Behl 1998: 85–86; Schlingloff 2000: III, pl. I.3; also AIIS # 97969, # 99584). Could they represent or reflect Śaiva-Pāśupata followers?

kings' own persuasions (Bakker 2010). Thus, folk and other Hindu deities likewise became prominent and widespread during that age. For example, various plaques depicting a popular fertility goddess commonly called Lajjāgaurī have been found in excavations of the Vākāṭaka period (Bakker 1997: 58–59, pl. XXIXb). Similarly, this period has seen the simultaneous development of the important cult of the “Mothers” (*mātṛs* or *mātṛkās*). Incidentally, several iconic representations of these Hindu gods and goddesses have been found seated in the squatting pose (on all these iconographic developments, see *infra*).

3. Corpus Analysis

3.1 Defining Features: A Gupta-period Art Style?

In **Chapters 2–3**, we saw that the Bhadrāsana posture originated nearly simultaneously in Gandhāra, Mathurā, and Andhra Pradesh. However, the surviving evidence points to a fundamental role for Sārnāth and the western Deccan caves in the growth, transformation, and later dissemination of this iconic type. Most of the images that I analyze below belong to the so-called Gupta-Vākāṭaka period (fourth–sixth century CE) and are loosely attributed to a specific Gupta or Vākāṭaka-related style.

To initially define the chronological framework of the Gupta-period art style, a quote from James Harle is in order:

Artistic styles do not exactly follow dynastic history, however; a style may survive a dynasty for decades or even a century or two, and the Gupta period in sculpture and architecture has on many occasion been extended to as late as A.D. 650. This appears unjustified. Although the Gupta style continued to influence later styles for centuries, it had undergone extensive modifications by then, and flourished, in necessarily altered forms [...]. On the other hand, to terminate the period with the death of Skandagupta, c. A.D. 467, ignores the fact that at Sārnāth some of the greatest of all Gupta sculptures are dated in the reign of one of his successors (1974: 6).

In the ensuing discussion, I follow Harle in assuming that by the middle of the sixth century, the Gupta style of art — *sensu stricto* — ends, giving way to the more formalized art

style of the seventh century. Moreover, it is true that the term Gupta art in its all-India context is probably a misnomer, since the sphere of Gupta political and cultural influence was mainly confined to the North.

But what might be said about Vākāṭaka art? For example, is Ajaṅṭā part of Gupta art? While many scholars argue that the paintings and sculptures from the western Indian caves are related to Gupta art, others, such as Joanna Williams (1982: 181–187; 1983), reject the label “Gupta-Vākāṭaka” for the fifth century style of northern and central Indian art. These scholars emphasize a distinctive local flavor and certain peculiarities which contrast with the Gupta mainstream. Williams has thus dismissed any link between the Ajaṅṭā and Gupta workshops and warns that one has to see development at Ajaṅṭā as internal, that is, within a local context.

I agree with the latter view; to a certain extent broad generalizations and amalgamations are to be avoided. But this view also needs to be situated in the larger context of the development of western Deccan caves; their chronological position should not be seen in isolation. In iconographic terms, moreover, from the second half of the fifth century onwards we see a massive increase in the number of sculptures and, to an unknown extent of paintings of Buddha (and other deities) images seated in *bhadrāsana*. The type seems to start more or less concurrently at both Sārnāth and Ajaṅṭā,²¹ and then spread extremely rapidly to other Buddhist sites or caves in the western-central Deccan.²² None of the great works at Auranṅābād or Ellorā, however, can be attributed to this Gupta-Vākāṭaka period. They clearly represent another major stylistic movement which belongs to the post-Gupta/Vākāṭaka period.

3.2 Non-Buddhist Deities

As we shall see in detail in the next section, Buddha images seated with legs pendant emerge mainly around the late fifth century and seem to have had strong associations with a range of

²¹ There seems to be a strong genealogical connection between the iconographic features of Buddha and related Bodhisattva images from both Sārnāth and the western Deccan. These connections tend to show that the trend moved from Sārnāth to the western Indian caves rather than the other way around. The primary support for this hypothesis is that western Indian images often show more sophisticated iconographic features; however, this is a topic for further investigation. Michael Willis (2014: 112), for example, rightly observes that little work has been done on the Sārnāth school, so much so that “not much can be said about the geographical extent of the idiom [i.e. the Sārnāth school] in South Asia.”

²² A Gupta-Vākāṭaka related style also spread in eastern India (Bihar, Bengal, Orissa), where a few early examples of Bhadrāsana Buddhas have been found. This small corpus of images will be dealt with in **Chapter 5**.

various deities, especially solar gods and female fertility goddesses. Thus, in order to understand the significance and later proliferation of Bhadrāsana Buddhas during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period, it is necessary to start first by surveying some early sculptural examples of non-Buddhist deities equally seated in *bhadrāsana*.²³

Āditya or Sūrya, the Sun God

Chapter 2 stressed the importance of Sun devotion in the region of ancient Mathurā. The same was probably true in central India from at least the second century BCE onwards. Meera Dass and Michael Willis (2002) came to this conclusion by studying, in detail, a lion capital found at the site of Udayagiri, literally, “sunrise-mountain.”

The Gwalior State Museum also contains a number of crowning and architectural elements from the Gupta period. A most important one is a lion capital from the Maurya period, recut, possibly around the fifth or sixth century CE, with the signs of the Zodiac (Williams 1973; Harle 1974: 14, 41, pls 36–37). On the abacus, the twelve zodiacal figures (*dvādaśarāśi*) are illustrated and separated by large circles within which are enthroned male figures shown in relief, with legs down and knees wide apart and right hands raised [Figure 4.2]. Joanna Williams (1973: 237–238, pls 2–5) identifies them as the twelve Ādityas (*dvādaśāditya*), sons of Aditi (“mother of the celestial gods”), associated with the Sun, hence the solar disks behind their heads. Accordingly, for each month, a different Āditya or Sun god manifests himself and shines. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Viṣṇu is said to be the principal Āditya god.²⁴ The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, moreover, states that all these twelve Ādityas are “the opulent expansions of Lord Viṣṇu in the form of the Sun god.”²⁵ Similarly, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* describes the Sun god (Sūrya) as the spiritual self of Viṣṇu.²⁶ The solar character of Viṣṇu has been discussed by many scholars (e.g. V.C. Srivastava 1960: 86ff; Gonda 1969: 25ff); it might not come as a surprise that a few representations of the god occasionally occur in a similar squatting and benevolent position on a stool with knees splayed apart.²⁷

²³ Not discussed here for reasons of space are occurrences of Umā-Pārvatī seated in *bhadrāsana* in the company of her consort Śiva. For one published example, see Pal 1986: I, 256. Several early images of the Jain goddess Ambikā in *bhadrāsana* have also been reported (e.g. Pal 2011: 54, cat. no. 17).

²⁴ *ādityānām ahaṃ viṣṇur jyotiṣām ravir aṃśumān* | i.e., “Of the Ādityas, I am Viṣṇu, of all luminaries, the radiant Sun” (Bhag 10, 21).

²⁵ *etā bhagavato viṣṇor ādityasya vibhūtayaḥ* | (Bhāg-p XII 11, 45).

²⁶ *vaiṣṇavo ’mśaḥ paraḥ sūryo yo ’ntarjyotir asamplavam* | (Viṣṇu-p II 8, 55).

²⁷ For the early example of Viṣṇu in *bhadrāsana* from Bhūmarā in Madhya Pradesh, see Jarrige & Joshi 2007: 282, cat. no. 88; also AIIS # 11032, and Astier 2014: fig. 4.III.11. For Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa, see *infra*. Other male deities are also occasionally represented sitting in this posture during the Gupta period, e.g. Daṇḍapāni and

In addition to Mathurā images, representations of Āditya or Sūrya continue to adopt a squatting position during the Gupta period onwards despite the appearance of a new standing iconographic form (Frenger 2005: 447). For example, a small seated Sūrya image in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has previously been attributed to the Kuṣāṇa period, but is now thought to belong to the early Gupta period, *circa* the fifth century (Harle 1974: 44, pl. 51; Harle & Topsfield 1987: 20, cat. no. 25) [Figure 4.3].²⁸ Another fine crowned Sūrya image, squatting in *bhadrāsana*, from Nachna Kuthara in Madhya Pradesh, is stylistically dated to the fifth century (Jarrige & Joshi 2007: 272, cat. no. 80).

M. Willis (2009: 38ff), drawing mainly from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, attempts to explain the constant popularity of the Sun god during the Gupta period by arguing that Āditya was one of the leading deities during the age of Candragupta II, who (with many of his successors) clearly revealed his alliance with the solar deity by assuming the additional epithet *vikramāditya*, i.e. “he who is the Sun of prowess.” In this manner, the king’s person — a staunch Vaiṣṇava — presumably combined the forces of the Sun (*āditya*) and the Moon (*candra*) in order to magnify his political greatness and martial ambitions, both in this life on earth and in his celestial abodes.²⁹

A “Universal Form” of Viṣṇu and the “Great Goddess” Durgā in Western India

A deity represented with multiple heads and arms known as Viśvarūpa, primarily Viṣṇu demonstrating how he encompasses the whole universe, becomes crystallized by the Gupta period.³⁰ The best-known textual description of this manifestation is the cosmic vision of Kṛṣṇa revealed to Arjuna in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, before the

Kubera (Astier 2014: figs 4.II.63–69 and 4.III.10). The early Kondamotu relief from Andhra Pradesh may not represent a squatting Narasimha as previously thought, but just an “additional attribute-bearer” for Vāsudeva who is represented on its proper right with only two arms, instead of four (Härtel 1987: 576, n. 9, pl. IIIc; also AIS # 16505).

²⁸ Verardi and Grossato (1983: 262, n. 34) further contend that this bearded-image of Sūrya could quite possibly be a Gupta king dressed in the “northern guise” of a Kuṣāṇa imperial ruler.

²⁹ This idea is most powerfully captured in Candragupta II’s coin legends: *kṣitim avajītya sucaritair divaṃ jayati vikramādityaḥ*, i.e. “Having conquered the earth with good conduct, Vikramāditya conquers heaven” (Allan 1914: 34–35; Willis 2009: 244). Solar “sectarianism” is also largely attested to on the basis of Gupta inscriptions and iconography. See V.C. Srivastava 1960: 211ff, and Pandey 1989.

³⁰ Not to be confused with Vaikuṅṭha images of Viṣṇu shown with four arms and three or four faces: partly anthropomorphic, and partly theriomorphic (lion and boar). An interesting relief in Mathurā from the Gupta period (Diskalkar 1932: 23–24, pl. 3) depicts a three-faced Viṣṇu image squatting in *bhadrāsana*, which may or may not yet be called Vaikuṅṭha, comprised of the central human head of Viṣṇu, probably flanked by those of his two most prominent *avatāras*, i.e. the boar-head of Varāha and lion-head of Narasimha. On this iconography, see Srinivasan 1979 and Gail 1983.

Mahābhārata war on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra. An iconographic description is also given in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* III 83 (trans. Kramrisch 1928: 107–108; P. Shah 1961: 189–190). In western India, however, artists probably relied on more ancient concepts of universality in their depictions of the so-called Viśvarūpa (Maxwell 1988: 144ff).

Indeed, unlike other Viśvarūpa icons which are standing, the Gujarat sculptural reliefs of the Śāmalājī area are seated in *bhadrāsana* with knees splayed wide apart (Maxwell 1983: pls 1, 5, 9–10, 18; Schastok 1985: 21, figs 26, 34, 38; AHS # 20855) [Figure 4.4]. This “auspicious pose,” adopted by the cosmic emanation of the god, emphasizes his supremacy and majestic nature. On the one hand, T.S. Maxwell (1988: 144) asserted that this peculiar attitude of Viśvarūpa derives partly from Kuṣāṇa earlier models of royal portraits as well as images of Viṣṇu riding his *vāhana* Garuḍa, also a solar deity, popularly found in later periods [Figure 4.5].³¹ On the other hand, Doris Meth Srinivasan (1997: 139) thinks that it is as if the squatting god is “giving birth” to the world, in a similar manner to other icons of Yakṣas or birth-giving Mātṛkās. According to the latter interpretation, the posture may also convey the idea that Viśvarūpa is giving birth to the beings radiating from him; the posture thus emphasizes his “maternal power.” Srinivasan adds, “we are in a tradition that can envision the creator as the Pregnant Male, so we should be prepared to see parturient iconography applied to males” (*ibid.*). Admittedly, this is a challenging argument which does not meet with universal approval.³²

Maxwell (1983; 1988: 144ff) believes that western Indian images of Viśvarūpa in *bhadrāsana* date from the late fifth century at the earliest through the ninth century at the latest. He also contends that this iconographic type of Viśvarūpa “seated à l’européenne” (1983: 233, pl. 19) spread further east as testified in a carved pillar found at Daśapura (present-day Mandasor or Mandasaur) which he dates to *circa* 700 CE.³³ Sara Schastok (1985), for her part, dates all these sculptures from *circa* 530–540 CE. She asserts that an image of the great goddess Durgā, said to be from Jhādol in today Rajasthan, which she dated to approximately the same period, is likewise seated in *bhadrāsana* on two recumbent lions

³¹ For a few more examples of Viṣṇu on Garuḍa, see Srinivasan 1979: 45, fig. 15, Bautze-Picron 2000a: figs 1–8, and 2002a: fig. 3; also AHS # 16530, # 43726, # 68358. During the late Kuṣāṇa, early Gupta period, Skanda-Kārttikeya also often appears straddling a peacock, another solar symbol made possible by the comparison between the peacock’s fanning and brilliant tail with the rising sun. See for example Diskalkar 1932: 48–49, pl. 19; also AHS # 44639, # 64068, # 95108.

³² For a reappraisal of the notion of the “Pregnant Male” in Indian art, see Fussman 1998: 474–475.

³³ See also Williams 1972–73: 61–63, fig. 30 who dates this pillar to the late sixth century.

(*ibid.*: 21, fig. 75) [Figure 4.6].³⁴ As we shall see below, even earlier depictions of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī are also seated regally on lions.

Śrī-Lakṣmī, Goddess of Royal Fortune

Śrī-Lakṣmī as consort of Viṣṇu and goddess of royal splendor and sovereignty is well known in India. She is sometimes represented as seated in the “auspicious pose” in sculptural representations from late Kuṣāṇa, early Gupta period onwards. These depictions, often observed near the entrance of ancient monuments, surely have an auspicious bearing on the nature of the site.

A post-Kuṣāṇa panel from Kanawara, a village near Mathurā, is an early example, dating to approximately the late third, early fourth century CE (Srinivasan & Gupta 2013: 303, fig. 125). This seems to mark the iconographic impact of the Northwest upon early Gupta imagery. On it, a female goddess is seated in *bhadrāsana* on a lion, next to Gaṇeśa, with her haunches quite low to the ground and her bent legs splayed wide open while the ankles are close together. Srinivasan and Gupta initially describe this pose as a “birth-giving posture,” entertaining the possibility that the female figure might represent a certain Mātṛkā or “Mother Goddess” (*ibid.*: 190). However, they later propose compelling arguments that it should be regarded as an early, perhaps the earliest known, representation of Śrī-Lakṣmī sitting regally on the lion (*ibid.*: 192).

This iconographic type, if confirmed, seems borrowed from the iconography of Nanā, known as the most important deity for the Kuṣāṇas (Srinivasan 2016; also **Fig. 2.2**). The type is also observed on early Gupta gold coins (Raven 2010: figs 21b, 22) and is even adopted later in Durgā imagery, as the Great Goddess of the Hindus (e.g. *supra*). According to Srinivasan and Gupta:

Attributing the lion seat to Lakṣmī was due in part to a recognition that the awesome powers of Nanā and Śrī-Lakṣmī, namely sovereignty, fertility and prosperity, overlap. However, by adopting Nanā’s lion’s seat for their favourite goddess, the Guptas were not simply accepting a foreign symbol; the lion is also an ancient emblem of royalty in India (Srinivasan & Gupta 2013: 192).

³⁴ A possibly earlier, *ca* third–fourth century CE, seated terracotta goddess in *bhadrāsana* from Uttar Pradesh has been tentatively identified as the “victorious” Durgā (Pal 1986: I, 233).

In another publication, Srinivasan (2010: 88) quotes the *Citrasūtra*, part of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* III 82, 3, assigning a certain throne to Lakṣmī. The full passage reads:

gaurī śuklāmbārā devī rūpeṇāpratimā bhuvī |
*pr̥thakcaturbhujā kāryā devī **siṃhāsane śubhe** ||*
***siṃhāsane** śyāḥ kartavyaṃ kamalaṃ cārukarṇikam |*
aṣṭapatraṃ mahābhāga karṇikāyām tu saṃsthitā ||

The goddess separately should be represented with four hands **on an auspicious throne. On her throne** should be a lotus with beautiful pericarps and eight petals (trans. Kramrisch 1928: 106).

In this translation, we must qualify what Stella Kramrisch has called, in English, the “auspicious throne.” The *bhadrāsana* is not meant here, but an “eminent” (*śubha*) lion throne or *siṃhāsana*. It is true that the two throne types have often been confounded and used alternatively in Sanskrit sources to simply denote a royal chair (**Chapter 1**).³⁵ Srinivasan and Gupta maintain that the enthroned goddess, installed on the lion, clearly “expresses her sovereign nature, a quality with which she can invest the earthly king, and [is] therefore an appropriate symbol on imperial coinage” (2013: 192). In addition to these qualities, the authors continue to view Śrī-Lakṣmī in the Kanawara panel as a specific form of Mātṛkā who may also “epitomize motherhood” (*ibid.*: 194).

The depiction of a squatting Śrī-Lakṣmī on the lion similarly occurs in a relief carved on the Gupta pillar from Bilsaḍ, dated to *circa* 420 CE (Williams 1982: 74–75, n. 47, fig. 81). The relief represents the *abhiṣeka* of Śrī-Lakṣmī composed of two elephants lustrating her from above. This iconographic convention is an additional symbol of sovereignty which we have already encountered elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent.³⁶ The Bilsaḍ relief may thus combine two symbols of sovereignty associated with Śrī-Lakṣmī: the lion throne and the sprinkling elephants. Lustrated Lakṣmī seated regally on the lion throne is definitely the

³⁵ P. Shah’s translation (2002: 188) of the same passage reproduces Kramrisch’s English rendition, presented above, almost verbatim, including the ambiguity that the goddess should be represented on an “auspicious throne.”

³⁶ For a fine example from Deogarh in Uttar Pradesh, see AIIS # 45320; for examples from Tamil Nadu, see **Figs 3.17–18**; for later examples from Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, see **Figs 5.15–17**.

embodiment of royal or imperial power. Moreover, in the late Vedic *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, earthly monarchs already married the goddess Śrī (II 4, 4.6). A latter portion of the same text also attributes to her the power of *rājya* (sovereignty) and *kṣatra* (kingship), which she can confer to others, thus legitimizing a ruler (XI 4, 3).³⁷ The manner in which Gupta kings used Śrī-Lakṣmī and the *abhiṣeka* symbolism, just as Pallava rulers did later in Tamil Nadu, therefore indicates that it was recognized as a stamp of authority. Very likely, the popularity of this female deity in Indian art during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods is related to her symbolic association with royal consecration or *rājyābhiṣeka*, involving the ritual sprinkling of water [Figure 4.7].³⁸

Mother Goddesses (Mātṛs or Mātṛkās)

On display in Sārnāth’s Archeological Site Museum, is a sculpture of a headless “Mother Goddess” sitting in the ubiquitous squatting pose [Figure 4.8]. According to B.R. Mani (2006: 70–71), it “was found by the author in 1981 in the adjoining village [of] Baraipur [...]. Artistically it represents [the] late Kushan and early Gupta phase and the name of Srigupta, the first Gupta king [,] has been read on it as one who installed it.” The name Śrī Gupta — the alleged ancestor of the Gupta dynasty (see *supra*) — if confirmed, would place the sculpture around the third century CE. The reading, however, cannot be corroborated. In any case, *śrīgupta* (“protected by Śrī”) is a rather common name and need not have anything to do with the dynasty.³⁹ The goddess is represented frontally seated in *bhadrāsana* on a wicker stool with her knees wide apart. In order to emphasize her maternal powers, she holds a child standing next to her. The subject is identified by the museum as Hārītī. While this identification is possible in a Buddhist context, it is also similar to other representations of Mother Goddesses found in the region, particularly during the fifth century, as we shall now see.

³⁷ See trans. Eggeling 1882: 377 and 1900: 62–66. For a recent study on the concept of “royal splendor” (*rājyaśrī*, *rājaśrī*, *kṣatraśrī*, *ṇpaśrī*) in the Vedic and Epic literature, see Edholm 2014. In the same vein, the latter author does not see the goddess Śrī just in terms of fertility or prosperity, but rather as a source for royal fortune and power.

³⁸ The various kind of waters with which the king is anointed during the *abhiṣeka* are celestial and also possess the splendor of the Sun, thus symbolically conferring a new, “solar body” to the ruler. See *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* V 3, 4.12f, and trans. Eggeling 1894: 76.

³⁹ In *Indian Archaeology 1982–83, A Review*, the sculpture is simply described as “a fragmentary image of Hariti bearing an inscription” (Rao 1983: 155, no. 31). At any rate, the crude aspect of this sculpture makes it difficult to ascertain a royal origin.

During the late Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta periods, “Mothers” or Mātṛkās (also known as Mātṛs), who are today traditionally viewed as the *śakti* (“energy”) of various Hindu deities, are often seated in *bhādrāsana*.⁴⁰ The mythology of the Mātṛkās is found in several *Purāṇas* written in their final forms and dated anywhere between 400 and 600 CE. Their cult is further corroborated by early epigraphic references, the earliest of which is found in the Gangadhar inscription written during the reign of the Aulikara king Viśvavarman, in the present-day western Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh, dated 423–424 CE (Fleet 1888: 76, 78, l. 35; Sircar 1965: 405, l. 35–36). Mātṛkās also figure in the pillar inscription of Skandagupta or Budhagupta from the Patna district of Bihar, dated to *circa* the late fifth century (Fleet 1888: 49, 51; Bhandarkar *et al.* 1981: 347, 349, l. 9). The latter inscription was recorded by a member of the royal Gupta family. In the same vein, other kings sought the favor of Mātṛkās in military matters. For example, the fifth century Talagunda inscription set up during the reign of the Kadamba king Śāntivarman (*ca* 455–470) claimed allegiance to both Skanda and the Mātṛkās who aided the ruler in defeating his enemies (Kielhorn 1905–06: 32, 35; Sircar 1965: 477, v. 22). His successors in the region, the Cālukyas, stated in several inscriptions that they were also nourished by the Mother Goddesses and protected by a martial form of Skanda known as Mahāsenā (Konow 1917–18: 149, 151, l. 3; Mirashi 1955: 123–131, 137–145; Mann 2012: 228).

Art and archeological remains confirm the above epigraphic evidence, marking a firm beginning in the cult of the Mātṛkās during this period.⁴¹ For example, three separate fragmented and eroded panels of icons found at Udayagiri in the region of Vidisha are dated in association with an inscription adjacent to Cave 6 to the first decade of the fifth century (K. Harper 2002: figs 21, 23). Another important and early rock-cut relief is of a group of Mātṛkās that has survived *in situ* from Badoh-Pathārī [Figures 4.9a–b]. Additionally, sculptures from Besnagar, also in Vidisha district, Madhya Pradesh, and today mostly kept in the Gwalior State Museum with one complete statue [Figure 4.10] exhibited at the National Museum of New Delhi exist (Agrawala 1971: 84–85, 88–89, figs 11, 13–15, 19–23; Harle 1974: 13, pls 27, 29–32; Astier 2014: fig. 4.III.36; AHS # 6514). The latter statues, dating

⁴⁰ Several preserved reliefs from Mathurā also represent early prototypes for “divine mothers” seated in *bhadrāsana* and sometimes holding a child on their knees (Agrawala 1971: 80–81, e.g. figs 2, 6–8; Bautze 1987). In later periods, however, the Saptamātṛkās were generally depicted standing, dancing, or seated in *lalitāsana*, the pose where only one leg is pendant and the other drawn up on the throne. On the regional variations of the heptad set during the medieval period, see Meister 1986; also K. Harper 1989.

⁴¹ Other sculptural fragments from Mathurā, but dated to the fifth century CE, have been identified as Mātṛkās. See for example AHS # 52575, # 76745.

from around the first half of the sixth century, are carved in the round and the thrones have platforms projecting forward upon which the feet rest. All but one figure sits in the *bhadra*-pose with knees either drawn together or wide apart. The above examples confirm that, already by the fifth century, the iconography of Mātṛkās had slowly evolved into a standardized group of seven goddesses and probably that their seating order had been gradually formalized. Similarly, Katherine Harper (2002: 115) attempts to demonstrate:

[... that] the Saptamātṛkās' acceptance into the orthodox Hindu pantheon was the result of notions of kingship as established by Gupta sovereigns and that the Saptamātṛkās were religio-political symbols that ensured the success of the kings' imperial program to establish *rājadharmā* (righteous rule) in territories controlled for centuries by foreign invaders.

Mātṛkā sculptures during this period were also idolized as caring and protective mothers; this is opposed to their frightening and ferocious depictions in scriptures. For example, two goddesses from Besnagar are each provided with a child between their knees, just as was the so-called Hāritī found in the Sārnāth region (see *supra*). The benign mother-and-child sculptures radiate reverence, not horror, through their associated auspicious pose (*bhādrāsana*). This moderation of the ferocity of the Mātṛkās, when transferred from scripture to a sculpture, may be guided by the proposition that art must first of all look beautiful “through the science of *citra*” and hence something terrible is better transformed into a likable figure.⁴² This reminds us of the story of Hāritī as she comes closest to the highest of the Mātṛkā concept, that is, the mother bestowing the purest maternal affection on

⁴² The Sanskrit term *citra* is usually associated with the art of painting, but its use on a few inscribed images in the round may imply that these statues had been painted (Kramrisch 1928: 32, n. 1). According to C.R. Agrawala (1971: 87), there were two types of Mātṛkās: those who are “auspicious” (*śivā*) and others who are “inauspicious” (*aśivā*). For more on the ancient worship of these frightening Mātṛkās, as “mothers” of Skanda, and the subsequent attempt to shift their position from inauspicious to auspicious roles, see Mann 2012: 33ff. Richard Mann also observed that Skanda's early association with the cult of the Mātṛkās gradually fades during the fifth century CE, where their role is taken over by a form of Śiva and Gaṇeśa (*ibid.*: 215ff).

her children.⁴³ As we have seen previously in the Northwest, Hārītī is often represented seated in the auspicious pose (**Chapter 2**).⁴⁴

This special posture thus possibly synthesized the ancient, primary function of the goddesses as mother and life-giver (Schastok 1985: 65) and perhaps even carries, as K. Harper argues (1989: 153–167), the esoteric symbolism of *mukti* (liberation). Indeed, the Mātṛkās were believed to liberate devotees from the endless cycles of rebirth or *samsāra*. But, according to the same author (K. Harper 2002), the worship of the goddesses possibly served another tantric function, that is, to fulfill the human urge to control and to aspire to power and domination (*bhukti*). This religious, military, and political importance of the Mātṛkās is thus analyzed by her through the lens of the dynastic, martial, and territorial ambitions of the imperial Guptas, especially Candragupta II “who was seeking to conquer the whole world” as one of the Udayagiri inscription indicates (Fleet 1888: 36, l. 5).

In summary, the Mātṛkās and their presumed tantric powers were possibly used by the Gupta kings to affirm their power, hence their popularity in the fifth century CE onwards. Moreover, according to Pia Brancaccio:

The cult of these goddesses became especially popular around the sixth and seventh centuries at a time when tantric traditions began to take ‘visible’ shape in Hindu religiosity (2011: 206).

The latter author then cites the Varāhamira’s *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 60, 19 — which in its initial form dates approximately to the mid-sixth century — as evidence for a kind of esoteric practice attached to the cult of the Mātṛkās in specific environments. The section of that text indeed mentions that these figures “are part of a *maṇḍala* drawn by the priest in the circumstance of the royal unction or *abhiṣeka*, where the goddesses appear together with planets and stars, with Skanda, Viṣṇu, and other protective deities” (*ibid.*: 206). Brancaccio further observes that the Mātṛkās are also described in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (also known as *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*) where they are positioned “in the intermediate sphere of the diagram

⁴³ On this story, see **Chapter 2, n. 54**. See also Yijing’s account (Li Rongxi 2000: 36–37). Depictions of this conversion are sculpted at Ajaṅṭā, Cave 2, with the Buddha shown in *bhadraśana* (Cohen 1998: figs. 9–10; also AHS # 96586, # 98011).

⁴⁴ During the Kuṣāṇa period, Kauśāmbī was another leading artistic center in northern India where early terracotta and bronze images of Hārītī, Kubera or Pañcika (Czuma 1985: cat. no. 54; 126–127; Astier 2014: 259ff, figs 3.III.59, 3.III.63; AHS # 9967), as well as a mysterious lion-headed “mother” (Kala 1973: 48–49, figs 17a–b; P.K. Agrawala 1977: 66), all seated on a low stool with the two legs down, were found.

[*maṇḍala*] right by the south gate, along with Yama, at the level of other figures associated with protection” (*ibid.*). This statement leads her to conclude the following:

It is possible, therefore, that the mother-goddess images carved in side chapels of virtually all of the rock-cut monuments linked to the early Kalacuri in Maharashtra may have functioned simultaneously on several levels, as deities protective of kingship and as objects of esoteric forms of worship. Especially at Aurangabad, in a non-Śaiva context, the traditionally apotropaic role of the mothers may have been dominant (2011: 206–207).

The symbology of heptads⁴⁵ is equally intriguing and may or may not find its direct Buddhist reflection in the depiction of seven past Buddhas at Auranḡābād, Ellorā, and other western Deccan caves (see *infra*), a region where a close relationship between Hindu and Buddhist practices certainly took place. We find for example at Auranḡābād, in the so-called Brahmanical cave which combines Buddhist and Hindu deities, a set of Saptamāṭṛkās (Brancaccio 2011: 16–17, 202ff, fig. 50). But as the following case of Lajjāgurī illustrates, the presence of Māṭṛkās or other deities of fertility found in the Buddhist caves of Auranḡābād is not at all idiosyncratic.⁴⁶

Lajjāgurī, Goddess of Procreation

A naked female figure found depicted in a Buddhist intrusive panel on the south wall of Cave 2 at Auranḡābād appears to be crouching to display her genitals with the right arm raised and the elbow resting on the knee [**Figure 4.11**]. The squatting and front-facing female is positioned where one would expect to find a donor figure, apparently worshipped by another female devotee opposite. Robert Brown (1990) identifies this figure as Lajjāgurī, a goddess associated with abundance, auspiciousness, and procreation as its sexual or, above all, birth-giving squatting posture testifies. Such imagery is mostly confined to central India, especially Maharashtra, and the southern Deccan during the first millennium CE,

⁴⁵ Several late *Purāṇas* state that these Mother Goddesses were actually eight, not seven. The seventh figure next to Cāmuṇḍā, the “eighth” goddess, may, however, form a visual pair with her so as to represent benevolent and fierce aspects of the same being — both acting as emanations of Durgā, i.e. the Great Goddess or Mahādevī (Meister 1986: 237–238).

⁴⁶ For a detailed study of other “images of fertility and richness” in the Ajanṭā caves, see Bautze-Picron 2002b.

but may go back to earlier civilizations in Western Asia and the Northwest of India (Kramrisch 1956; Bolon 1992).⁴⁷

Brown (*ibid.*: 3) observes that “the Aurangabad figure does not spread her legs as widely as the Lajjā Gaurī figures usually do,” that is, she does not adopt the so-called leg-raised pose (*uttānapādāsana*) for producing new offspring, with the legs widely splayed apart and raised straight upwards, but rather takes a more formal squatting posture (*utkuṭāsana*), a variant of the *bhadrāsana* frequently adopted by the Mātṛkās (see *supra*). Brown also remarks (*ibid.*: 5) that this small sculpture probably represents an individual donation made by a female Buddhist follower in the hope, or to give thanks, for a particular boon, such as a child. Such goddesses of the Lajjāgaurī type were certainly not worshipped only by Hindus. For example, a third-century inscription placed on a sculpture of Lajjāgaurī from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in Andhra Pradesh was that of an Ikṣvāku queen who was a patron of Buddhism (Narasimhaswami 1951–52). At any rate, female figure imagery also appears prominently at Auraṅgābād by the second half of the sixth century (see *infra*). Brown thus concludes by saying that “it was the nature of Buddhist practice at Aurangabad, when Hinduism was showing tremendous influence and female and sexual imagery was becoming important, that allowed the appearance of our Buddhist Lajjā Gaurī” (*ibid.*: 6).

Pia Brancaccio (2011: 137–139) goes one step further in identifying the squatting goddess in Auraṅgābād Cave 2, located near the two *nāgas* emerging from water, with a passage from the *Lotus Sūtra* where the daughter of the *nāga*-king Sāgara who lived at the bottom of the ocean publicly displays her genitals and subsequently magically changed her sex in order to become a Bodhisattva (trans. Kern 1884: 251–253). This interpretation would perhaps explain how this squatting goddess possibly encapsulated the hopes of local female devotees at Auraṅgābād to gain access to Buddhahood. Another striking element is that both her posture and her attributes of fertility, especially the lotus, were also shared with Lajjāgaurī and Lakṣmī, two goddesses of good fortune and abundance already discussed above.

Could this “auspicious pose” in India then echo ancestral mother fertility worship and parturient iconography present since the Neolithic period? The issue is whether such early imagery of squatting goddesses, replete with auspiciousness, might have served as possible models for Buddhist religious icons, such as Hārītī, conveying prosperity, or whether they were complete independent iconographic developments. The shared iconography and

⁴⁷ H.D. Sankalia (1960) goes so far as to compare Lajjāgaurī with the mysterious Greek goddess Baubo (Βαυβώ), often seen naked and squatting with her hands on her genitalia.

symbolism between these Mātrkās with some Buddhist images made during the Gupta period remain for further comparative study.⁴⁸

3.3 Buddhist Sculptures from Sārnāth

Several Buddha sculptures seated in *bhadrāsana*, all made of grey sandstone and presumably produced in the Sārnāth workshops, are known and discussed below. They are all held in various museum collections and none survive *in situ*. In general, they perform the preaching gesture of the First Sermon, a favored topic at the site, and there is a growing tendency to represent these figures in high-relief.⁴⁹

The British Museum, London

The high-relief Bhadrāsana Buddha sculpture from the British Museum [Figure 4.12a] is probably the best-known and most splendid such work in the so-called Gupta style. This sculpture surely originated from Sārnāth,⁵⁰ as can be surmised both because of its stylistic achievement and the “appropriateness” of its iconographic content. The Buddha’s hands are in *dharmacakrapravartana* (or simply *dharmacakra*), the gesture indicative of preaching the First Sermon in the Deer Park (*mṛgadāva*), with the two hands positioned in front of the

⁴⁸ Along these lines, see Brown’s study of what he calls the “feminization” of fifth-century Buddha sculptures at Sārnāth. He suggests there “appears to be a shift from a strongly masculine [Kuṣāṇa Buddha] image toward a much less masculine (if not overly female) image” during the Gupta period (2002: 165). He gives a possible explanation that, “for the Sārnāth Gupta-period Buddha, the kindness and gentleness of the Buddha’s message has become associated with a less masculine, if not actually female, image” (*ibid.*: 173). In his view, the more asexual Sārnāth Buddha images, with the lack of depiction of male genitals under a clinging robe, could be regarded as a “male-mother figure” (*ibid.*: 177), paralleling Doris Srinivasan’s view of Viṣṇu Viśvarūpa in *bhadrāsana* as the “Pregnant Male” (1997: 139).

⁴⁹ Xuanzang (Beal 1884: II, 46) reported that a life-sized metal image (copper?) of the Buddha, represented as “turning the wheel of the law,” was worshipped in the main shrine at Sārnāth during his visit. However, he did not describe the image’s sitting posture, whether it was cross- or pendant-legged.

⁵⁰ Foucher says “provenant de Sarnath,” (1900: 88, fig. 10) while Zwalf writes “eastern India, perhaps Sārnāth” (1985: 97, cat. no. 131). In fact, Michael Willis (forthcoming) has demonstrated — on the basis of Major Markham Kittoe’s drawings kept at the British Library [Figure 4.12b] — that the sculpture was first collected in Sārnāth and then transferred to the old India Museum (1801–1879) of the former British East India Company in London.

breast. This independent image would thus seem to carry a clear biographical and locative significance.⁵¹

This sitting sculpture embodies the finest characteristics of the Sārnāth school during the late fifth century,⁵² for example the way in which the Buddha is wrapped with transparent and polished monastic clothes without folds, while the outer-robe (*saṅghātī*) covers both shoulders. The appearance of the Buddha image is also slighter and more elongated than its stiffer Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā predecessors. In addition, his hair is curled toward the right (*dakṣiṇāvarta*) and the *uṣṇīṣa* is prominent; there is no *ūrṇa* between the two slanted eyebrows; and the half-closed eyes look downward, not straight, as if withdrawn in deep meditation. The statue, however, appears active, so as to teach the Buddhist sermon of the turning the wheel of the law, with his left middle finger pointing to the circle made by the right hand with the thumb and fore-finger. His legs hang down with his knees splayed wide apart while his feet rest on a double inverted lotus base. Lastly, the Buddha sits on a highly decorated throne flanked by lions, *vyālas* (rampant leogryph), and *makaras* (mythical sea-creature) that “anticipates the crowned and ornamented image which became increasingly common as a symbol of the transcendent Buddha” (Zwalf 1985: 97).⁵³

As J. Rosenfield asserted (1963: 22),⁵⁴ this Buddha sitting with the legs pendant on a lion throne from Sārnāth is clearly invested “with a regal or temporal kind of authority, far different from that projected by the *padmāsana*, the basic ascetic posture.” It may be added that a prominent nimbus (*prabhāmaṇḍala*, lit. “circle of light”), also emanates from the back of the Buddha’s head so as to perhaps associate him with the Sun god, at least symbolically (**Appendix A**). The nimbus is almost plain and only bordered with scallops and pearls comparable to that of the Buddha image dated by inscription to 474 (Rosenfield 1963: fig. 1).⁵⁵ Although Rosenfield reports that one scholar’s opinion would place this Bhadrāsana Buddha in the seventh century on account of its “heaviness and disintegration of the classical

⁵¹ We know from several inscriptions found at the site spanning several centuries that the ancient name of the whole monastery at Sārnāth was “Saddharmacakra” or “Saddharmacakrapravartanavihāra” in its fuller form (Oertel 1908: 91; Marshall & Konow 1909: 97, 100–101, inscr. no. V, XIII).

⁵² The majority of the Sārnāth sculptures are dated to the second half of the fifth century, based on three inscribed standing images of the Buddha dated to 474 and 476–477 CE (Rosenfield 1963), two of which were “caused to be made” by a certain Śākyabhikṣu (Morrissey 2009: Appendix, no. 92, 93).

⁵³ On the Indian symbolism of the throne adorned with “animals,” see Auboyer 1949: 105ff.

⁵⁴ In the photographs published by Rosenfield (1963: fig. 4; 1967: fig. 167), the Buddha’s nose, now damaged, was still in place.

⁵⁵ For a brief survey of the early stylistic development of the nimbus in Indian Buddhist art, see Bautze-Picron 1990.

style” (*ibid.*: 22), I see no reason for doubting that it belongs to the same high style of the late-fifth century period as the other dated examples that he studied.

The Indian Museum, Kolkata

Numerous statues allegedly from Sārnāth came into the possession of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (now the Indian Museum of Kolkata) in 1835–1836, brought there by Captain (later Major-General) Alexander Cunningham.

A large example of the Buddha seated on a throne, with the feet resting on the ground, is kept in the storage of the Indian Museum (Anderson 1883: 24, cat. no. S. 42). Unfortunately, the hands are broken off, but they originally had been brought forward in front of the chest, more precisely at solar plexus level, in the attitude of teaching the First Sermon; the head is also gone [Figure 4.13]. In many respects, this statue is similar to another headless sculpture still at Sārnāth and presently kept in storage at the Archeological Museum [Figure 4.14]. By virtue of their smooth and unpleated drapery, these examples doubtless belong to the same classical Gupta style of Sārnāth dating from the late fifth century.

Another smaller figure of the Buddha seated on a lion throne or *simhāsana* and somewhat stiffer from the preceding examples, but with an ornamented and apparently cushioned back, was presented at the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 2nd December 1835 (Anderson 1883: 11, cat. no. S. 10) [Figure 4.15]. This image resembles the above studied sculpture from the British Museum, as well as carries some differences. In terms of similarities, for example, the legs of the figure rest on a lotus stool; from the back of the throne springs a nimbus or *prabhāmaṇḍala*, with a scalloped and beaded border exactly like that of the aforementioned image. Although the right hand is broken, it is clear that the Buddha once performed the preaching gesture with his two hands, but with the variation in which the left little finger seems to point to the circle made by the now absent right hand. As we shall see below, this alternative hand gesture is first and foremost observed in the caves of the western Deccan, but usually not seen in classical Gupta art.⁵⁶ Finally, the folds that appear on the lower part of the robe, which is also worn in the open mode, are not characteristic of classical Gupta images from Sārnāth with the usual transparent and more graceful monastic clothes. Could it be that this sculpture is transitional between the Sārnāth

⁵⁶ John Huntington (2009: 92–93) notes that in Sārnāth only the left fore-finger or middle finger is used. See also J. Huntington & Chaya 2000. I do not agree, however, with their interpretations that these regional variations reflect a different set of Buddhist teachings.

school of the late fifth century and the more rigid Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā forerunners of the fourth century? If these observations are correct, a slightly earlier date of mid-fifth century could be suggested for this sculpture. Alternatively, it could represent a regional variant and need not to have been produced at Sārnāth, or at least not by the same sculptors from the same workshop.

At any rate, that the previous independent sculptures all relate to the First Sermon of the Buddha is almost certain. To substantiate this we have a stone high slab, also said to be from Sārnāth and now in the Indian Museum, which is divided into four narrative panels placed one over the other and organized in sequence in a single vertical row (Anderson 1883: 7, cat. no. S. 3). They represent the Four Great Events of the Master's existence, namely from bottom to top, his Birth,⁵⁷ his Enlightenment, his First Sermon, and his Death [Figure 4.16].⁵⁸ The third panel from the bottom precisely depicts the Buddha in the same preaching attitude as described above and also seated in the *bhadra*-pose. Even though the wheel (*dharmacakra*) flanked by two deer does not appear on the base and the scene is characterized by the absence of the five first disciples (*pañcavargīya*) — the immediate Buddha's attendants are Bodhisattvas and flying *vidyādhara*s —, it is fairly certain that the relief represents the First Sermon. As J. Williams confesses, however, some ambiguity with the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī exists, for the Buddha sits in both instances in *bhadrāsana* “with his feet supported by a large lotus which replaces the *dharmacakra* and deer” (1975: 182, fig. 5). We will see below other examples depicted on reliefs from western Indian caves where the conflation of the two episodes is common. In addition, while this narrative stele can be dated to the late fifth century, later Pāla scenes often represent the two miracles with the Buddha sitting in the same posture and performing an identical preaching gesture with his hands (Chapter 5).⁵⁹

Because of the concomitant presence of the *mahāparinirvāṇa* episode represented on top of the stele in question, these narrative scenes could only relate to the life of

⁵⁷ The lowest panel representing the Birth, also depicts the Bathing of the young Bodhisattva, the Great Departure, and the Cutting of the Buddha's Hair. See Williams 1975: 173.

⁵⁸ J. Williams (1975: 171, n. 2) contends that, generally, the Sārnāth narrative steles “seem to have been installed as major objects of worship against a flat wall,” and that they “are comparable in size to images which are objects of worship such as the major seated and standing Buddhas of Sārnāth.” She thus emphasizes the idea that Buddhist narrative panels were not necessarily, if at all, meant to only “tell stories,” but also served iconic and devotional functions. In the same vein, see Brown 1997.

⁵⁹ Actually, in the scene representing the offering of honey to the Buddha, he is often represented sitting with legs pendant, but with a bowl in his hands resting on his lap. A fragmentary relief of this scene has been retrieved from Sārnāth but its whereabouts are unknown. See Oertel 1908: 99, list no. 312, and Sahni 1914: 197, cat. C(a) 25.

Śākyamuni.⁶⁰ This is piece of one evidence that, at least in Indian art, the sitting *bhadra*-posture is mainly attributed to the historical Buddha and should not be confused with the impending advent (or rather descent) of Buddha Maitreya, no matter what was written in the past.⁶¹ It should be emphasized at this stage, moreover, that almost no Buddha images of the Bhadrāsana type that remain in India are positively identified by an inscription. Unless contrary evidence comes to the fore, it would still be more prudent to identify these independent Bhadrāsana Buddhas as Śākyamuni, the archetype of all past, future, and transcendental Buddhas.⁶²

The Archeological Museum, Sārnāth

Daya Ram Sahni (1914), in his precious catalogue of the Sārnāth Archeological Museum, described several high-reliefs of Bhadrāsana Buddhas that were “scientifically” unearthed at Sārnāth during excavations conducted in 1905 and 1907. None of these images were illustrated in the catalogue publication, unfortunately, and on the whole only a handful of these Bhadrāsana Buddha images have been published in other archeological reports. Thus they often remain difficult to trace and identify. My tentative matching between the text descriptions provided in the catalogue, the published archeological reports, and the photographs that I managed to gather is presented below.⁶³

An interesting miniature *caitya* in sandstone with a double cornice around the drum was found during the 1905 Sārnāth excavation, west of the main shrine (Oertel 1908: 99, list no. 378). It stands on a large full-blossomed lotus and is fronted or ornamented by a high-relief figure of the Buddha seated on a simple throne in the attitude of expounding the law.

⁶⁰ Several extant versions of the Buddha’s life in Sanskrit (e.g. *Buddhacarita*; *Lalitavistara*) conclude with the First Sermon, although it is possible that they originally contained events through the *mahāparinirvāna*, as do the Chinese and Tibetan translations of the *Buddhacarita* (Willemsen 2009).

⁶¹ Maria-George Bourda (1949) first warned against misconceptions regarding this posture in which, for many decades, scholars had tended to assign it exclusively to Maitreya. On the grounds that all Buddhas are equivalent, insofar as the actual events in their lives on earth, such as the First Sermon, are virtually identical, one scholar argued that the British Museum sculpture presented above, and other Buddhas seated in the same pose, may represent Maitreya (Y. Lee 1983: 176–186). Following this line of reasoning, it could be easily objected, however, that these sculptures might just as well represent any Buddha conveying the ideals of his special characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*), no matter whether he was a figure of the past, the present, or the future.

⁶² As we shall see further below, some Maharashtra cases exist where the seven past Buddhas are all represented in a row, preaching and sometimes seated in *bhadrāsana*, while Maitreya, as a Bodhisattva, stands at the right end in princely garb [Figs 4.62, 4.80, 4.107, 4.143, 4.172]. Of particular interest is Ajaṅṭā Cave 22, where an inscribed painting identifies the only Buddha depicted in *bhadrāsana* as Krakucchanda, a figure of the past.

⁶³ I was unable to find any information and references on Fig. 4.14, currently kept in storage. I thank Peter Skilling for sharing this photograph with me.

The pinnacle (and the stone umbrella that probably once surmounted it) is broken off, but it is likely that this miniature *caitya* was originally attached to the rear wall of a private shrine (Sahni 1914: 225, cat. no. D(b) 27; Jarrige & Joshi 2007: 188–189, cat. no. 29) [Figure 4.17]. The Buddha’s monastic cloth covers both shoulders and the series of stringlike light striations which descend from the neck in a row of crescents to just below the knees is somewhat reminiscent of earlier Mathurā examples. The artistic concept of the anthropomorphic Buddha juxtaposed and fronting — or even perhaps emerging from? — a monolithic *caitya* is also known in the western Deccan caves, first and foremost at Ajañṭā Cave 26, now dated to approximately the third or last quarter of the fifth century, and in a more grandiloquent manner at Ellorā Cave 10, dated later in the seventh century (see *infra*). These examples would give us a relative timeframe for the simultaneous appearance of this imagery at Sārnāth, unless of course, the latter sculpture actually preceded those from Maharashtra by a few years or even decades.

Another high-relief of the Buddha sits between two smaller figures standing on a raised pedestal [Figure 4.18]. This sandstone sculpture was discovered in the medieval Monastery 1 during the Sārnāth excavations of 1907 (Marshall & Konow 1909: 90, list no. 2, pl. XXIX, b). The feet of the main central Buddha, whose smooth drapery leaves the right shoulder bare, are broken off. A plain circular nimbus surrounds his head and on either side is a celestial figure carrying a garland. To the proper right of the Buddha, we find the first standing attendant, a Bodhisattva with a deerskin (*ajina*) thrown over his left shoulder, holding a rosary (*akṣamālā*) in the right hand and a water flask (*kalāśa* or *kamaṇḍalu*) in the left. The second jewelled figure, another Bodhisattva standing to the left of the Buddha, has his right hand down with the palm turned out in the gift-bestowing gesture with the left holding a lotus stalk. The faces of both Bodhisattvas are defaced. The base of the sculpture is also much worn, but the head of a devotee is clearly distinguishable. Sahni identifies the two Bodhisattvas as respectively, Maitreya on the Buddha’s right and Avalokiteśvara or Padmapāṇi on his left (1914: 72–73, cat. no. B(b) 186).⁶⁴ If this identification is correct, this

⁶⁴ A few Bodhisattva images were found at Sārnāth (e.g. Sahni 1914: 118ff), although these have not always been identified correctly. For example, this reference excerpted from “Excavations at Sārnāth” for 1904–1905 written by F.O. Oerte (the reading of the inscription was due to J.Ph. Vogel): “There is another inscribed Bodhisattva statue (list. No. 120, ht 4’) which probably represents Mañjuśrī, the personification of wisdom [...]. It will be noticed that the small Dhyāni-Buddha in the headdress is in the earth touching attitude and therefore not Amitābha but Akṣobhya, which would lead us to identify the image with Mañjuśrī. [...] The inscription (list no. XXIV) incised on the back of the image, is in characters of the seventh century A.D. and consists of the so-called Buddhist creed or formula of the Law, **followed by the word *Arolika*, which may be the name of the donor**” (Oerte 1908: 81–82; see also Sahni, *ibid.*: 120–121, pl. XIIIc). I contest the identification of the word

would be an unusual arrangement; in the Northwest and the western Deccan caves such triads are found where Avalokiteśvara is generally on the Buddha's proper right (see *infra*).

However, rather than necessarily seeing two different Bodhisattvas here, a case could be made that they embody a generic aspect of Bodhisattvahood in two different forms, i.e. the ascetic type on the Buddha's proper right, and the royal type on his left. At any rate, the sculpture is made of the same style and follows approximately the same conventions as the other Sārnāth sculptures studied above and so presumably belongs to the late fifth century as well.⁶⁵ When compared with other Buddhist triads from the western Deccan (cf. *infra*), another striking feature is that at Sārnāth during the Gupta period the Buddha in the center is much bigger than the Bodhisattva attendants. Claudine Bautze-Picron opines that this Bhadrāsana sculpture, as well as the one kept at the British Museum and studied above, may in fact illustrate the teaching of the Buddha delivered on Mount Meru, of which the Sārnāth sermon was just a rehearsal (2010a: 25, 27, n. 49). I will return to this episode and its possible association with imagery when discussing the material from Ajañṭā in western India.

Next, a different figure in high-relief was unearthed at Sārnāth in 1907 to the northwest of the main shrine, roughly one meter below surface (Marshall & Konow 1909: 75; Sahni 1914: 72, cat. no. B(b) 184).⁶⁶ Sahni has acknowledged the critical state of preservation of this statue [Figure 4.19].⁶⁷ The lower portion below the waist was badly damaged by "saltpetre" and both hands have been lost. The feet presumably once rested on a full-blown lotus, below which was a wheel originally placed between a pair of deer, with two monks in

Arolika as a proper name for the donor. It more probably refers to a famous heart *mantra* for Avalokiteśvara. The thirty-sixth chapter of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*/*Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* for example states that "ĀROLIK is the all-purpose heart of Avalokita [i.e. Avalokiteśvara]" (*ārolik avalokitasya hṛdayaḥ*). Thus, the identification of this statue with Mañjuśrī is dubious and the miniature Buddha in the earth touching pose observed in the headdress was probably not perceived as Akṣobhya at Sārnāth during this period. Furthermore, the feature of Jina Akṣobhya present in the headdress of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī does not seem to appear before the late tenth or eleventh century (Mallmann 1948: 179, 310; Bautze-Picron 1989: 82). At any rate, this inscription is, to my knowledge, the only epigraphic evidence we have for *ārolik* in South Asia. Interestingly, a set of silver and gold foils from Java apparently gives the same *mantra*, plus several further instances of *jinajik* (Arlo Griffiths, Pers. Comm.). For more on the heart *mantras*, especially *jinajik*, see Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: 17ff. On the misuses of the term "Padmapāṇi" as an epithet for Avalokiteśvara, see Bautze-Picron 2004: n. 2.

⁶⁵ Other triads with the central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* seemingly flanked by two attending Bodhisattvas have been excavated at Sārnāth. See Oertel 1908: 93, list no. 78; Marshall & Konow 1909: 90, list no. 4; also Sahni 1914: 80, 97, cat. nos B(b) 245 and B(c) 43. I have not been able, however, to find published photographs for these sculptures and their present whereabouts are unknown.

⁶⁶ Another similar, much smaller (h. 20 cm) sculpture was also unearthed in 1907 in the area to the west of the main shrine (Sahni 1914: 74, cat. no. B(b) 196).

⁶⁷ It is actually in much worse shape today than when it was first excavated in 1907 (Marshall & Konow 1909: 90, list no. 3, pl. XX, 3).

devotional attitude on proper right; traces of the remaining three exist on the other side. Sahni further remarked that the Buddha's dress was of the usual Sārnāth style, although the right shoulder was bare.⁶⁸ A circular nimbus around the Buddha's head is surrounded by concentric bands of beads and scallops; two corpulent figures found on the sides are garland-carrying celestials. Sahni considered this Buddha image was made of grey sandstone, but with some reddish tint, belonging to a "decadent" Gupta style which would seemingly place it chronologically in the sixth century, after the other examples studied above. Admittedly, however, the absence of dated images from this period, as well as the conservative nature of later artistic traditions at Sārnāth, make confirmation of this suggestion difficult, much less to even date other Buddha images with any certainty within this latest Gupta phase at Sārnāth.

Lastly, a fragment of a door architrave or lintel contains a central niche (*candraśālā*) surrounded by ornamental foliage depicting a single Buddha seated on a low couch and performing the ubiquitous preaching gesture (Sahni 1914: 234–235, cat. no. D(d) 3) [Figures 4.20a–b]. Based on stylistic considerations, J. Williams (1982: 169, pl. 259) places the lintel in the early seventh century, that is, in the post-Gupta phase at Sārnāth, although this *candraśālā* can be also compared to a similar architectural fragment probably belonging to the early sixth century from Bhūmarā, Madhya Pradesh, and presently located at the Allahabad Museum. In the latter relief [Figure 4.21], the central deity, wearing a mitre, also seated in *bhadrāsana* and holding a club, is now identified as Viṣṇu (Williams 1982: 120, n. 62; Jarrige & Joshi 2007: 282, cat. 88). It may not be mere coincidence that the two figures appear in the same majestic pose, for the Buddha is often compared to Viṣṇu, for example in the *Lalitavistara* where he is designated "as strong as Nārāyaṇa" (*nārāyaṇasthāmavān*).⁶⁹

The Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum, Varanasi

A unique and important, albeit fragmentary, clay tablet is kept in the art and archeological museum located in Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi (S.K. Srivastava 1996: 241, fig. 116).⁷⁰ Broken at the top, the tablet represents the preaching (now headless) Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, seated on a high elaborate *makara*-throne, and attended by an acolyte on each

⁶⁸ Interestingly, Sahni added a note here: "In all the other sculptures illustrating the first sermon both shoulders are covered in accordance with the Buddhist tenets" (1914: 72, n. 1). The baring of one shoulder might be best explained by a reliance upon earlier Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā prototypes.

⁶⁹ See for example Lal 109, v. 61 (trans. Foucaux 1884: 100; DTC 2013: 79).

⁷⁰ The tablet was not on display during my two visits in 2007 and 2010. Even though I could not get confirmation, nor obtain its inventory number from the curators, it is probably kept in storage.

side, each presumably holding fly-whisks. Two crouching deer and a profiled wheel can be observed or deduced at the Buddha's feet, near the throne base. This feature, according to Surendra Srivastava, suffices to identify the scene as the First Sermon in the Deer Park at Sārnāth.⁷¹ This is the sole example I am aware of this type of tablet found anywhere in India. Also remarkable is that the Buddha here is not preaching with the two hands elevated together in front of the chest as usual. Only the right hand is raised, while his left one rests palm upwards on the lap [Figure 4.22].

Several clay tablets discovered at Thap Chumphon, in the central region of Nakhon Sawan in Thailand, dated to approximately the late seventh–early eighth centuries, display the same striking iconography (Revire 2012a: 111f, fig. 12; also **Table 1 no. 12**). These tablets are in fact so close in appearance to the fragment kept in Varanasi that they were probably made from the same (or a very similar) mold. On this ground, one might logically envisage the Varanasi fragment to have served as a prototype for those found in Central Thailand.⁷²

My reasoning, however, turns the argument around. Given that clay Buddhist tablets were rarely produced in Gupta India, whereas they were popular in mainland Southeast Asia from at least the seventh century onwards, and since virtually no Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* are known to combine in northern India the preaching gesture with only the right hand raised, a case can be made that the single clay tablet now located in Varanasi was actually brought to India from Southeast Asia at an unknown date and possibly left behind (in Sārnāth?) by a pilgrim or a traveller. Without further data concerning the retrieval of this unique Varanasi tablet, there is no way to prove or disprove the hypothesis, although my approach, based on a large corpus from South and Southeast Asia, makes it a viable possibility.

3.4 Buddhist Sculptures from Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat

The Archeological Museum, Sāñcī

A number of Gupta-style sculptures have been found at Sāñcī such as the four cross-legged seated Buddhas still seen inside the processional path of the Great Stūpa (Harle 1974: 14, pl. 38) and possibly mentioned epigraphically in a local inscription found on the railing and

⁷¹ See, however, the remarks made *infra*, in **Chapter 4, n. 196**.

⁷² This interpretation was first made by Piriya Krairiksh (e.g. 2012: 53, fig. 1.23).

dated 450–451 CE (Fleet 1888: 260–262).⁷³ But only one Bhadrāsana Buddha is known to come from the site and is currently kept at the local site museum.⁷⁴ The much mutilated Buddha image is made of a variety of red sandstone and is seated on a throne supported by a pair of damaged lions. The Buddha wears the monastic robe with the right shoulder bare. His left and right arms are broken and the upper part of the left leg is equally missing. The face is damaged but we can still distinguish the ornamental *uṣṇīṣa* on top of his head; the hands are also mutilated, but were held in a teaching attitude using the little finger, rather than the fore-finger or the middle finger as is customary at Sārnāth [Figure 4.24]. This statue’s heavy character compares poorly with the high Gupta style of the Sārnāth school (see *supra*) and it echoes more closely the images found in the western Deccan caves (see *infra*). At any rate, it can be attributed to the second half of the fifth century or early sixth century.

The Gujari Mahal Archeological Museum in Gwalior

One Buddha image kept at the Gwalior Museum is seated in *bhadrāsana* [Figure 4.25]. Little, if any, information about the statue is available, only that it is reputed to be from Kota in the southern part of Shivpuri district, Madhya Pradesh (Tenwar & Manuel 2015: 121, fig. 2), where few neglected Buddhist remains have been found.⁷⁵ The high-relief is made of buff sandstone, and the slab is 157 cm in height. Presumably the stone would have been installed as a main object of worship against a flat wall in a temple. The hands are broken off and it is not absolutely certain that they would have been performing the preaching gesture. Perhaps the Buddha was originally holding a bowl in his hands resting on his lap, in which case the episode of the offering of honey by a monkey could be invoked (cf. **Chapter 5**). Based on this poor documentation, a roughly estimated date of sixth or seventh century can only be proposed for the local production of this sculpture.

⁷³ The inscription uses the compound *caturbuddhāsane* (l. 6–7), which can be interpreted in several ways: “on the four seats of the four Buddhas,” “on the [same] seat of the four Buddhas,” or “on the four seats of the [same] Buddha;” Fleet loosely rendered it as “the place where (*the images of*) the four Buddhas are seated.” His translation assumes that the present Buddha images were already present when the inscription was written. However, it is entirely possible that the Buddha images were a later addition to the original (four?) *āsana*(s), or empty throne(s), as the focus of worship. Conceivably, also, *āsane* could have a more neutral meaning in inscriptions, that is simply a “place, where there are Buddha (statues)” (Hinüber 2008: 32).

⁷⁴ A fragment stone of a seated figure with legs apparently pendant is still found *in situ*, near the eastern Monastery and Temple 44 and 45, but it is too incomplete for a detailed study [Figure 4.23].

⁷⁵ For a recent and broader survey of Buddhist archeological evidence in central India, see Skilling 2014.

The Archeological Museum of Abhayagiri (Sri Lanka)

A fine carved stone triad was recently found in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, at the heart of a major monastery site of Mahāyāna teachings in Therāvada guise, the Abhayagiri Vihāra [Figure 4.26].⁷⁶ This high-relief in pink limestone or perhaps dolomitic marble was found during recent restoration work inside the relic chamber of the Great Stūpa and is now kept in the Archeological Museum of Abhayagiri. It was discovered around 2007–2010, approximately 90 feet (*ca* 27 m) above ground level and directly inserted in the masonry of the monument as part of the brickwork.⁷⁷

The stone relief depicts, in the center, a Buddha sitting in the pendant-legged pose on a throne with lions that appear to actually support its base, decorated with *makaras* at both ends. Both of the Buddha's shoulders are covered with his monastic diaphanous robe, close to the Gupta idiom of the Sārnāth school. His hands, however, perform a variant of the preaching gesture in which, again, the left little finger points to the circle made by the right hand; this peculiar hand gesture is mostly observed in the caves of the western Deccan but traditionally not in Gupta-Sārnāth art.⁷⁸ His feet rest upon an expanded lotus serving as his footstool. Such double lotus pedestals are a sure hallmark of a relatively late production in the fifth–sixth centuries, whereas a few decades earlier in Gandhāra, rectangular plain footstools or plinths were often found [Figs 2.30, 2.32–33, 2.36]. To the Buddha's left a standing figure holds the flask and wears the Brahmanical knot which could identify the figure either as Maitreya or an ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara.⁷⁹ The second crowned attendant on the Buddha's proper right, however, has no specific attribute, making its identification doubtful.⁸⁰ Both male figures are represented as *caurī*-bearers or fly-whisk attendants,

⁷⁶ The Mahāyāna leanings of the Abhayagiri Vihāra in medieval Sri Lanka are no secrets. See *inter alia* J. Walters 1997 and Cousins 2012.

⁷⁷ I wish to thank Arlo Griffiths, Nandana Chutiwongs, Osmund Bopearachchi, and Peter Skilling for drawing this sculpture to my attention and sharing their photographs and information.

⁷⁸ With the exception seen above [Fig. 4.15].

⁷⁹ We know that, in India, Avalokiteśvara ultimately assimilated the iconography of Maitreya entirely in *circa* the sixth–seventh century and became an ascetic type holding a flask as well (Mallmann 1948; Nandana 2002). However, Sofia Sundstrom told me (Pers. Comm.) that his placement here makes it somewhat difficult to ascertain this. As we shall see, in the Buddhist caves of Maharashtra, Avalokiteśvara is often, but not always, depicted to the Buddha's right. See also Divakaran 1989: 148, n. 18, 159–160, 163–164. Could this unusual placement reflect a regional variety or the impact of earlier Gandhāran or Mathurā iconography?

⁸⁰ The museum label surprisingly describes this triad as Amitābha residing in the western Pure Land of Sukhāvātī, attended by Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara on his left, and the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta on his right; this is total speculation. Another solution might be to identify both attendant Bodhisattvas as dual

thereupon emphasizing the Buddha's royal and spiritual authority. In the corners above their heads are flying *vidyādhara*s or "Buddhist cherubs" wearing garlands to the Buddha, probably in conformity with the new *bhakti* ideal of worship.

Similar triads are sometimes found in Gandhāra and Sārnāth (see *supra*) and most notably in the caves of the western Deccan, a transitional place of evolving Buddhism during the mid-to-late first millennium CE. Conversely, manufactured Buddha images in this posture are totally unknown in the island of Sri Lanka.⁸¹ Moreover, since the high-relief here shows a clear fusion of Gupta and Vākāṭaka styles, it was possibly executed originally somewhere between northern and western India during approximately the late fifth or early sixth century and brought to the island by pious traders or pilgrims as offerings at some unknown later date. Pink limestone or marble used for the execution of this relief is scarcely found in Sri Lanka but we cannot completely reject the hypothesis that it may have been sculpted locally by a craftsman very conversant with the art of western India.⁸²

The Baroda Museum, Gujarat

A rare gilt bronze image of the preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, in an almost perfect state of preservation, is currently on display at the Baroda Museum in Vadodara, Gujarat.⁸³ It is reported to possibly come from Valabhī, once the seat of a famous university and a large Buddhist population which both Xuanzang (Beal 1884: II, 266f) and Yijing (Li Rongxi 2000: 149) either visited or heard about in the seventh century. It was also the ancient capital of the Maitrakas who became one of the most important dynasties of western India in the sixth century and persisted in their rule of the region until their fall in the eighth century (Dutt 1988: 224ff). The Buddha image measures approximately 20 cm in height and his face, hands, and feet are gilded. The preaching gesture with the two hands in front of the solar

representations of Avalokiteśvara, one in princely attire, one as an ascetic. For a recent study on the ancient Sukhāvātī cult in South Asia, based on epigraphic data, see Acharya 2008.

⁸¹ This lack occurs despite the *Citrakarmasāstra*'s statement, possibly composed in original Sanskrit in Sri Lanka during the mid-to-late first millennium CE, that presents one of the earliest accounts of the term *bhadrāsana* as a "sitting posture" (**Chapter 1**). One unique example in bronze and two "Eight Miracles" stone panels depicting the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* do occur on the island, but these images are clearly later "Pāla/Bengal" imports or good copies from medieval Northeast India (Mudiyansa 1967: 30–31, 36–37, figs 4, 7, 9; also **Chapter 5**).

⁸² The Abhayagiriṭhūpa was renovated several times throughout its convoluted history. For instance, King Moggallāna III (r. ca 614–619 CE) ordered its repair in the seventh century (Schroeder 1990: 572).

⁸³ This bronze (inv. no. unknown) was previously kept at the Gandhi Smriti Museum, also known as the "Barton Museum," in Bhavnagar (U.P. Shah 1973; Bhowmik 1995: 73ff). I wish to thank Ken Ishikawa for his assistance in furnishing photos and published references on this image.

plexus is performed with the left middle finger pointing to the circle made by the right hand. The drapery covers both shoulders and displays peculiar concentric U-shape folds. The Buddha sits on a lotus pillow placed on top of the square base of a throne which shows a lion trampling on an elephant at each corner. The Buddha's feet rest on a lotus pedestal supported by a thick stalk and two buds. It is almost certain that a separate nimbus and/or an umbrella was once attached by a rod to the back of the Buddha image as the lug behind his neck suggests [Figures 4.27a–b].

Indian scholars tend to date this bronze to around the seventh century, presumably due to its alleged connection with Valabhī and the visit of the Chinese pilgrims during that time (U.P. Shah 1973; Bhowmik 1995: 73ff). This date, however, seems a bit too early, since this Gujarat image is in fact closer and more reminiscent of probably later Kashmiri bronzes — save that in the latter production the hands are held in a slightly different manner, etc. — than it is to earlier images from the Northwest or the western Deccan. Both Douglas Barrett (1962: figs 18–19) and Umakant Shah (1973: 45) admit similarities with Kashmiri bronzes traditionally dated to the tenth century.⁸⁴ Fruitful comparisons can also be drawn with two pre-Pāla stone Buddha images from Bodhgayā in eastern India [Figs 5.23–24], where the rendering of the drapery with concentric U-shaped folds covering both shoulders is also similarly depicted, albeit in a more simplistic fashion. On these grounds, I would tend to locate the production of this Gujarat bronze between these two artistic traditions, placing it in approximately the eighth or even possibly the early ninth century.

3.5 Paintings and Sculptures from the Western Deccan Caves

The most famous, and most studied, Buddhist caves⁸⁵ in the western Deccan are those of Ajañṭā, followed by those of Auranṅābād, Ellorā, Kaṇherī, and Nāsik, located in Maharashtra. These cave complexes, however, represent only a small portion of the total rock-cut cave activity.⁸⁶ Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana* appear at all of these sites,

⁸⁴ Admittedly, the chronology of many of these Buddhist bronzes from Gilgit and Kashmir, several of which are inscribed and dated, is certainly in need of revision (Chapter 5). Comparable stylistic affinities have also been reported between some Ākoṭā bronzes from Gujarat and related Kashmiri images. See Ishikawa 2011.

⁸⁵ In the following, although I am aware that this use is a bit of a misnomer, I use “cave(s)” as pure convention. These are not natural formations, but examples of Indian rock-cut architecture. On this terminology, see Granoff 2013.

⁸⁶ The classical study of western Deccan caves is Fergusson & Burgess 1969, Part II, written by James Burgess and first published in 1880. For a recent reexamination of these sites, see Alone 2002. I do not concur, however, with Alone's dating in which he places most excavations of the second phase in the fourth century CE.

sometimes in the hundreds, chiefly during the late fifth century and the following sixth through eighth centuries. Most images are carved in high-relief, but a few cave paintings remain, predominantly at Ajañṭā. I contend that these Bhadrāsana Buddhas found in western Indian caves are important and distinctive art manifestations in the overall development of Indian Buddhist art.

I do not intend, however, to provide in this section a complete list of the images, an impossible task. My coverage is, by necessity, selective. In the following, I will give an overview of key caves and sites, in order to apprehend the sudden emergence of these images in context, their possible significance, and subsequent chronological development in the region by offering a stylistic analysis as well as formulating typological and iconographic variations. The examination also often depends on context; it must therefore be combined with a study of the historical situation of each cave or site, when known, as revealed mainly through epigraphic sources.

Ajañṭā

The Ajañṭā caves are a series of about thirty Buddhist rock-cut monuments located in modern Aurangabad district, Maharashtra. Artistic work at the site occurred in two distinct phases, the first ranging from *circa* 100 BCE to 100 CE, the second, according to the prevailing chronology, covering the period between approximately 462 and 480 CE. This latter period is often described, perhaps exaggeratedly, as mature Mahāyāna constructions.⁸⁷

In this chapter, my study of Bhadrāsana Buddhas focuses exclusively on this more developed second phase regarding which I adopt the “short chronology” proposed by Walter Spink. Put simply, the rock-cut activity at Ajañṭā during this phase is considered a major artistic achievement in the context of the rise and fall of the Vākāṭakas (Vatsagulma branch) *circa* the third quarter of the fifth century.⁸⁸ The implications are twofold: 1) The work-span

⁸⁷ See *inter alia* Spink 1974. Schopen (2005b: 239) explains that at least until the early medieval period, Mahāyāna was nearly invisible in India because it developed as a movement within already established religious communities. This may well apply to Ajañṭā as well, where Mahāyāna was perhaps present from the beginning, but became “epigraphically” visible only during the late Vākāṭaka period. Along these lines, see also Cohen 1995b: 254ff, and Morrissey 2009: 90ff.

⁸⁸ A detailed summary and analysis of the “short chronology” is offered in Cohen 1995b: Appendix D, 422ff. For many years, scholars thought that the later caves at Ajañṭā were made over a long period from the fourth to the seventh centuries CE, but in recent decades a series of studies by Spink (summed up in Spink 2005a) argue that most of the work took place over a very brief period during the glorious years of Hariṣeṇa. Despite a few quibbles (e.g. Bakker 1997: 88–89; Bautze-Picron 2002b: 279, n. 65; cf. Spink 2005a: 22ff and 2006: 117ff),

of the Ajaṅṭā caves lasted for only a short time, linked mostly to Hariṣeṇa’s reign (*ca* 460–477); 2) There was a sudden disruption of cave activities (*ca* 479–480) due to the king’s unexpected death and because there was probably a latent conflict between two feudatory dynasties which Spink, after Mirashi — on the basis of the Cave 17 inscription, interprets as between the Ṛṣīkas and the Aśmakas.⁸⁹ Following this analysis, a clear demarcation can thus be made between the “programmatically” and “intrusive” periods at Ajaṅṭā.

Programmatic Images

During the so-called “programmatically period” (*ca* 462–478), the excavation and decoration of the caves progressed more or less under the strict administrative control of the major patrons. Spink (2006: 149ff) argued that as long as a donor maintained an interest in the cave for which he paid, that excavation was treated as his exclusive property and was not available for alteration or decoration by anybody else. In the whole complex of Ajaṅṭā, while the walls inside Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17 were plastered and painted with palace scenes and court stories often drawn from various *jātakas* and the life of the Master,⁹⁰ only two caves, to be discussed

these views on the Ajaṅṭā’s short chronology are increasingly widely accepted, at least in their broad conclusions, and are followed here.

⁸⁹ The narrative of Aśmaka aggression stems from the problematic verse 10 of this inscription. For a new reading and a different historical interpretation, see Cohen 1995b: 44ff, Appendix B, 387ff. In opposition to Spink’s view, Cohen considers that the Aśmakas were actually the western Vākātakas and that the aggressors responsible for the site’s troubles and perhaps its final demise were the so-called main or eastern branch under King Pṛithivīṣeṇa II (*ibid.*: 62, 70f).

⁹⁰ In many cases, a princely or royal figure seated in the assertive majestic pose on a throne with legs down has been variously identified as some fictional princes or kings, often the Buddha-to-be in a previous life (e.g. Yazdani 1933: 9ff, 50–51, pls 12a, 14, 45; 1955: 36ff, 40f, 45f, 48, pls 15, 17a, 21c, 26; Schlingloff 1988: 81ff, fig. 1.9; 86ff, figs 1.4, 12; 93ff, figs 1.6, 2.3; 118ff, fig. 1.5; 130ff, figs 1.4, 2.6; 256ff, fig. 40.25; Schlingloff 2000: I, 191, 196, 210–212, 219, 229, 232, 249f, 255, 273, 283f). In particular, a scene from Cave 2 depicts the Bodhisattva occupying the place of honor in the center [**Figure 4.28**]. His nimbus painted around his head shows that he was a celestial being who was still dwelling in Tuṣita heaven prior to his birth; he was also bejeweled and enthroned in majesty on a highly ornamented throne, attended by two *caurī*-bearers standing next to him and surrounded by seated figures in the *añjali* gesture so as to show his superior status (Yazdani 1933: 18, pl. 19; Schlingloff 1988: 16, fig. 2.1; 2000: I, 376; Behl 1998: 120f). In several other scenes from Cave 17, the *abhiṣeka* ceremony is depicted with two attendants pouring consecrated water on the head of a newly crowned king (often the Buddha-to-be) who is seated on a chair with his legs down (Yazdani 1955: 57f, 93, pls 36b, 55, 60; Schlingloff 1988: 104, fig. 1.9; 263, fig. 40.26; Schlingloff 2000: I, 212; Behl 1998: 196; Wood 2004: 123ff) [**Figure 4.29**]. Dieter Schlingloff’s extensive work on narrative paintings (e.g. 1988, 2000) has shown that both Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā* and the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (which served as the basis for such narrative collections as the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Avadānaśataka*) were better known at Ajaṅṭā than previously thought; see also Cohen 1995b: 111ff. Unfortunately, however, because of our ignorance of the vivid oral traditions in ancient India, there is no certainty that these written narratives were always those that were actually depicted at the site.

below, yielded major stone sculptures of Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* completed in their main shrines just before the end of this programmatic phase.

Cave 16

Possibly the most important excavation at Ajañtā for understanding site development is Cave 16; Spink (1975; 2007: 179ff) designates this as “the crucial cave.” This cave not only possesses a detailed donative inscription, attributing the programmatic excavation and decoration to a single donor, the Vākāṭaka minister Varāhadeva, but it also allows us to determine that the cave was basically set within the absolute span of this single man’s career life as part of his programmatic effort. This is only true if we accept that the dedicatory record was incised shortly before the cave’s completion. Moreover, Cave 16 shows both early and late artistic and architectural features determined as morphologically when compared with other caves at the site. The only possible conclusion is that Ajañtā’s entire chronology as proposed by Spink should be short and limited to roughly an eighteen or twenty-year span. In his words:

Cave 16 at Ajañtā is an excavation of great importance, for it alone allows us to establish the chronology of Ajañtā’s Mahāyāna phase within narrow limits. Furthermore, although it is not a particularly elaborate cave, it plays a crucial role in the development of style and iconography at the site (1975: 143).

The cave had one of the largest monastic residences, dominated by a huge, monolithic Buddha in *bhadrāsana* carved in the round in a separate shrine room in the back. The unique placement of the Buddha within the cave complemented the iconographic programme. All other central Buddha figures within Ajañtā’s *vihāras* were carved in shrines set apart from their monasteries’ spaces. By contrast, the Cave 16 Buddha was separated from its *vihāra*’s main space mainly by a pair of columns, as if placed in a palatial pillared setting [Figures 4.30–31]. The colossal Buddha is thus revolutionary in the sense that it looms directly above the worshipper to such an extent that one may directly feel his presence and regal grandeur, in a way not matched anywhere else at the site. “Compared with the other

shrine images at Ajaṅṭā,” Weiner observes, “there is a prepossessing and overbearing majesty to this figure that sets it apart conceptually” (1977: 98).⁹¹

In view of the historico-political context surrounding patronage at the site and taking further into consideration the iconology of the Cave 16 Buddha, Richard Cohen argues that the massive Bhadrāsana image of the central shrine was perceived as a “double” of King Hariṣeṇa himself (1995b: 313ff; 1998: 394ff). Given the minister’s project of using this cave to glorify his king, Cohen contends that this image may have functioned as something of a “portrait sculpture;” it may have allegorized Hariṣeṇa as the Buddha who sits on Indra’s throne. Varāhadeva likens this epigraphically to the ideal king who “extinguishes the flames of wickedness” and enables the world to “enter that peaceful and noble state free from sorrow and disease, [attained] by eradicating the many faults” (Cohen 1995b: 361–362). Making such a homology complete, Cohen claims that Varāhadeva’s inscription compares Hariṣeṇa to Indra, Lord of gods, and also calls the Buddha *yatīndra*, which he interprets as the “ascetic Indra” (1995b: 310). Cave 16’s dedicatory inscription also characterizes this place as the “excellent dwelling” of Indra “which is adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture-galleries, ledges, statues of the nymphs, etc.” and is given the name “Vaijayanta,” eponymous with Indra’s divine palace in the realm of the Thirty-three (Mirashi 1963: 111, vv. 24–29).⁹²

In addition to the huge shrine sculpture, the programmatic mural depictions of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī (*mahāprātihārya*), the Buddha’s teachings of the Dharma to his mother and a host of *devas* in Trāyastrīṣa,⁹³ and the subsequent Descent of the Buddha at Sāṃkāśya (*devatāvatarāṇa*) are all of importance in Cave 16 (Yazdani 1946: pls 57a, 58; Schlingloff 2000: I, 476ff, 512ff) [Figures 4.32–34]. That these painted scenes were possibly all parts of one and the same narrative cycle⁹⁴ and that they were precisely included within

⁹¹ For several other views, see also AIIS # 96875, # 96877–80.

⁹² According to Spink (1975; 2007: 195ff), the hasty completion and dedication of this colossal Buddha image in *bhadrāsana* may, just before the period of disruption and yet immediately after the sudden demise of King Hariṣeṇa in *circa* 477, be significant. Auboyer 1949: 160, n. 2 gives several references where “righteous kings” (*dharmarājas*) in India were reborn as Indra upon their death.

⁹³ Which G. Yazdani constantly calls “Tushita heaven” (1946: 57–58, 60; 1955: 66ff). On this episode, see Skilling 2008a; also Anālayo 2012.

⁹⁴ On this series of events, see Cohen 1995b: 271ff; Skorupski 2001b: 40–46; also Strong 2001: 107–117. One of the most complex and fascinating representations of this pictorial pairing can be found on the left-wall of the antechamber of Cave 17 (Yazdani 1955: 66ff, pls 38–39; Schlingloff 2000: I, 485f; Allinger 2010a: fig. 1) [Figure 4.35]. Of note, the Buddha is depicted sitting in *bhadrāsana* while both preaching to the gods in Trāyastrīṣa in the upper part and delivering a sermon at Sāṃkāśya in the lower register. A fine stone slab kept in Wat Suthat (i.e. Sudarāna, the City of the Thirty-three), Bangkok, produced during the Dvāravatī artistic culture, displays in two registers the Great Miracle and the subsequent Dharma teaching to the gods in which the Buddha is again seated in the pendant-legged pose. See Brown 1984: 88, fig. 13, and Revire 2012a: 102–104,

Cave 16's iconographic programme, gives strength to the analogy carved in the inscription: the cave "clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown" equated with the abode of the gods. We also know that the rocky landscape of the Ajaṅṭā complex had been designed and perceived as being the finest mountain, "the peak of which contains various (types of) caves" (Mirashi 1963: 111, vv. 29, 32). In this context, we may question whether Varāhadeva actually intended Hariṣeṇa's identification with the Buddha,⁹⁵ as Cohen claims, or, rather, if it was not the royal function and power of Indra, residing on top of his mountain, that was sought for by the Great Ascetic, virtually transforming the Buddha into an almighty ruler, Lord of the universe. I will come back to the significance of this interchangeability between Indra and the Buddha in the conclusion of the present chapter.

Spink further describes the unprecedented impact at the site upon completion of the *caityamandira*, that is, the shrine containing the colossal statue of the Bhadrāsana Buddha at the rear of this cave:⁹⁶

By the time it was finished, it [the Bhadrāsana Buddha] had started a dramatic transformation of concepts of imagery at the site. Its iconographic heritage is witnessed in a whole series of sculptured Buddhas seated in the "European pose," all of which invariably belong to the latest years of the site's activity; these set the standard for the main images in most of the sixth-century caves in western India as well (Spink 1975: 166).

fig. 7; also **Fig. 6.7** and **Table 1, no. 7**. Bautze-Picron (2010a: 29–30, 36–37) suggests that the main standing Buddha image with both hands at shoulder level from Cave 19 might represent the Descent at Sāmkāśya and that it should therefore be intrinsically related to the Bhadrāsana preaching Buddha of Cave 16. If so, is it possible that the main preaching Buddha of Cave 26, also in *bhadrāsana*, might initially have been thought of as delivering a sermon at Sāmkāśya, just as it was portrayed in the painting of Cave 17 after the descent? For this interpretation to be tenable, however, the iconographic programs of Caves 16, 19, and 26 would have to be linked one another in a unique fashion.

⁹⁵ The Cave 17 inscription openly states that the local king has entered the Bodhisattva path and homologizes him to the Buddha as *munīndra* (vv. 19, 28), whereas Hariṣeṇa is described as a mere *kṣitīndra* (v. 21). According to Leela Wood (2004: 114–115), two imperial models were at stake here: 1) the inferior model as "*balacakravartin*," an emperor such as Hariṣeṇa ruling by force alone, and 2) the superior model pertaining to the feudatory as "golden *cakravartin*," a Universal Monarch ruling only by Dharma.

⁹⁶ Cave 16 inscription, v. 24, reads: *[ni]veśitābhyan taracaityamandiram* (ed. Cohen 2006: 312). The term *caitya* can either refer to an object (usually a *stūpa*) or a person worthy of veneration, here the Buddha himself. See also the Cave 17 inscription which mentions the presence of the "king of ascetics," i.e. the Buddha, as worthy of veneration (v. 4: *munirājacaityam*). On the interpretation of these two inscriptions, see Mirashi 1963: 111, 129; Cohen 1995b: 361–362, 370–371; Owen 2001: 44–45; also Wood 2004. A number of passages in the *Mahāvastu* and *Lalitavistara* also refer to the Buddha as a *cetiya* "for the whole world," "for the world," "for people," etc. (Mvu II 294, 296, 349, 354, 359; Mvu III 273, 279; Lal, ch. 7, v. 47; Lal, ch. 23, v. 31).

Sheila Weiner (1976: 350ff; 1977: 62–63, 70) agrees with Spink that the Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* are relatively late images at Ajaṅṭā. While discussing the iconographic program of the cave shrines, she relates this Bhadrāsana type with other images and sites along with some considerations over the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism(s) in India, as if it were a single and coherent tradition. Unfortunately, Weiner uses Buddhist doctrines without fully investigating their implications for Buddhist intellectual history. For example, by invoking the *trikāya* doctrine, by which the Buddha is said to have “three bodies” (viz. *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, *nirmāṇakāya*), Weiner (1977: 66ff, 116) uses Mahāyāna sources, such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, without actually showing how those texts specifically apply to Ajaṅṭā.⁹⁷ Commenting on the nature of these Bhadrāsana Buddha images, she satisfactorily emphasized the influences that reached Ajaṅṭā from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and Sārnāth, possibly via Sāñcī. However, she also mentions Gandhāra and Mathurā as possible alternatives from the Northwest with their numerous trade route connections to the western Indian caves. The impact and popularity of this new type of Buddha image was enormous and immediate at Ajaṅṭā. Nearly all of the important images started at the site during its final heyday are also of the Bhadrāsana type.

Standing Bodhisattva attendants are almost invariably included in these later shrine groups centered on Bhadrāsana Buddha images, while few if any Buddha images conceived in stone and made earlier at the site had flanking attendants. This common triadic arrangement is probably the reason that the sculptors in Cave 16 also took the trouble to include them, even though it meant crowding them in behind the throne. As Spink (1975: 151) notes, the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* was almost certainly replacing a planned image in *padmāsana* (seated cross-legged) and was carved in an area not intended for it. This made it necessary to adjust the composition considerably, for instance, by making both flanking Bodhisattvas small and locating them expediently behind the throne (AIIS # 96879–80). Flanking Bodhisattva images have been variously identified as Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, or Vajrapāṇi (e.g. Bautze-Picron 1997: 1–7). However, most of these sculptures are stereotyped and have no specific attribute; when they do, these attributes are often shared by several Bodhisattvas. Thus, it is safe to conclude that individual Bodhisattva identity was probably not yet clearly established during this period in this region. This is in contrast with later appearances when they tend to take more importance in size and number. To conclude, two types of Bodhisattvas, often paired, are prevalent at Ajaṅṭā and at the other western

⁹⁷ See also criticisms made by Cohen 1995b: 106ff.

Deccan caves, viz. a newly developed ascetic type devoid of any ornamentation and the royal, fully adorned type.

Cave 26

As with Cave 16, the main Buddha image from Cave 26 is of the Bhadrāsana type. Spink (2006: 22ff) presents compelling arguments to suggest that this *caitya*-hall was inaugurated *circa* 462, thus making it one of the earliest undertakings of the Vākāṭaka phase at the site. A recent article seems to support Spink’s proposition that Cave 26 was an early excavation, at least in its conception (Singh 2012).

However for Spink (2007: 335ff), the Cave 26 Buddha was not completed until about 478 under the frenetic patronage of the monk Buddhahadra, probably at the “eleventh hour” in the generally anxious political environment immediately following Hariṣeṇa’s sudden demise. The Buddha image is carved from the central monolithic *caitya*.⁹⁸ He is shown seated in all his glory on an elaborate throne with his legs pendant. The throne’s backslab is decorated on both sides from bottom to top with elephants, *vyālas*, both with riders on their back, and open-jaws *makaras* [Figures 4.36–37]. The Buddha performs the ubiquitous preaching gesture with his two hands; a nimbus with faint traces of plaster appears behind his head. Of note, an additional row of five miniature Buddhas, four standing ones centered on another Bhadrāsana Buddha, each further bracketed by two standing Bodhisattvas, is carved on the frieze decorating the stone baldaquin just above [Figure 4.38]. This placement of “multiple Buddhas” within the same composition is rare and assuredly reflects the very late trend at the site wherein Buddhas can also act as attendants to the central icon (see *infra*; also Kaṇherī Cave 90, Figs 4.99, 4.105–106). The feet of the large enthroned Buddha rest on a double lotus pedestal upheld by two *nāga*-kings. At the base, an additional lion appears on each side on top of an elephant, both animals supporting the throne [Figure 4.39].⁹⁹ Kneeling devotees (donors?) carved in stone are also seen on the floor to the left of the monolithic *caitya*.

⁹⁸ The exact significance of this new combination between the Buddha and the *caitya* remains elusive, although Fukuyama (2014) recently wrote that this Bhadrāsana image fronting the *caitya* may be representing a particular “Mahāyānic” and “universal” concept of the Buddha. See also the discussion of *tathāgatacaitya/tathāgatastūpa* by Schopen below.

⁹⁹ See Bautze-Picron 2008c who observes that the elephant is symbolically related to earth and water, while the lion refers to heaven and fire. By incorporating the two opposite animals in the personality of the Buddha and his throne ornamentation, the Tathāgata displays his capacity to unify the cosmos (earth/heaven). See also Auboyer 1949: 105ff.

According to Spink, this massive Bhadrāsana Buddha fronting the *caitya* in Cave 26 did not properly fit the space allotted to it. For this reason, Spink suggested that the Bodhisattva attendants were relegated to the wings where they could be found in miniature just beyond the frame, on the *caitya* drum (Spink 2006: 44, 77, 89; 2007: 337). Claudine Bautze-Picron (1997: 4–7, figs 1–4) observed that a group of four Bodhisattvas, not just two, were depicted on this drum. She tentatively identified them as Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, and Samantabhadrā (or Vajrapāṇi?), and saw in them an extended version of the original triadic arrangement noticed elsewhere at Ajaṅṭā and further developed later at Ellorā with the addition of four “secondary” figures to constitute the group of eight Bodhisattvas distributed around a central Buddha. Another group of four standing Bodhisattvas were arranged around a central Bhadrāsana Buddha at the level of the triforium of Cave 26, on the left side [Figure 4.40]. Here the Buddha is immediately flanked by two unidentified Bodhisattvas wearing the fly-whisk. Two other small representations of Avalokiteśvara, one of which as the savior rescuing from the eight great perils, are shown standing on the far left and far right (Bautze-Picron 2004: 236f, fig. 35). Almost opposite, on the right side of the hall, another image of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* is carved on the triforium and is accompanied by four other Buddhas, standing or seated cross-legged [Figure 4.41]. Presumably, all these decorative images were carved as part of the same late original program of the *caitya*-hall *circa* 478.

Both iconographic similarities and stylistic differences are apparent in the two large stone sculptural examples of Bhadrāsana Buddhas from Caves 16 and 26. Since these images were probably carved around the same time (*ca* 477–478), Spink (1985: 105–106) warned art historians against being too absolute in their perceptions of “style development” as necessarily chronological and gradual. The general confusion of styles at Ajaṅṭā, Spink further observed, “can best be explained by recognizing that the artists drawn to the site by the promise of employment came over the years from many of the territories that comprised Harishena’s ever-expanding sphere of influence and control” (Spink 2013: 95).

This remark allows us to draw a crucial distinction between “style” and “iconography.” Buddhist iconography is generally prescriptive and fixed and does not easily change from one region to another except when certain “iconographic” innovations are introduced, just as at Ajaṅṭā with the introduction of the Bhadrāsana type. Conversely, “style” reflects the diversity of regional aesthetics and cultures. Style is quite fluid, dependant on the geographical origin of the craftsmen; this might explain the disparities we observe at the site.

In other words, as Spink aptly expressed, for Ajaṅṭā “iconography, which develops almost by ‘clockwork’, is a surer guide” (2006: 173).

In addition to the major Cave 26 Buddha sculpture, four large panels carved on the ambulatory walls surrounding the *caitya*-hall (reliefs R2, R3, R4, and L8) deserve attention for their quality and iconographic content. All of these reliefs depict triads with a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* attended by two Bodhisattvas [Figures 4.43–46]. Spink (2006: 88; 2009: 89, 94) contended that they were started and sponsored by Buddhahadra shortly after the central Buddha image was consecrated *circa* 478. Therefore he asserted that they still belong technically to the programmatic phase of the cave. Interestingly, these panels combine the regal symbolism of the Buddha seated in the majestic pose on an elaborate throne¹⁰⁰ with an actual scene of coronation. Indeed, in addition to the usual garland bearers, two flying *vidyādharas* hold a large tiara (*mukūṭa*) above the *makara*-arch seen on top of the Blessed One, confirming the association of this pose with royal power [Figures 4.42, 44–45, 47].¹⁰¹ The motif of the tiara clearly derived from precedents coming from the Northwest, where the crowning motif of the wreath was most frequently found on some late Gandhāran complex steles. The classical connotation of the wreath on the head was victory and/or kingship, but it may also signify the qualification to teach the Dharma. Claudine Bautze-Picron discussed this motif in detail with the Muhammad Nari stele from Gandhāra as a key example. She interpreted the wreath as a reference to the Buddha’s glorification (2010a: 14–17, figs 18–21).¹⁰²

Regarding the feet of the Buddha in these panels, they are raised on a lotus pedestal upheld by two *nāga*-kings. In one appearance, this is even conflated with the wheel and deer motif (relief R2) [Figure 4.48]. Various scenes of kneeling or standing devotees attending the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* are also shown beneath the pedestal of the relief L8 [Figures 4.49–50].

¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, the thrones are variously supported by lions or atlante dwarfs.

¹⁰¹ On the north wall of the Deogarh temple, dated approximately to the first half of the sixth century, celestials hold a similar tiara above the head of Viṣṇu mounted on Garuḍa. See Lubotsky 1996: 172, fig. 4; also AIIS # 43726. The *mukūṭa*, i.e. “crown, diadem, or tiara” is found for the first time in texts in the Epics. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the enthroned Rāvaṇa is said to be splendid and crowned with a “golden tiara” (Rāmāy V 8, 23; V 47, 2). In the *Mahābhārata*, the gods and kings also wear tiaras (Mhbh I 26, 32; I 162, 8; III 170, 35; III 218, 1; IV 61, 27; VIII 68, 28; IX 44, 89).

¹⁰² See also J. Huntington (1980: 668) who sees the wreath as a “Gandhāran version of the Buddhist crown,” rather than a “prototypical crown.” Fukuyama (2014) also discusses these reliefs and compares them with some late-Gandhāran reliefs, the so-called “complex scenes,” where the wreath is held in the same manner by cherubs over the head of the Buddha. I thank Ken Ishikawa for drawing the latter reference to my attention and for providing an English synopsis of the text.

Intrusive Images

During the fifteen or so years of Vākāṭaka programmatic period that the Ajaṅṭā site flourished under the aegis of the elite or courtly donors, Spink argues that no “outsiders” could have contributed or donated a Buddha image or relief (Spink 2006: 161ff). Except for the two important shrine images in Caves 16 and 26, introduced to the site by Varāhadeva and Buddhābhadrā and probably completed *circa* 478 (see *supra*), no prior Bhadrāsana images were apparently carved at Ajaṅṭā.¹⁰³ But once these great patrons had departed from the collapsing site during the so-called “period of disruption” (*ca* 479–480), that is, the devastating years following Hariṣeṇa’s death, monks still resident there, along with local devotees and individual donors, briefly sponsored what Spink has accurately described as the “helter-skelter” donation of large numbers of single “intrusive” images, to make merit while they could. Again, according to Spink’s chronology (*ibid.*: 93ff, 158ff), after about 480 all artistic activity ends at the site, the craftsmen having departed. Presumably, monks continued to live in some of the caves for perhaps a few more years, after which the site became totally abandoned, except for the use of a few cells by Śaiva ascetics and the like in later centuries.

Spink showed, in his detailed listing of cave by cave intrusions (2005b), that hundreds, if not thousands, of separate Buddha images or Buddhist triads were individual donations; a few of these still have painted or incised dedicatory inscriptions (Cohen 2006). The presence of such donative inscriptions on or beneath iconic imagery invariably identified them as intrusions made to produce merit (cf. the *yad atra puṇyam* formula).¹⁰⁴ Much of this corpus has been described afresh by Morrissey as “palimpsests” which “apparently violated, disrupted and even vandalized” (2009: 110) the carefully controlled plans for the caves made during the programmatic period. Of note, however, these intrusive carvings and inscriptions appear only in caves where the main shrine image had been already dedicated by 478. In other words, these intrusive inscriptions are totally absent inside *vihāras* without proper consecrated shrines and unfinished excavations such as Caves 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15A, 23, 24, 28, 29 (e.g. Spink 2007: 56ff, 81ff, 127ff, 161ff, 169f, 170f, 178f, 290ff, 304ff, 342ff), or

¹⁰³ Spink notes a curious separation in time between the early depiction of such Bhadrāsana Buddhas in paintings and their later appearance in carvings (1975: 151, n. 17; 2006: 205, n. 2). He says the type appears in painting almost a decade before it appeared in sculpture, but, he also notes, always as part of Ajaṅṭā’s narrative murals, for example in Caves 1, 16, 17 and 21 (Yazdani 1955: 28f, 42, 109, pls 8a–b, 18b, 77b; Schlingloff 1988: 54, fig. 4.1; 60–62, fig. 3; Schlingloff 2000: I, 417, 434, 473, 475, 487, 491) [Figs 4.32–35].

¹⁰⁴ At Ajaṅṭā, Morrissey lists thirty five intrusive inscriptions by monks, nine by lay people, while eleven are still uncertain (2009: 119).

even in Cave 1 where the completed shrine was “ritually dead” and never “brought to life” (2006: 184ff). In Spink’s words:

[During the period of disruption] only such Buddha images (and the caves where they dwelt) that were “alive” and thus efficacious in fulfilling the donor’s anxious quest for merit, were acceptable. It is for this reason that the new donors, over and over, crowded their images, if necessary, into cramped spaces in caves where the Buddha image was in worship, while they left untouched the spacious wall surfaces of excavations where, for one reason or another, the image was never brought to sufficient completion to be put into ritual use (*ibid.*: 170).

Many of these intrusive images represent the Buddha, occasionally alone, preaching and seated in the “auspicious pose” on the conventional lion throne with his legs down, but more frequently attended by two Bodhisattvas (and sometimes even two Buddhas). The Buddha’s feet are usually planted on a double lotus pedestal, sometimes with a pair of deer and a wheel shown beneath, or supported by two *nāga*-kings. For these reasons, the panels are often thought to represent specific narrative episodes from the First Sermon at Sārnāth or the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, even though these compositions can often be seen as purely conventional preaching scenes, repeated far and wide over the site. Such carved or painted reliefs have been reported in various numbers, sizes, and states of preservation either on interior walls, porches, outer façades, or even in some neighboring shrinelets of Caves 2, 4, Upper 6, 7, 9, 9A–B, 10, 10A, 11, 12A, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 26 (e.g. Spink 2005b: 3, 8ff, 54ff, 98, 99ff, 105ff, 111ff, 116, 117ff, 147ff, 161ff, 168ff, 172ff, 189ff, 200ff). In the following, I list only a selection of some of the most important and well-known intrusive examples of Bhadrāsana Buddhas at Ajañṭā, leaving out several panel duplicates to avoid exhaustion and repetition.¹⁰⁵ In particular, I focus on those images accompanied by a painted or incised inscription in Sanskrit, to provide us with a better understanding of their nature and function.

¹⁰⁵ Several views of intrusive images not listed hereafter can be found on the AIIS website: # 61421–22 (Cave 4), # 61353, # 61359–60, # 97082, # 97084–85, # 98042–43 (Upper Cave 6), # 61277, # 61280–83, # 97117–18 (Caves 9A–B), # 61264 (Cave 10A), # 98407 (Cave 11), # 98464 (Cave 15), # 61588–89, # 96909–10, # 98515–16, # 98527, # 98717 (Cave 19), # 96945, # 96956 (Cave 20), # 98717 (Cave 23), # 19215, # 96699 (Cave 26, exterior).

Cave 2

A very worn painting from Cave 2's rear wall, to the left of the antechamber, seems to represent the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī with the main central Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* on a throne, of which only the pendant legs with feet resting on a lotus pedestal can be seen. Significantly, the throne of the Buddha appears to be placed under a mango tree with rich foliage and fruit (Yazdani 1933: 26–27, pl. 27; Schlingloff 2000: I, 510). The rest of the composition is filled with small Buddhas arranged in several rows. They are depicted with various hand gestures seated in the cross-legged position on full-blown lotuses springing from several stalks [Figure 4.51]. The miracle of the mango tree associated with the multiplication of Buddhas is a rare occurrence in the western Indian caves and deserves separate treatment later (see *infra*; also Fig. 4.103). According to Spink, this painting of the Great Miracle apparently “usurps the high-priority space on the left rear wall previously planned for a bodhisattva Padmapani” (2007: 54). Moreover, a donative record associated with the little intrusion found near the bottom in the right side corner safely places it during the period of disruption. It reads as follows:

1. *deya(dharmmo 'yam śākyabhikṣo)[r bhadanta budha]guptasya yad
atra pu[ṇyam]*
2. [ta] ----- (sa)rrvasatvā(nām) -----

Translation:

This is [the religious donation of the Śākyabhikṣu] reverend
Budhagupta... Let the merit therein ... all living beings (ed. & trans.
Cohen 2006: 280, inscr. no. 12).

Upper Cave 6

A previously unnoticed, now ruined, painted intrusion of a Bhadrāsana Buddha has an incomplete inscription near the top of the right front pilaster from Upper Cave 6, reading:

1. *(deya)dharmo ya[m] śākyabhik[ṣ]o[r ggo]vin[d]asya yad a(tra
puṇyam) ---*

Translation:

This is the religious donation of the Śākyabhikṣu Govinda. Let the [merit therein]... (ed. & trans. Cohen 2006: 285, inscr. no. 19).

Cave 7

A painted intrusion with an illegible, most likely donative, inscription is found on the rear wall of the porch of Cave 7, to the left of the shrine doorway (Cohen 2006: 286, inscr. no. 21; Spink 2006: 164 and 2007: 126). Despite the faintness of this painting, the central figure of a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* can be discerned. He is apparently delivering a sermon (First Sermon?) and seems to be attended by two standing figures tentatively identified as Bodhisattvas (Yazdani 1946: 13–14, pl. 11a).

Cave 9

Several painted intrusions with hardly legible donative inscriptions are found on the rear wall of the *caitya*-hall cave (Cohen 2006: 287ff, inscr. nos 23, 25, 26; Spink 2006: 245ff). In the usual manner, they depict the central Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* on a royal throne preaching with his two hands [**Figures 4.52a–b**]. His feet rest on a lotus pedestal and he is flanked by two bejewelled attendants. In one scene, a prominent *stūpa* or *caitya* on the right with a painted inscription on the base is present, referring to the *caitya* as the *deyadharmā* or religious donation of some unknown lay person or, more probably, a monk (Yazdani 1946: Appendix, 89, inscr. no. 8; Cohen 2006: 287–288, inscr. no. 24). Notably, these accompanying scenes, which Yazdani (1946: 20–22, pls 18a–b) thought were drawn from “the life of the Buddha,” appear to belong to a complete story, possibly related to a particular episode of the *Lotus Sūtra*. I describe and discuss in the summary the special significance of these narrative scenes.

A slightly better preserved painting is found on the cave’s triforium, above the ninth pillar of the right aisle (Foucher 1909: 26, pl. 4; Yazdani 1946: 23–24, pl. 15b; Zin 2003: II, pl. 20c; Spink 2006: 251ff). The enthroned Buddha in *bhadrāsana* is directly attended by two Bodhisattvas as fly-whisk bearers with two additional standing Buddhas turned towards the central triad [**Figures 4.53a–b**].¹⁰⁶ A donative inscription appears between the lotus pedestals

¹⁰⁶ See also AHS # 97139, # 97143.

upon which the two nearest attendants of the Buddha stand. It is given in four lines as follows:

1. [*siddham*] *deyadharmmo 'yam --- ravi*
2. *prabhasya [ya]d atra (puṇyam) tad [bha]*
3. *vatu mātā(p)it(r)os sarvvasattvā(nām)*
4. *ca*

Translation:

[Success!] This is the religious donation of ... Raviprabha. Let the [merit] therein be for [his] mother and father and all living beings (ed. & trans. Cohen 2006: 289, inscr. no. 27).¹⁰⁷

Cave 10

Yazdani (1946: 38, Appendix, 91, inscr. no. 4) and Cohen (2006: 299, inscr. no. 49) both have noticed an inscription on Pillar L9, face A, beneath the image of a sitting Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, but it is too faded to be read. In all likelihood, it recorded the name of the donor who sponsored the scene painted on this pillar [Figures 4.54a–b]. I again reserve the discussion on the identification of this scene and its possible affiliation with the *Lotus Sūtra* for later.

Several rows of other Buddhas preaching and seated in *bhadrāsana* are painted on top of the pillars in processions; they are alternatively dressed in white or red robes [Figures 4.55–56].¹⁰⁸ Because no donative inscriptions appear to seek credit for these, Spink (2006: 210ff) assigns them to the very last year of work during the programmatic phase (*ca* 478). In his view, these repetitive paintings were part of a contractual project to redecorate the overall interior of the *caitya*-hall as “processions” of Buddhas and were the work of a single group of artists who started simultaneously at pillars L5 and R5 and ended at pillars L10 and R10 respectively. Spink hypothesizes that, at this point, another group of painters took over and continued the work for a while, painting red-robe Buddhas, before this continuation halted due to unexpected circumstances. Spink (*ibid.*: 218f) explains the change

¹⁰⁷ For an earlier and slightly different edition, see Dhavalikar 1968: 151, fig. 5.

¹⁰⁸ For more views, see AHS # 96984, # 96986–87, # 98381–85, # 98387–89.

of colors in the robes, from white to red, by the “better availability, or perhaps the lower cost, of such [red ocre] pigments” during the chaotic transition between the programmatic phase and the immediately following intrusive period. Incidentally, similar painted rows of red-robed Buddhas, often inscribed with intrusive donative records of resident monks at the site, are seen on the pillars of the ancient *caitya*-hall at Pitalkhora [Fig. 4.68].

Cave 11

Late intrusive carved images, also once painted but now faded, seen on the right wall of the porch [Figure 4.57], as well as paintings found on the rear wall to the right of the shrine entrance, are attributed to the period of disruption (Spink 2005a: 220ff; 2006: 165; 2007: 160).¹⁰⁹ A donative inscription of a certain lay follower, which is dated to the same period, appears on the throne pedestal of the Bhadrāsana Buddha painted over a cloth-based surface of the rear shrine wall (Dhavalikar 1968: 149–150, fig. 3; Spink 1968: figs 16–19). The inscription reads:

1. [*siddham*] *deyadharmmo 'yam upā-*
2. *saka mitradharmmasya*
3. *yad atra puṇyam tad bhava[tu]*
4. *mātāpitro sarvvasatvānān ca*

Translation:

[Success!] This is the religious donation of the upāsaka Mitradharma.
Let the merit therein belong to [his] mother and father and all living
beings (ed. & trans. Cohen 2006: 307, inscr. no. 64).

Cave 19

The fine panel carved on the right wall outside the courtyard of Cave 19 which depicts the unattended Bhadrāsana Buddha is possibly one of the first intrusive images of this kind at Ajañṭā. Spink compares this low-relief with images from Cave 26 and slightly postdates it to around late 478 or early 479 (2005a: 147ff; 2007: 242). The large panel is framed on almost

¹⁰⁹ See also AHS # 96996, # 98407–08.

all sides by other small intrusive carvings of Buddhas in different standing or seated positions, either cross- or pendant-legged [Figure 4.58].¹¹⁰ These minor reliefs were probably donated later after the central composition was completed by different devotees who often appear kneeling at the base of their own panel offerings.

Cave 22

Late carved intrusions of the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* adorn the shrine and rear wall of the tiny but very late and unfinished Cave 22, which, according to Spink (2007: 288ff), was probably not even begun until 477 [Figures 4.59–60]. The cave has also three donative inscriptions, plus two important descriptive labels (Cohen 2006: 330ff, inscr. nos 88–90, 91–92).

The first donative record is associated with the panel found carved at the right of the entrance to the shrine [Figure 4.61]. The panel depicts a triad centered on the preaching Buddha enthroned on an elaborate *makara*-chair, flanked by two Bodhisattva attendants, each of which stands on a lotus pedestal supported by a long stalk. Two prominent *nāga*-kings uphold the middle stem that supports the lotus pedestal of the Buddha. Several garland-bearers crowd the scene at the top, while a pair of deer, and kneeling devotees are at the bottom of the composition. The two-line inscription is painted on both sides of the Buddha's pedestal, just beneath two lions which support his throne at the base. The inscription has been restored as follows:

1. (left) [*siddham*] *deyadharmmo 'yaṃ śākya-*
(right) *bhi[kṣo]r bhadanta bha--[sya] mātāpitro*
2. (left) *m udiśya sa[rvva]sa-*
(right) *tvānāñ ca bhavatu*

¹¹⁰ See also AHS # 98536–39.

Translation:

[Success!] This is the religious donation of the Śākyabhikṣu reverend Bha?. Let it be in honor of his parents and for all living beings (ed. & trans. Cohen 2006: 330, inscr. no. 89).¹¹¹

In addition to this intrusive panel, the donation of which occasioned the previous record, an important intrusive painted composition on the right wall inside the shrine of the cave shows the popular seven Buddhas theme, plus the future Maitreya as a Bodhisattva [Figure 4.62]. This painting is also accompanied by a donative inscription referring to the religious gift of a certain Śākyabhikṣu for the spiritual benefit of his parents and all sentient beings.¹¹² A label inscription found just below the row of seated Buddhas gives the following names (Yazdani 1955: Appendix, 111; ed. Cohen 2006: 332, inscr. no. 91):

1. *vipaśvī śikhī viśvabhū (krakucchandaḥ) ka[naka]muniḥ kāśyapaḥ śākyamuni maitre[yah]*

The first three listed Buddhas, i.e. Vipāśyī,¹¹³ Śikhī, and Viśvabhū, all seated cross-legged, belong to preceding *kalpas* (eons), while Krakucchanda,¹¹⁴ notably the only figure

¹¹¹ Cf. Dhavalikar 1968: 150–151, figs 4a–c.

¹¹² Cohen reads: ... *deyadharmmo 'yaṃ śākyabhikṣo m aparāśaila i...* (2006: 331, inscr. no. 90). The last part of this inscription was previously read and published as *śākyabhikṣho(r) ma[hā]yāna* (Yazdani 1955: Appendix, 112). However, according to Morrissey (2009: 69ff), while the latter reading appears impossible, the former interpretation put forward by Cohen that the Śākyabhikṣu may have been here affiliated to the Aparāśaila monastic lineage (*nikāya*) is “grammatically untenable” since it suggests an impossible case-ending. In all likelihood, the name of the monk is expected in the remainder of the inscription along with the genitive case-ending; all of this has been lost.

¹¹³ Another label inscription from Ajaṅṭā Cave 10 mentions the former Buddha Vipāśyī as a *samyaksambuddha* (Cohen 2006: 303–304, inscr. no. 58). The inclusion of the word *cetika* in the second part of this record has been interpreted to indicate that the donor was a member of the Cetika *nikāya*. Likewise, Cohen (1995a: 11ff) contends that the donative record of Cave 22 (see note *supra*), which he attributes to a monk possibly belonging to the Aparāśaila *nikāya*, is a case of “discontented categories” between the so-called Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

¹¹⁴ The name Kraku(c)chanda (variously spelt, cf. BHSD, s.v.) is actually lost in the inscription that concerns us here, but is supplied based upon canonical lists of the seven past Buddhas, e.g., the *Mahāvadānasūtra* which, when restored, reads: *itaḥ sa ekanavataḥ kalpo yasmiṃ kalpe Vipāśyī samyaksambuddho loke utpannaḥ itaḥ sa ekatrimśattamaḥ kalpo yasmiṃ kalpe Śikhī ca Viśvabhuk ca samyaksambuddhau loka utpannau asminn eva Bhadrakalpe catvāraḥ samyaksambuddhā loke utpannā Krakasundaḥ [= Krakucchandaḥ] Kanakamuniḥ Kāśyapo vayaṃ cāpy etarhi Śākyamuniḥ iyam atra dharmatā tasmād idam ucyate ||* (ed. Fukita 2003: 36). For the parallel passage in Pali, see D II 3, trans. Walshe 1995: 199.

depicted here in *bhadrāsana*,¹¹⁵ Kanakamuni, Kāśyapa, Śākyamuni, and the Buddha-to-be Maitreya constitute the (first) five Buddhas of the present *bhadrakalpa* or fortunate eon.¹¹⁶ Just above them, four still legible names are given for their respective *bodhi*-trees (ed. Cohen 2006: 332, inscr. no. 92):

1. --- *puṇḍarīka* --- *śirīṣaḥ udum(b)a(rah) nyagro(dhaḥ)* ---

Specifically, the Puṇḍarīka-tree (*Mangifera indica*) is found above Śikhī, the Śirīṣa-tree (*Acacia sirissa* or *Albizia lebbek*) above the presumed missing Krakucchanda, the Uḍumbara-tree (*Ficus glomerata* or *racemosa*) above Kanakamuni, and the Nyagrodha-tree (*Ficus benghalensis* or *indica*) over Kāśyapa.¹¹⁷ The combination of this painting with the inscriptions makes clear that the “auspicious pose” is not favored or restricted to any Buddha. In this case, only the former Krakucchanda is represented in the center as sitting in this manner, probably for symmetrical reasons, while on other occasions, other past Buddhas are also depicted in *bhadrāsana* in the western Indian caves (cf. *infra*).

¹¹⁵ The painting deteriorated in modern times to such an extent that a negative taken by Walter Spink in 1966 (AIIS # 96799) no longer shows Buddha Krakucchanda in his original pendant-legged posture. I was unable to access Cave 22 during my two visits at Ajaṅṭā in 2007 and 2012.

¹¹⁶ The *Mahāvādānasūtra* (cf. note *supra*, and its Pali counterpart, i.e. the *Mahāpadānasutta*) states that Vipasyī appeared 91 eons ago, while both Śikhī and Viśvabhū came into being as Buddhas 31 eons ago. In addition, a Pali commentary explains why our present *kalpa* is regarded as fortunate or auspicious: *evaṃ pañca kappā vuttā || tesu ayaṃ kappo Kakusandho Konāgamano Kassapo Gotamo Metteyyo ti pañcabuddhapaṭimaṇḍitattā bhaddakappo nāma jāto ||* (Ap-a, p. 542); i.e. “[...] Five (types of) eons are spoken of. As regards these, this (present) eon has become known as an ‘auspicious eon,’ on account of the fact that it will have been adorned with five Buddhas, viz. Kakusandha, Konāgamana, Kassapa, Gotama (and) Metteyya” (my translation). However, according to the later *Bhadrakalpikasūtra*, only extant in Tibetan and Chinese (trans. Dharma Publishing 1986), “approximately” 1,000 Buddhas must appear in the present *kalpa* of which 996 are yet to come. Both the *Lalitavistara* (trans. Foucaux 1884: 341; DTC 2013: 317) and the *Mahāvastu* (Mvu III 330; trans. J. Jones 1956: 321–322) seem to echo the same concept of a thousand Buddhas. Incidentally, a painted donative inscription from the antechamber wall of Ajaṅṭā Cave 2 (ed. Cohen 2006: 282–282, inscr. no. 14; Zin 2003: II, pl. 11) also mentions the religious gift of a lay follower (*sākyo-uśakasya* = Śākyopāsaka) sponsoring the depiction of a “thousand Buddhas” (*bu[d]dhā sahasam*). Could these represent past and future Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa? For an in-depth investigation on the concept of the “fortunate aeon,” see Skilling 2010; for more on the scheme of past Buddhas in different traditions, see Gombrich 1980, and Nattier 1991: 19ff. A variant list of 500 Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa is known in Tocharian Buddhism, on which see Pinault 2011.

¹¹⁷ For a recent study on the various essences of *bodhi*-trees of the seven past Buddhas, see Shimizu 2010: 18ff. The term *puṇḍarīka* occurring here does not denote the “white lotus,” but rather the “white mango tree” (*ibid.*: 36ff). That much is clear from the following Pali commentary on the *Buddhavamsa* which reads: *puṇḍarīkarukkho ti setambarukkho ||* (Mv 247); i.e. “the ‘Puṇḍarīka-tree’ is the white mango tree” (my translation).

Some intrusive panels (often unfinished) were added to the vestibule of Cave 26 and positioned at the rear of the circumambulatory wall [Figures 4.63–64]. According to Spink (2006: 89ff), these sculptures were carved at the rear of the *caitya*-hall sometime in 480, when the more desirable locations in the ambulatories had been occupied, and thus represent the very late trend at the site. In his own, slightly romanticized, words:

At first, the new donors, sponsoring intrusive images, made large panels which reflected, in a simplified way, those sponsored by Buddhābhaddra himself [see *supra*]. However, as the months went on, and pressures increased, the ambulatory walls were broken up into a confusing array of multiple separate donations, all of course Buddha images, either seated or standing. The figures here were almost certainly all private donations, and many probably had painted inscriptions, now long since lost (2009: caption to fig. 181).

The intrusive panels all display triads centered on a Bhadrāsana Buddha with attendant standing Buddhas instead of Bodhisattvas [Figure 4.65]. Half-way between the two types, however, Panel L2 intriguingly shows the central Buddha flanked by a crowned Bodhisattva carrying a lotus on his proper left and an attendant standing Buddha on his proper right [Figure 4.66].

Summary and Discussion

From the following survey, it is clear that the Bhadrāsana type became the “image of choice” at Ajañṭā throughout the later years of programmatic work during the late Vākāṭaka phase as well as during the chaotic aftermath that ensued during the period of disruption. It is fascinating to observe how rapidly this imagery proliferated throughout the complex to occupy the most visible spaces seemingly without a clear iconographic program. Generally speaking, one finds only larger Bhadrāsana figures among the intrusions during the early time of disruption (e.g. Caves 19, 22, 26). The latest generic intrusions, on the contrary, were smaller in size and often hastily carved in the least desirable areas once the better spaces had become occupied. This took place until the intrusive work at the site came to a sudden halt,

leaving many Buddha figures and reliefs unfinished, never plastered or painted (Spink 2009: 96ff).¹¹⁸ In most of the late Bhadrāsana reliefs produced at the site, the carving and decoration of the panels is reduced to a minimum. We shall see later below that the same craze and popularity of the Bhadrāsana type holds true at other cave sites as well, such as Auraṅgābād, Ellorā, Kaṇherī, and Nāsik, but, importantly, all post-date the Ajaṅṭā production.

The central question to be tackled then is why this new iconographic development first took place at Ajaṅṭā? Richard Cohen links the sudden appearance of the “regal posture” with Buddha images and the surrounding catastrophic political and historical events at Ajaṅṭā following Hariṣeṇa’s death. He writes, “the *bhadrāsana* Buddha was as a propaganda device during this [dark] moment in Indian political history” (1995b: 314) and “through the *bhadrāsana* iconography, patrons at the site invoked the Buddha to act in his capacity as Cakravartin, to maintain the Dharma and saṅgha at that time of crisis” (*ibid.*: 315).¹¹⁹ But, in addition to these external historical circumstances, internal and religious factors may have played a significant role as well.

During the so-called period of disruption, evidence for the presence of Mahāyāna cult activities is significantly more visible and substantial. We know that many of these “uninvited” donors or “intruders” at Ajaṅṭā, according to Spink (2005b), were monks who remained at the site in spite of the breakdown in organized patronage. It is likely that this period reflects the activities of remaining residents at the site, rather than an inflow of new exterior elements. Furthermore, epigraphic evidence confirms that the intrusive donors were mainly monastics. Cohen (1995b: 202ff) and Morrissey (2009: 119ff) have calculated that the monks at Ajaṅṭā included more than 75% of the identifiable donors during this period. Importantly, these monks specifically styled themselves Śākyabhikṣus. More precisely, Cohen counts no less than sixteen and eighteen extant intrusive records in the two *caitya*-halls, i.e. Caves 9 and 10 (1995b: 412, fig. 47). The argument for the likely Mahāyāna association of these Indian monks was assessed at the beginning of this chapter. If Śākyabhikṣus employing the *yad atra puṇyam* formula can be identified as connected to Mahāyāna Buddhism(s) and its practices, then it would appear that, on the basis of the available epigraphic evidence that the intrusive phase at Ajaṅṭā was a very active period for

¹¹⁸ The possibility exists that a significant proportion of this “intrusive” material was never intended to be visible, at least not for the human eyes. On this issue, see DeCaroli 2011.

¹¹⁹ For the complete argument, see the section titled: “The King is Dead, Long Live King Buddha” in Chapter 5 of his dissertation (Cohen 1995b: 297–315).

supporters of this movement(s). While this remains only a hypothesis, other art historical evidence to be reviewed below may further support this possibility.

Was the Lotus Sūtra Intentionally Depicted in Caves 9 and 10?

Several scholars have noted that, during this period of disruption, representations of the so-called “Litany of Avalokiteśvara” appear with increasing frequency; for instance, they are sculpted onto the porch of Cave 4, on top of which a small Bhadrāsana Buddha is also depicted in an arched niche [Figure 4.67],¹²⁰ or even painted as in Caves 2 and 17 (Yazdani 1955: 19, pl. 4a; Schlingloff 1988: 175ff, figs 1, 2), and sometimes accompanied by donative inscriptions (Cohen 2006: 285, 307, inscr. nos 18, 63).¹²¹ Other depictions of standing Bodhisattvas identifiable as ascetic forms of Avalokiteśvara with elaborate matted hair (*jaṭāmukuta*), a deerskin over one shoulder, and holding a water flask have also been observed on the pillars of the *caitya*-halls in Caves 9 and 10 (Spink 2006: 259ff; Morrissey 2009: 123–124).¹²² There is also a unique painting on a pillar in Cave 10 which, as G. Schopen convincingly argues, represents “the first, and so far only, known illustration of a Mahāyāna *sūtra* narrative in Indian art” (2005b: 294). According to Schopen, the image in question is an illustration of an episode drawn from the twenty-fourth (or twenty-fifth) chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* (cf. Murase 1971), in which the Bodhisattva Akṣayamati, after hearing the Buddha Śākyamuni narrate the generous qualities of Avalokiteśvara, standing on his proper left, presents to him a gift of a necklace of pearls “worth a hundred thousand” [Figs 4.54a–b]. Schopen’s tentative identification of this painting from Cave 10 is of considerable significance; he concludes, “if it is to be accepted, it proves for the first time that at least one specifically Mahāyāna text was actually known at this remarkable site, and this provides the impetus to look elsewhere at Ajaṅṭā for other traces of that same text” (*ibid.*). When combined with the numerous images of the “Litany of Avalokiteśvara,” it

¹²⁰ Traces of painting remain on the Buddha. See also AIIS # 61424.

¹²¹ Regarding Spink’s estimate (2005b: 6ff), more than a dozen painted or sculpted examples of the great savior or “Lord of travelers” occur at Ajaṅṭā. Depictions of the *aṣṭamāhābhaya* Avalokiteśvara, i.e. “protecting from the eight (sometimes ten) great perils,” are based on a specific literary description of that Bodhisattva as a savior found in the twenty-fourth (or twenty-fifth) chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* (Kern 1884: 406–418; Murase 1971). Virtually identical descriptions of Avalokiteśvara also appear in both the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* and the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*. Bautze-Picron (2004: 236ff, figs 34–35, 37, Appendix 2) notices that most examples of Avalokiteśvara as a savior are distributed on the left side (for the viewer) of the walls/entrances in the western caves. See also Mallmann 1948: 28–36, 39–47, 135–141, 292–296.

¹²² It is clear that these old caves, originally excavated during the first phase of activity at the site (*ca* 100 BCE–100 CE), had retained their sanctity throughout the centuries as they show both attempts at redecoration during the late Vākāṅka phase and several intrusions during the subsequent period of disruption (Spink 2006: 199ff).

would appear that increasing evidence, although short-lived, for the popularity of the *Lotus Sūtra* is found at Ajaṅṭā. But there is more.

Another, even more elaborate wall painting from Cave 9, briefly alluded to above for its inscriptional record, deserves further attention. The painting consists of a series of panels located in the circumambulatory path which covers most of the interior rear wall of the *caitya*-hall [Figs 4.52a–b].¹²³ The two central panels represent the standard iconic Bhadrāsana Buddha, separated by a *caitya* or a *stūpa*, flanked by a hieratic standing figure of a Bodhisattva, probably Avalokiteśvara, on the left. Dieter Schlingloff considers this Bodhisattva purely “scene dividers.” The painting is intermingled with narrative scenes, the overall content of which has been interpreted by Schlingloff as the conversion story of the Brahmin ascetic Kāśyapa by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, recounted in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (2000: I, 381ff). More specifically, the two Bhadrāsana Buddhas have been identified by the latter as the “night visit” of the gods to the Buddha on the left and the preparation for the Buddha’s ablutions on the right. Spink finds this identification dubious and writes that, in other contexts where very similar compositions are found, these panels have been thought to represent the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī (2006: 248–249). Morrissey (2009: 127ff, figs 28–32) has also expressed his doubts concerning Schlingloff’s identification and prefers to see the meaning in another passage illustrated in the eleventh and twenty-fourth chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which the “jewelled *stūpa*” of the former Buddha Prabhūtaratna dramatically appears (Kern 1884: 227–254, 406–418). Accordingly, Prabhūtaratna, then still a Bodhisattva, made a vow that he would appear in any world system in his jewelled *stūpa* whenever the *Lotus Sūtra* was taught by a future Buddha. Following the narrative of the *stūpa*’s origin, Śākyamuni then proceeds to open it and reveals the glowing body of Prabhūtaratna. According to Morrissey, this very event, the dramatic opening of the jewelled *stūpa*, is precisely what is being depicted in this painted composition of Cave 9.

In the scene, to the left, a painted Buddha in white robe, most probably Śākyamuni, is shown standing next to another Buddha seated on a throne, presumably Prabhūtaratna. This identification is suggested by the *stūpa* represented on the right [Fig. 4.52a]. The intention of

¹²³ The precise chronology of this painting within the site’s overall redecoration scheme at the site has been the source of controversy. Spink (2006: 245–250) noted that the extent and quality of execution of this painting, as well as its narrative content, suggests that it was at least begun during the programmatic phase. However, the presence of several painted donative inscriptions in association with this composition, found under the Bhadrāsana Buddhas and the *caitya/stūpa* (Cohen 2006: 287f), may indicate, according to Spink, that it was abandoned at some point and taken over and completed by “intruders” during the period of disruption. At any rate, it is obvious that this painting belongs to a very late period of activity at Ajaṅṭā, either in the final years of the programmatic phase or during the intrusive period.

the artist would perhaps have been to depict the Buddha Prabhūtaratna seated within the opened *stūpa*. Further to the right, the next portion of the composition seems to follow the textual narrative with minute details [Fig. 4.52b]. Morrissey interprets it as Prabhūtaratna inviting Śākyamuni to sit down with him inside the jewelled *stūpa*, reiterating his enthusiasm for the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*: “I repeat, thou hast well expounded this Dharmaparyāya of the Lotus of the True Law” (Kern 1884: 236). In this painted scene both Buddhas are seated together;¹²⁴ the Buddha figure on the right, identified as Prabhūtaratna, appears to indicate to Śākyamuni that he be seated, while the latter, having taken his seat and portrayed in the preaching gesture, seems to be inaugurating his sermons. Undeniably, the correspondence between text and image here seems quite striking and the depiction of the central jewelled *stūpa* in particular is, for Morrissey, a strong factor that would tie the overall iconography of the cave painting to the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The worship of the jewelled *stūpa*, witnessing Śākyamuni’s revelation of the Buddha Prabhūtaratna, to hear the exposition of the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* was a popular topic in China; it strongly captured early medieval Chinese art and imagination (e.g. J. Davidson 1954; Wang 2005).¹²⁵ Given this, the many white or red-robed Buddhas depicted on the pillars around the *caitya*-hall might perhaps echo the myriad transformed bodies of Śākyamuni which he summoned upon the opening of the *stūpa*. This could refer either to the eleventh chapter or to the thousand Buddhas found in the eighth chapter.¹²⁶ If the extant Chinese material corroborates that the worship of the jewelled *stūpa* of Prabhūtaratna was a focal point during this period throughout Buddhist Asia, including at Ajaṅṭā Cave 9, this would have manifold implications for other caves at the site such as in Caves 19 and 26.

¹²⁴ Admittedly, in all available translations of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the sitting posture of the Buddhas is either not specified or is enjoined to be in the cross-legged position. See however note *infra*.

¹²⁵ M. Rhie (2010: 123–124, 136, 318, figs 5.14a, b and 5.15a, b) reports some rare early paintings from Binglisi, Gansu province in China (Cave 169, groups 11 and 24), dated to *circa* the early fifth century, in which both Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna sit together in the jewelled *stūpa* with their legs pendant. She links this iconography to the eleventh chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* in its earlier Chinese translation by Dharmarakṣa (286 CE), where the sitting postures of the Buddhas are not indicated, as opposed to the Kumārajīva’s later rendition (406 CE) which specified that “the two Tathāgatas [were] sitting cross-legged on the lion seat” (trans. Kubo & Yuyama 2007: 172). This latter is the standard source for later Chinese art. The Sanskrit original indeed reads the same as in Kumārajīva’s translation: *evameva bhagavāṁstaṁ mahāntaṁ ratnastūpaṁ vaihāyasaṁ sthitaṁ dakṣiṇayā hastāṅgulyā madhye samuddhātya apāvṛṇoti sma | samanantaravivṛtasya khalu punastasya mahāratnastūpasya, atha khalu bhagavān prabhūtaratnastathāgato ’rhan samyaksambuddhaḥ siṁhāsānopaviṣṭaḥ paryaṅkaṁ baddvā* (ed. Vaidya 1960: 153).

¹²⁶ Krishna (1981: figs 1–3) and other scholars suggested that a few white-robed standing Buddhas painted on the pillars of Cave 10 show the influence of “Gandhāra” imagery. To me, however, these painted Buddhas look stylistically Chinese. Yazdani (1946: 38) also felt the paintings were of “North-West Indian [origin], [but] perhaps with a blend of Chinese element in them.”

Following this line of investigation, we could then query anew the mysterious identification and significance of the Buddha images fronting or perhaps, more accurately, emerging out of the rock-cut *caitya*.¹²⁷

The *Lotus Sūtra* states that Prabhūtaratna appears because, as a Bodhisattva, he made the following vow: “Let my Stūpa here, this Stūpa of my proper bodily frame (or form), arise wherever in any Buddha-field in the ten directions of space, in all worlds, the Dharmaparyāya of the Lotus of the True Law is propounded, and let it stand in the sky above the assembled congregation [...]” (Kern 1884: 229f). Śākyamuni later opens the *stūpa* with his right fore finger, thereby revealing Prabhūtaratna seated on a throne. At Prabhūtaratna’s invitation, Śākyamuni then enters the *stūpa*, and the two Buddhas sit alongside each other. Although Prabhūtaratna never became an object of cultic worship on his own in India, the imagery of the twin Buddhas sitting together was a frequent subject of Buddhist art as early as the fifth century. Incidentally, Cohen has noticed two Buddhas, seated side by side, which may or may not be a reference to the meeting of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, on the left side of the arch façade of Cave 26 (1995b: 297, fig. 76).

Morrissey observes two more remaining elements within the overall composition on the rear wall of Cave 9 at Ajañṭā that might be linked to other episodes of the *Lotus Sūtra* (2009: 131f, fig. 32). The first scene depicts an enthroned Buddha in *bhadrāsana* surrounded by a seated monastic audience in what appears to be a mountainous landscape. This is remarkably similar to the background described in the introductory passages of the text translated by Kern (1884: 1) as follows: “Thus have I heard. Once upon a time the Lord was staying at Rājagrha, on the Gṛdhra-kūta mountain [i.e., Vulture Peak] with a numerous assemblage of monks [...]” Morrissey (*ibid.*: 132ff) further notes in the same painting a visual representation of the famous parable of the burning house, expounded by the Buddha in the third chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which a structure is on fire, as indicated by the several figures climbing a ladder with pots in an attempt to extinguish it. In the foreground, a standing Buddha addresses several figures, one of whom is a monk that might be identified as Śariputra.

Admittedly, Morrissey’s preferred identification of the above scenes with episodes of the *Lotus Sūtra* runs counter to traditional interpretations;¹²⁸ he seeks to explain the entire

¹²⁷ Spink (2006: 205, 214, 241) argues that a Buddha image was almost certainly painted at the front center of the monolithic *caityas* in Caves 9 and 10 during the redecoration that took place in the late Vākāṭaka phase.

composition of the wall paintings in the cave as elements of a coherent visual program evocative of the Mahāyāna text. Should Morrissey’s interpretation be recognized, it would appear that through these paintings, the late artists and patrons of Cave 9 — predominately Śākyabhikṣus — might have sought to identify the cave’s early monolith *caitya* as the “jewelled *stūpa*” of the former Buddha Prabhūtaratna reckoned in the *Lotus Sūtra*. In other words, these intrusive artists and patrons might have made a conscious attempt to “carefully orchestrate the transformation of this *caitya* hall into a location sanctified by the preaching of the *Lotus sūtra*” (*ibid.*: 133). It might also, according to the same author, “provide the earliest, and only, evidence for an identifiable and localizable Mahāyāna *sūtra* cult within an Indian monastic site” (*ibid.*: 136). This provisional conclusion seems to concur with and substantiate Schopen’s argument in which he cited earlier several passages from the *Lotus Sūtra* (2005b: 38ff), stating that *stūpas* or *caityas* should be built in places where writing, recitation, and other activities associated with the *sūtra* were performed. One passage he quotes affirms that a *caitya* should be built wherever a person who retains the *sūtra* in memory might stand or sit, etc. The same passage refers to such a *caitya* as a *tathāgatastūpa*. Another passage states that a *caitya* should be made wherever the *sūtra* might be recited, illuminated, preached, written, considered, spoken, repeated, or set up as a book, “whether in a park or a *vihāra* or in a house or forest or city or at the foot of a tree or on a lofty platform or in a place of rest or a cave” (Schopen 2005b: 40; cf. Kern 1884: 324, 367). Schopen also presents these passages as clear evidence for the early existence of “book shrines” in India and suggests that the “specific kind of *caitya* which is to be built is consciously equated with the *stūpa*”, indicating that there was an “attempted amalgamation of two distinct cults, the *stūpa* cult and the book cult” (*ibid.*: 41). In other words, the *Lotus Sūtra* was perceived as so sacred that a *caitya/stūpa* of some kind should be “built” everywhere it was preached since it also functioned as a relic.

While Schopen’s ideas advocating for a “cult of the book” in early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism have since been challenged (e.g. Drewes 2007), a recent paper concluded that the cult of a certain type of textual culture, both oral and written, was highly mobile in India during the Middle Period (Apple 2014). Apple’s evidence is based on a study of the occurrence of the phrase *dharmaparyāyo hastagato*, i.e. “having the Dharma-discourse in one’s hand,” in a selected number of Mahāyāna *sūtras* — including the *Lotus Sūtra*.

¹²⁸ For example, questioning the place of the *Lotus Sūtra* in India, Silk writes: “To the best of my knowledge, there exists at present no known art historical or inscriptional evidence conclusively related to the Lotus in the Indian subcontinent” (2001: 88).

According to Skilling the appearance of the same phrase in a section of the twenty-sixth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* may conceptually illustrate how early Mahāyāna *sūtras* circulated in India. His deduction is based on an analysis of the verb *pra √car*, i.e. “to circulate/roam/wander” (SED, s.v.) and its use with a locative, as in *Jambudvīpe*.¹²⁹ The *Lotus Sūtra* may have thus played a critical role in transmitting innovative iconographic forms at Ajaṅṭā, spreading these conventions to the rest of western India, while also finding a new home in China, for example in the caves of Yungang, Dunhuang, or Longmen.

This text and other important Mahāyāna compositions have often been conveniently invoked in decoding the imagery, paintings, and reliefs from these other Buddhist cave complexes. I now turn to study the rest of this western Indian corpus in a more or less chronological order, even if overlaps inevitably exist.

Other Early Buddhist Caves

Most of the caves discussed below were developed in the early centuries CE or even before, and, after a long hiatus, were reoccupied, repaired, or further excavated in the late fifth through the sixth centuries CE. Buddhists, identified with commerce and manufacturing through their early association with traders, tended to locate their monastic establishments in natural areas — away from cities to avoid the distractions of the material world — but not so far from inhabited places as to hinder contact with people, especially donors. These “caves” presumably provided lodging for travelling traders and pilgrims, serving as important locations for rest, safety, exchange of information, and possibly fulfilling some other more pragmatic Buddhist functions as well as religious education and/or meditation practices.

Bagh, Dhamnar, and Kholvi

The Bagh rock-cut caves are situated among the southern slopes of the Vindhya hills in the state of Madhya Pradesh, some 300 km northwest of Ajaṅṭā. Walter Spink (1977) has seen

¹²⁹ This section states: *ayaṃ ca bhagavan saddharmapuṇḍarīko dharmaparyāyo 'smiṃ jambudvīpe pracaramāṇo yeṣāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ hastagato bhaviṣyati tair bhagavan dharmabhāṇakair evaṃ veditavyam | samantabhadrasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyānubhāvena yad asmākam ayaṃ dharmaparyāyo hastagataḥ samantabhadrasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya tejasā |* i.e. “Blessed One, **when this Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-dharmaparyāya circulates in Jambudvīpa, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattvas into whose hands it falls**, those *dharmabhāṇakas* should know this: It is by power of the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Samantabhadra that this *dharmaparyāya* has come into our hands, by the might of the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Samantabhadra” (ed. Vaidya 1960: 265; trans. Skilling 2004: 192).

these caves as one of the cardinal evidences for dating the Ajaṅṭā's second phase, provided that the date of the copperplate inscription of Mahārāja Subandhu's year 167 discovered there is in the Gupta era. The same inscription was previously assigned to the Kalacuri era by Mirashi (1955: 17ff). On the basis of his new dating and the content of the inscription, Spink observed that the Bagh caves were excavated probably just before the last years of the fifth century, when King Subandhu was ruling over the former Vākāṭaka stronghold of Anūpa. But, according to Spink (1977: 64), "other considerations related to the iconography of Buddha images at Bagh equally support the view that the site cannot be dated prior to the last part of the fifth century A.D." Among the iconographic features he reports are traces of an image, presumably of a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* (now lost) glimpsed above a *nāga* shrine at the left of the courtyard of Cave 4 (*ibid.*: figs 14 and 15), where the wheel and deer are positioned in profile below the composition where the Buddha's feet would have stood. Two *caurī*-bearers, now largely obliterated except for their fly-whisks, once probably flanked the image.

As was demonstrated above, the Bhadrāsana type became increasingly popular from the last quarter of the fifth century onwards in the western Deccan caves. Spink also considers that "the bhadrāsana type itself might be considered an 'import' from earlier sites in the southeast, in particular Nagarjunakonda, just as it might also find a source in the 'bhadrāsana' posed figures of yakshas or bodhisattvas from the Gandhara area" (2006: 43; also **Chapter 2**). As it happens, a colossal Yakṣa seated in the auspicious pose is carved in another niche at the left of the exterior court of Cave 4; this supports Spink's interpretation and dating of the Bagh caves (AIIS # 99405–07).

A few dilapidated Bhadrāsana Buddha images, still unpublished, are present in the roughly contemporary sites of Kholvi and Dhamnar, also located in Madhya Pradesh or nearby Rajasthan. These suggest that the relatively unknown excavations were probably begun in the same period during which Bagh was flourishing (Spink 1977: 62).

Pitalkhora

The site of Pitalkhora consists of about twenty remote caves and forms one of the earliest centers of the rock-cut architecture in India. It is located nearly 50 km northwest of Ellorā and 90 km west of Ajaṅṭā in a very deep and narrow valley, which is the reason for its modern name "Brazen Glen." All the caves belong to an early Buddhist phase of excavation which may date back to the first or second century BCE, but the paintings were executed

much later during a brief (no more than a few decades) phase of renewed patronage, from the late fifth century CE through the beginning of the sixth (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 242ff; Pandit 2012b). That some painting survived, albeit often in a poor state of preservation, is probably because the caves were abandoned shortly afterwards and kept in the dark for centuries.¹³⁰

Nicolas Morrissey (2009: 138ff; 2013) has recently studied the series of painted images along the ambulatory walls and interior pillars of Cave 3, some accompanied by painted donative inscriptions. In many cases, kneeling figures wearing a white robe and displaying the *añjali* gesture appear below the Buddha image. Some instances of preaching Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* are depicted on the pillars that were first plastered before the images were painted [Figure 4.68].¹³¹ None of these images seem to be identifiable as specific Buddha figures. However, the survival of the paintings and their donative inscriptions in Cave 3 allows some insight into the identity of the patrons and confirms their dating to the late fifth or early sixth century based on style, iconography, and paleography. In the six remaining inscriptions, edited and translated by Morrissey (2009: Appendix, nos 77–82), the donors can be identified as Śākyabhikṣus and almost all are adopting the *yad atra puṇyam* donative formula which several scholars associate with Mahāyāna ideals (see *supra*). In one particular case, in the interior left ambulatory wall beneath a mutilated painting of a seated Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, the inscription has been painted on the left and right sides of a wheel and between two kneeling devotees. According to Morrissey (*ibid.*: Appendix, no. 77), only two lines are legible:

1. [deya]dhar[mmo'ya]ṁ śāk[ya]bhi[kṣor] --- radhasya
2. ā[ca]ryā --- sarvva--nā[ṁ yada]tra puṇya[ṁ]

Translation:

1. This is the pious gift of the Śākyabhikṣu... radha... what here is the merit...
2. Teachers... all...

¹³⁰ Similarly, ancient paintings “chiefly of Buddha with attendants,” have been reported at Bedsa on the interior pillars in the main *caitya*-hall; they are unfortunately lost to us. See Fergusson & Burgess 1969: 230–231.

¹³¹ See also AHS # 085169–70, # 085182–83.

Several other standing figures, clad as ascetics, also appear in these paintings. They wear white robes, have matted hair, possibly carry a lotus or a water flask, and might perhaps have been intended as representations of Avalokiteśvara or Maitreya (Morrissey 2013: figs 3, 7–8, 11). On the whole, this led Morrissey to conclude that “the available evidence indicates that activity at the Piṭalkhorā monastery was indeed, at least in part, sponsored by a group of monks who were adherents of Mahāyāna Buddhism” (2009: 150). This, again, would reinforce the religious context in which Bhadrāsana Buddha imagery emerges at these cave sites during this crucial period.

Karla, Kuda, and Mahad

The important Karla cave complex is built into a rocky hillside around 60 km northwest from Pune, in Maharashtra. Far less known, the Kuda caves are located about 140 km west of Pune, close to the coast in south Konkan. Another cluster of caves are situated at Gandharpale in the Western Ghats or Sahyadri hills about halfway from Pune to Kuda, near the city of Mahad. The majority of these Buddhist sites arose near major ancient seaports, trade routes, and natural passes or river valleys, running eastward from the Arabian Sea into the Deccan, although some were quite isolated, suggesting possible “forest” monastic retreats as well.¹³²

The main cave at Karla features a large, intricately carved, *caitya*-hall dating back to approximately the beginning of the Common Era. This is among the largest and most impressive rock-cut *caitya*-halls in India. Except from a few later invasive sculptures found on the outside façade, the remaining imagery belongs to the earlier Buddhist occupation at the site (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 232–242). I am only here concerned with these intrusive panels dating probably to the late fifth, early sixth century, the most famous of which has been published several times [Figures 4.69a–b]. It represents a complex scene with a Buddhist triad where both fly-whisk attendants are clad as ascetics. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1935: 53–54, pl. VII) interpreted the central pendant-legged figure in this relief as the Buddha in *sambhogakāya*, i.e. the “blissful body” in Mahāyāna philosophical thoughts, as embedded for example in the *Lotus Sūtra*. According to him, the whole relief, which can be divided in three planes, represents the three cosmic spheres of existence. From bottom to top, these are 1) the water-plane represented by two *nāgas*, chthonian creatures *par excellence*,

¹³² For earlier theories on the association of Buddhist caves with ancient trade routes, see Ray 1986 and, more recently, Ray 2013. However, some Buddhist caves recently discovered in the vicinity of Thanale are located far away from ancient trade routes. For detailed information on these caves, see Ganvir 2014.

holding a long vertical lotus stem upright as an *axis mundi* which would also conceptually link Mount Gṛdhrakūṭa, i.e. Vulture Peak, with the mythical Mount Meru. 2) In the middle is the earth-plane where the Buddha is seated on a lion throne, with his feet on the lotus over a conventionalized wheel flanked by two deer, appearing to preach the Dharma to an assembly of Bodhisattvas on top of Vulture Peak. 3) Finally, uppermost, the heavenly-plane, represented by flying figures on top holding an object over the Buddha's head [Figure 4.70] Coomaraswamy (*ibid.*) identified this as a *stūpa*, symbol of the Buddha's final *parinirvāṇa* when he reached the eternal principle.

Mireille Bénisti (1961), who studied this relief afresh in the light of another similar panel located in an adjacent *vihāra*-cave at Karla [Figure 4.71], rejected this interpretation. She, following other scholars, identified the object held by the *vidyādhara*s as a tiara, not a “flying *stūpa*” as did Coomaraswamy. Based on this, she concluded that the scene should be rather related to the “coronation” of the Buddha after preaching the twofold *Lotus Sūtra* to both the assembly of Śrāvakas on earth and to the Bodhisattvas residing in Tuṣita. She also discounted the scene with *nāgas* below the wheel — a conflation of patterns we have already noticed at Ajaṅṭā Cave 26 — as mere iconographic contamination between the First Sermon and the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī. The latter representation of the Great Miracle was widely depicted in the Buddhist caves of western India during the late fifth through the sixth centuries. At stake in this display of power was the issue whether the ascetic teacher, i.e. the Buddha, could claim supremacy on earth and win over the support of lay supporters and potential royal patrons.

Following the same line of interpretation, Claudine Bautze-Picron (2010a: 42, figs 48ff) notices that other similar scenes of coronation appear at Karla, on the same façade as well as in adjacent caves [Figures 4.72–74], and also in Kuda Cave 6 where several reliefs represent the enthroned Buddha [Figure 4.75], often carved with *nāga* motifs holding up the lotus on top of which the wheel and two flanking deer are also erected.¹³³ As at Karla, these sculpted panels are considered late intrusive additions and not part of the original design and plan of the caves. We know this for sure because they were also incised by individuals below the seated Buddha images with the common *yad atra puṇyam* formula. In three cases, they were recorded as the donations of certain Śākyabhikṣus (Morrissey 2009: Appendix, nos 60–63). These panels therefore comprise important visual evidence for understanding the chronological and religious development of the imagery.

¹³³ See also AHS # 84579–80. Bautze-Picron further argues that the *nāga* scene did not necessarily belong to the original scheme of the above Karla panel (*ibid.*: 43).

The Buddhist caves at Gandharpale, near Mahad,¹³⁴ although, for the most part, excavated earlier, were also reoccupied during the late fifth or early sixth century, as evidenced by the presence of some late intrusive panels. For example, in Cave 1, a worn panel shows a seated Buddha in *bhadrāsana* carved on the front of an unfinished squarish block of stone rising to the roof of the separate shrine chamber [Figures 4.76–77]. This was most likely intended to be originally shaped as a monolithic three-dimensional *caitya*, located inside the cell at the rear end of the astylar and flat-ceiling cave.¹³⁵ The central Buddha image is flanked by two attendants whose attributes are unclear, thus their identities as Bodhisattvas are difficult to ascertain (Pandit 2012a: fig. 159). In addition, two celestials flying under a *makara*-arch are clearly visible with an object in their hands, most likely a tiara, as if crowning the Buddha’s head. Below his feet, a pair of deer near a wheel can only be guessed at, given their poor state of preservation. Carved on the side wall of the smaller Cave 21, in the middle of which stands a plain monolithic *caitya* in stone, another intrusive panel bears a striking resemblance with previous “coronation scenes” of the Buddha (Pandit 2012a: 125, figs 161–162) [Figure 4.78].¹³⁶ Stylistically, these sculptures are close to Karla and Kuda reliefs; similar *makara*-arches are also extensively found at Kaṇherī caves (discussed below), and thus probably date to the same period or slightly later, presumably in the late fifth–early sixth century.¹³⁷

Kaṇherī (and Kondivate)

The Kaṇherī caves constitute a large group of rock-cut monuments amounting to a total of about one hundred excavations located in the northwest outskirts of Mumbai, on the island of Salsette.¹³⁸ The name Kaṇherī originates from the Sanskrit term *kṛṣṇagiri*, known from ancient inscriptions, meaning “black mountain,” possibly because the caves were chiseled out

¹³⁴ Formerly known as Mhar, on which, see Fergusson & Burgess 1969: 209–211.

¹³⁵ See Owen 2001: 37–38. This unfinished cave has also been described as a *caitya*-cum-*vihāra* type, following the plan of the rock-cut architecture seen in several other late western Deccan caves. Suraj Pandit (2012a: 103) places this cave in the Traikūṭaka period, *circa* late fifth, early sixth century, according to his chronology of the dynasty.

¹³⁶ James Burgess (1969: 210–211) described the scene “with a figure of Buddha seated with his legs down, attended by *chaurī* bearers and *vidyādhara*s, the latter holding a mitre over his head.”

¹³⁷ Alone (2002: 250–252) dates the Mahad sculpture to the second half of the fourth century CE, but I find this dating much too early and unlikely.

¹³⁸ Several competing systems of cave numberings exist for Kaṇherī. See Leese 1983: 283–284, Appendix I, and Pandit 2004: 367–370. I follow the most recent system propounded by the Archaeological Survey of India.

of a massive basaltic rock. Buddhist sources called the site Aparānta, which thrived during the early period due to its proximity to ancient sea port towns such as Sopāra.

Kaṇherī is believed to be one of the oldest cave formations in coastal western India. The cave complex may at least date back to the first century CE and was in occupation probably through the tenth century CE, proving the continued importance of Aparānta/Kaṇherī as a major monastic center (Ray 1994).¹³⁹ The caves have been mentioned since the sixteenth century by early European and other visitors. However, the antiquarian zeal of the late eighteenth century, in particular, led several European residents to leave amusing drawings of the caves, with possibly some of the earliest illustrations of pendant-legged Buddhas ever depicted in western art (Wright 2011: 205, fig. 5).

Early Excavations with Intrusive Images

Rock-cut activity at Kaṇherī can be divided into two major phases, separated by a long hiatus, consistent with an apparent general lack of patronage in this part of western India. The first activity phase spanned from around the first to the third centuries CE. The most prominent excavation belonging to this phase is Cave 3, a *caitya*-hall dating to the period of the Sātavāhana king Yājñaśrī Sātakarṇi (r. ca 172–201 CE). However, the veranda of Cave 3 contains several sculptures of Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* that are later, intrusive, additions (cf. second phase *infra*), datable to around the fifth–sixth centuries (Leese 1979: 84, fig. 5). More precisely, one of these intrusive panels sculpted in low-relief appears on the façade wall of Cave 3, below which is an inscription stating that the panel is the “pious gift of the Śākya monk (*bhikṣu*) Dharmagupta” (Leese 1983: 123–124, 257, fig. 331; AHS # 55534) **[Figure 4.79]**.¹⁴⁰ Surprisingly, paleographically this inscription has been assigned to the early fourth century by Yashadatta Alone (2002: 249), who also assigns the other Traikūṭaka inscriptions to the same period.¹⁴¹ However, inherent problems with the early dating of these

¹³⁹ For an early description of the caves, see Fergusson & Burgess 1969: 348ff.

¹⁴⁰ The inscription in Sanskrit reads: *deyadharmmo 'yaṁ śākyaabhikṣo[r] dharmmaguptasya* (cf. Burgess 1883: 77; Gokhale 1991: 52–53; Tsukamoto 1996: 420, Kanh 8).

¹⁴¹ The Traikūṭaka dynasty, according to Mirashi (1955: 25–32) and others (e.g. Pandit 2012a: 157ff, Appendix), was, on the basis of copperplate inscriptions allegedly dated in the Kalacuri era, in independent control of the western coastline by 490 CE. Alone (2002: 71–74), however, opines that the region was more likely still in the hands of the Konkan Mauryas and that the Traikūṭaka copperplates ought to be dated in the Śāka era, not that of the Kalacuri. If this latter is the case, their ascendancy in the region ought to be dated much earlier and relegated to the fourth century. In other words, according to the latter position, the Traikūṭakas were never the feudatories of the Vākāṭakas as previously thought. Stylistic and iconographic considerations, however, decisively favor the first interpretation.

inscriptions, for reasons exposed in this dissertation, lead me to stylistically date this Buddha image in *bhadrāsana*, and others of its kind at the site, to at least a century later, probably somewhere in the late fifth or early sixth century. This dating echos the other Śākyaabhiṣu inscriptions found at Ajaṅṭā (see *supra*) and other western Indian caves.

Adjacent Cave 2 also has a number of seated Buddha images sculpted in low-relief on the left interior wall bearing the same features (Leese 1983: fig. 317; AIIS # 84314, # 84321). These include a series depicting seven Bhadrāsana Buddhas with a seated Bodhisattva on the right (*ibid.*: 122, fig. 320; AIIS # 84319, 84320) [Figure 4.80]. A similar row of seven Buddhas, albeit seated alternatively in meditation and in the pendant-legged pose, appear on the right wall of Cave 3's veranda (Leese 1983: 256f, fig. 503). On the basis of a similar painting found at Ajaṅṭā Cave 22 and identified by inscriptions, these panels likely represent the seven past Buddhas, including the historical Śākyamuni and his six predecessors, accompanied by the future Buddha Maitreya. Cave 4, just as Cave 2 above, has a small monolithic stone *caitya* inside its chamber. It also has numerous panels with teaching Buddhas in the pendant-legged pose covering its walls, a type which appears on the *caitya* drum as well, facing various cardinal directions (*ibid.*: 126, fig. 336; AIIS # 72788, # 84336–43, # 84345) [Figures 4.81–82]. Other Bhadrāsana Buddha images were likewise added to the walls of many first-phase caves. Marilyn Leese recorded and described similar intrusive panels depicting a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, often flanked by two attendants, sculpted either on the exterior veranda, the interior side walls, or the rear walls of Caves 5, 19, 26, 50, 53, 56, 64, 67, 73, 79, and 93 respectively (1983: 90, 127, 129ff, 252ff, figs 33, 341f, 346ff, 350f, 353, 356–363, 368ff, 381f, 385) [Figures 4.83–92].¹⁴²

Later Excavations

The second phase of excavation activity at Kaṅherī probably dates from the mid-fifth through the mid-sixth centuries. M. Leese worked on these late excavations, represented by a group of 90 caves in total, for her doctoral dissertation (1983). Her interpretation closely follows the framework and chronology of W. Spink; she and Spink both assign the renewal of activity at the site to the rise of the Traikūṭaka dynasty from the late fifth century onwards. Indeed, the discovery of several copperplates at or around Kaṅherī — with unknown era dates but which

¹⁴² For more views from Cave 50, see AIIS # 84357, # 84360, # 84364–66; for Cave 53, see AIIS # 85486; for Cave 67, see AIIS # 55543, # 85488, # 85490, # 85493, # 86005; and for Cave 73 (mislabeled Cave 72), see AIIS # 55511.

scholars generally equate with the Kalacuri's after Mirashi (1955: I, 25–32) — mention the rule of the Traikūṭakas over the area. One copperplate in particular, ascribed to a date *circa* 494–495 CE, mentions the “Great Monastery at Kṛṣṇagiri” (Gokhale 1991: 8). More recently, Suraj Pandit, in his dissertation (2004) and several other publications (e.g. 2003, 2009, 2012) has asserted and further substantiated this dating. I also subscribe to this view and dating; in practical terms this means that Kaṇherī late sculptures made during this second-phase of activity should usually be mainly dated to immediately after the work of Ajaṇṭā, that is, shortly after the collapse of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas. This dating contradicts that by Y. Alone (2002). In other words, all the figures discussed hereafter should stylistically and iconographically be safely dated to the interval between Ajaṇṭā and Auranṅābād and before the early Buddhist sculptures at Ellorā.

New Shrines, Buddhist Triads, and Miracles

A major difference appearing with the second-phase Kaṇherī caves is the addition of a furnished shrine chamber at the hall's rear wall, as appears in Caves 11, 41, 52, 87, and 89, and was absent during the first phase (Leese 1983: 94f, 98, 100ff, 108, 111, 151, 156, 178ff, 246, 263, figs 65, 74, 77, 125, 142, 144ff, 172, 174, 176–179, 194, 247, 260f, 264ff, 281, 409ff, 516, 543) [Figure 4.93].¹⁴³ During this second-phase, as already noted, multiple stereotype panels of a Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, often arranged in triads, adorn the small shrines and side walls of many caves [Figures 4.94–100].¹⁴⁴ The central Buddha sculpted in high-relief and seated on a throne, always displays the preaching gesture with two hands held together and feet generally supported by a lotus stalk upheld by two *nāgas*. He is generally flanked by either two standing Buddhas, two fly-whisk attendants, or two Bodhisattvas differentiated by their hair styles, clothes, emblems, or attributes, or, on rare occasions, even female attendants (Tārās?).¹⁴⁵ Based on these elements, at Kaṇherī the Bodhisattva attendant on the Buddha's proper right generally suggests a prince or royal type and that on the

¹⁴³ For Cave 11, see also AIIS # 55535; for Cave 41, see AIIS # 85466–67. In Caves 12 (AIIS # 85444) and 52 (AIIS # 55514, # 85475, # 85477), the main shrine Buddha is also seated in the pendant-legged pose, but neither attendants, nor celestials, or lotus pedestals appear. Below the unfinished platform of Cave 12's main Buddha image, an abraded and totally illegible inscription has been noticed (Leese 1983: 104, 111, figs 205–206, fig. 279f).

¹⁴⁴ For more views from Cave 11, see AIIS # 55531–32, # 85440–41; for Cave 41, see AIIS # 85468–69; for Cave 52, see AIIS # 85478; for Cave 89, see AIIS # 55508–10; and for Cave 90, see AIIS # 55503, # 85497.

¹⁴⁵ The same development occurs at other sites where the Buddha is sometimes attended by two standing Buddhas, forming a triad. For a study of Bodhisattva imagery at Kaṇherī, see Pandit 2009; for so-called Tārā goddesses generally appearing as mere attendants, see Pandit 2002.

Buddha's left indicates an ascetic type. This triadic arrangement appears, for example, in Caves 11 [Figs 4.94–95] and 67 [Fig. 4.88]. In these caves, the Bodhisattva on the left side of the Buddha is recognized as Avalokiteśvara, with ascetic features holding a lotus in the left hand. In contrast, the Bodhisattva on the right side of the Buddha is characterized by kingly attire, wearing a three-pointed crown (*triśika*). He holds a long stem lotus in full-bloom either in his left hand [Fig. 4.88] or one flanks his right side [Figs 4.94–95]. In this region, the lotus has never been associated with any Bodhisattva other than Avalokiteśvara and so it presumably represents this figure again, albeit in a different guise.¹⁴⁶ If my identification is correct, this would be another presumed instance of a double representation of Avalokiteśvara flanking the Buddha, where the ascetic type co-exists with the ornate type (see also *supra*).

In Cave 89 (AIIS # 55509–10, # 85504), for example on the left side of the shrine entrance [Figure 4.101], close up views allow us to see that the Buddha's proper left attendant has a deerskin on his left shoulder, a sure sign of ascetism, as well as a *caitya* emblem in front of his topknot. However, Maitreya is probably not referred to here since the figure also holds a long lotus stalk (I. Kim 1997: 159). Moreover, Inchang Kim writes, “the artist of Kānherī seems to have emphasized the cult of Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara more than that of Maitreya” (*ibid.*: 160; see also p. 188). In at least one instance, however, we may see Vajrapāṇi in princely garb substituted for the ascetic attendant; Vajrapāṇi holds the *vajra* with his left hand, on the Buddha's proper left [Fig. 4.90]. In some other cases, the ascetic and prince types are reversed; it is then possible to recognize Avalokiteśvara as an ascetic on the Buddha's proper right, while Vajrapāṇi remains on the left [Figure 4.102]. These triads are also supported by double lotus pedestals while flying celestials overhead bring a garland or other offerings to the central Buddha. Traces of plaster and paint may be seen here and there on these panels and it is entirely possible that the donors may have recorded their names by painting them on the plaster (now lost) in order to get spiritual benefit for the donations.¹⁴⁷

In Caves 11 or 87, moreover, shrines are composed like a triptych tableau of three attended Bhadrāsana Buddhas, one sitting on the rear wall and the other two carved on each side wall (Leese 1983: 95, 98, figs 88–90, 118–120). Is it possible that these thrice seated

¹⁴⁶ I. Kim (1997: 189) considers that the type of crown Bodhisattvas wear was restricted to Maitreya only and that the representation of the “lotus” may in fact be a prototype of the *nāgakesara* (or *nāgapuṣpa*), i.e. the flower of Maitreya.

¹⁴⁷ See Pandit 2003: 392f who sees the production of these intrusive panels at Kānherī as one way to fulfill the economic needs of the local Saṅgha. Several inscriptions at Ajaṅṭā were similarly painted directly on pillars, panels, or other architectural elements donated to the caves (Cohen 2006).

Buddhas, also observed at Nāsik Caves 16, 23–24 (see *infra*), represent the three generic Buddhas of the Three Ages, i.e. Past, Present and Future, or else, the Three Assemblies of Buddha Maitreya as known mainly in Chinese sources?¹⁴⁸ According to these scriptures, translated or composed in early medieval China, when Maitreya descends to become a Buddha in a glorious distant future, he will hold three assemblies beneath the Nāgapuṣpa-tree (*Mesua ferrea*, i.e. “Dragon flower”); those people who attend to hear the Dharma directly from him will achieve arhatship. The topic of the Three Assemblies of Maitreya is sometimes represented by three Bhadrāsana Buddhas in mural paintings and carvings at Dunhuang (e.g. Caves 55, 148, 329, 445) and other Buddhist caves (e.g. Yulin Cave 25), along the Chinese Silk road during the Tang period (Dorothy Wong, Pers. Comm.). As tempting as it may be to identify some of these Kaṅherī intrusive shrine panels with this textual scheme, in my opinion it is too risky to read back evidence from far distant regions, such as China, and apply it to these western Indian caves. This is all the more so since the independent messianic cult of Maitreya as a manifested Buddha seems to be totally unknown in South (and Southeast) Asia during the first millennium CE (cf. Jaini 1988).¹⁴⁹ On the contrary, I. Kim’s detailed analysis (1997: 145ff) regarding the iconography of Maitreya in South Asia reveals that the coming Buddha is only represented as an attendant Bodhisattva in the western Deccan caves and the concept of Maitreya as a Buddha had not gained the same importance in South Asia as it had in China.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Allusions to the Three Assemblies of Maitreya are either totally absent (cf. *Maitreyāvādāna*) or much shorter (cf. *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*) in Sanskrit sources. See Lévi 1932: 388, 395. For Chinese texts, see especially the *Sūtra of Maitreya Becoming a Buddha* [Ch. *Mile chengfo jing*, T. 456] and the *Sūtra of Maitreya’s Descent* [Ch. *Mile laishi jing*, T. 457]. On the popular Maitreya soteriology and cult in China, see Y. Lee 1983 and Yin 2012. For a recent and exhaustive study of Chinese Maitreya *sūtras*, see Legittimo 2008.

¹⁴⁹ In the Pali Canon, three past Buddhas — Vipassī, Sikhī, and Vessabhū — also had three assemblies (*sannipāta*) each. Gotama and his three direct predecessors, viz. Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa, from the present fortunate eon (*bhaddakappa*), held only one assembly each. See D II 5ff (trans. Walshe 1995: 200–201); also Nattier 1988: 46–47, n. 60. However, the *Dirghāgama*, translated in Chinese, has a parallel passage where the Buddha Viśvabhū (P. Vessabhū) is said to have held only two assemblies (Muller 2012: 293). The same holds true in the *Mahāvādānasūtra* (ed. Fukita 2003: 40).

¹⁵⁰ To my knowledge, the earliest Maitreya (Ch. Mile) Buddha image seated in *bhadrāsana* found in China is the gilt bronze statue, inscribed and dated 423 CE (“the first year of Jingping reign of the Southern dynasties”), said to come from Yulin city. It is now exhibited in the Shaanxi History Museum in Xi’an and has been discussed at length by M. Rhié (2002: 455ff, figs 2.82a–d, pl. VIII). Incidentally, a “fuzzy star” (i.e. comet) was observed and documented in Chinese historical records precisely during that same year 423 (Pankenier *et al.* 2008: 57–58). This comet may have been interpreted by some Buddhist circles, possibly intermingled with Daoist eschatology, as a “cosmic sign” announcing the apocalypse at the end of a cycle known in Chinese as *mofa* (末法), seeing the gradual disappearance of the doctrine, and followed by the far distant, if not imminent, advent of Buddha Maitreya (cf. Zürcher 1982; Nattier 1988: 30–32 and 1991: 90ff). The date also falls immediately after Faxian’s return from India in 415 and thus suggests that the *bhadrāsana* type, later known as

In Caves 89 and 90, intrusive panels in low-relief appear on all four walls of the halls, suggesting that they can literally transform the caves into “living shrines” (Leese 1983: 101f).¹⁵¹ For example, one of the panels on the back wall of the inner hall facing the antechamber of Cave 89 represents the Buddha, seated in *bhadrāsana* with his feet supported by a lotus and his hands performing the usual preaching gesture, attended by two Bodhisattvas also standing on lotuses. The stalk of the main lotus is held by two *nāgas* seemingly attended by two *nāginīs*, one on either side of the *nāga* pair. The latter pair is thought to represent the two *nāga*-kings, Nanda and Upananda, who appear several times in the Sanskrit accounts of the life of the Buddha, such as during the famous episode of the “Great Miracle” at Śrāvastī collected, for example, in the *Divyāvadāna* (ed. Cowell & Neil 1886: 143–166; trans. Burnouf 1876: 162–189).¹⁵² Importantly for the identification of this scene, a tree with leaves and tiny fruit is also represented above the Buddha’s head [Figure 4.103]. Pandit (2015: 46, fig. 4.1) identifies this species with the mango tree and suggests that fire flames may have also been intended and painted originally behind the Buddha’s shoulders where faint traces of plaster survive in the nimbus. In addition, the water-plane may symbolically be suggested by the presence of *nāgas* at the bottom of the panel. From the alleged simultaneous presence of fire and water and because of the exceptional occurrence of the mango tree, Pandit sees that this panel is a rendering of the “Twin Miracle” (Skt. *yamakaprātihārya*; P. *yamakapāṭihāriya*) performed at Śrāvastī/Sāvattihī by the Buddha when the two elements emanate forth from his body to show his superiority over his rivals.¹⁵³ This miracle is known to us in various textual recensions, although Pandit notes that “the depiction of a mango tree is very rare in sculpture in the cave art of Western India” (*ibid.*:

“yi image” (倚像), may have been introduced in China around this period (Ku 2010: 278ff). However, I do not concur with Ku’s view that this iconographic type is specifically representative of what she labels “Buddharāja Maitreya.” In the same vein, I contest the interpretation of Y. Lee 1983: 176ff (following J. Huntington 1981: 54, n. 21) who posits that all major preaching Buddha images in Indian art shown in *bhadrāsana* either depict Maitreya or even a dual form dubbed “Maitreya-Vairocana.” To be sure, Yumin Lee concedes that “not a single image of this type that remains in India is identified as Maitreya by inscription” (1983: 177). Even in Chinese art, unless identified by inscriptions, Maitreya Buddha images cannot be distinguished from those of Śākyamuni. On this issue, see also Wong 2001 and *supra*, Chapter 4, n. 61. In addition to Maitreya, a few inscribed Śākyamuni Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* are known in China. See for example, Lefebvre d’Argencé 1974: 184, cat. no. 87.

¹⁵¹ Pandit also notices Cave 90’s uniqueness with no contemporary shrine and the central figure in the main panel on the rear wall missing (2004: 258, 313–314).

¹⁵² According to Cohen (1995b: 280ff), in this context *prātihārya* signifies a “means of conversion” with a clear social and religious agenda for establishing the Saṅgha as a desirable participant in the ancient Indian society rather than “miracle” or “extraordinary occurrence” *per se*.

¹⁵³ To be sure, the *Nidānakathā* to the *Jātaka* collection notes that the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle on several occasions, for example right after his Enlightenment (Jayawickrama 1990: 103–104, 119).

46).¹⁵⁴ The mango tree (*gaṇḍamba*) under which the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle is in fact only known to us from extant Pali literary sources such as the *Dhammapada* commentary (Dhp-a III 198ff; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 35–47). In contrast, the two *nāga*-kings depicted in the reliefs are only found in the Sanskrit versions of the miracle. In sum, if the above identification of this panel with the Twin Miracle is correct, then, either a different and hitherto unknown textual recension of the story was at play and circulated in the region by the late fifth or sixth century, or the sculptors at Kaṇherī may just have confused or combined some elements of the narrative belonging to different oral or textual traditions and sources.

A similar intrusive panel is depicted at the peripheral site of Kondivate (also known as Mahakali) in the largest Cave 9, an early *caitya*-hall [Figure 4.104]. Pandit thinks this cave originally dated to *circa* the first century CE (2012: 90), but the mutilated panel located on the right wall was added later and can be dated to the early sixth century (2015: 51, fig. 4.4) because it follows closely the style of the sculptural panels at Kaṇherī, for example from Caves 67 and 89. It would thus belong to the same phase of excavation as at Kaṇherī, which presumably falls in the Traikūṭaka period. Besides Kaṇherī and Kondivate, the real popularity of this iconographic theme depicted on intrusive panels — variously showing an attended Bhadrāsana Buddha with his feet on a lotus supported by two *nāgas* — can be seen more widely in the late rock-cut excavations of western India. Most of these panels have been commonly interpreted as Śrāvastī miracle scenes, following A. Foucher (1909), even though the multiplication of Buddhas on lotus flowers is frequently absent. Additionally, the Buddha is not known to have been seated with his legs pendant in the textual sources while performing the actual miracles.¹⁵⁵ Their identification and significance cannot thus be absolutely certain.¹⁵⁶ In this vein, Pandit warns that although many of these panels can be

¹⁵⁴ It also appears in Ajaṇṭā Cave 2 (see *supra*, cf. Fig. 4.51). Mango trees are apparently also depicted later in Pāla art in combination with the miracle of multiplication (G. Bhattacharya 1990).

¹⁵⁵ The Sanskrit version of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī collected in the *Divyāvadāna* states, in one passage, that “a lion throne was prepared for the Lord” (*bhagavataḥ siṃhāsanaṃ prajñaptam*) by King Prasenajit to perform his miracles, but the posture with which the Buddha was going to be seated is never specified. By contrast, a later passage relating to the lotus pericarp created by the two *nāga*-kings Nanda and Upananda for the Buddha to sit on, clearly states that “the Lord was seated cross-legged there” (*tatrāpi bhagavān paryāṅkaniṣaṇṇaḥ*), while images of the Buddha got multiplied in the same manner (ed. Cowell & Neil 1886: 155, 162; my translations). The only possible conclusion is that this chapter from the *Divyāvadāna* cannot be taken as the ultimate source of our panels here, where the Buddha inevitably sits in *bhadrāsana*.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Robert Brown’s reservation (1990: n. 3). The Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, however, is clearly a recurrent theme in Dvāravatī art in Central Thailand, where the Buddha is often represented seated in *bhadrāsana* and where a mixture of inspirations from various textual sources is also equally observed. For a discussion, see Brown 1984 and Revire 2012a: 102ff.

confounded with the Great Miracle, they are “trinity panels” (2015: 52f), or, put more simply, generic triads. These triadic arrangements constituted of a central Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattva attendants indeed gained great popularity in the western Deccan caves, first at Ajañtā and then in the later caves of Nāsik, Aurañgābād, and Ellorā.¹⁵⁷

A Unique Mañḍalic Composition in Cave 90?

Even if the sculptors or donors at Kañherī originally intended to copy this popular theme of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, it seems to have lost most of its basic narrative background and ultimately developed into a sort of *mañḍalic* composition or symbolic representation of the universe set in stone.¹⁵⁸ A fine example of this exists on a unique carving on the left wall of the interior hall of Cave 90 at Kañherī (Leese 1983: 249–250; Pandit 2015: 49–50; AIIIS # 55506). Here the central Bhadrāsana Buddha is attended by two crowned Bodhisattvas, most likely Avalokiteśvara on the Buddha’s proper right and Vajrapāṇi on his left, each of which is, in turn, flanked by a female partner on one side (a Tārā?). Four identical Buddha images in the same sitting posture as the central one, performing the same hand gesture of preaching the law with their two hands, are presented in the four corners of the composition [Figures 4.105a–b].¹⁵⁹ The Huntingtons interpret this panel as the *mañḍala* of the “Five Jinas” (*pañcajina*) of esoteric Buddhism, with the central pendant-legged Buddha representing the eternal principle or “body of Dharma” (*dharmakāya*) manifested by Sarvavid Vairocana (S. Huntington 1985: 263–264). Their identification is doubtful because the concept of the “all-knowing” (Sarvavid) Vairocana, usually depicted four-faced, is late and the Buddha would be more satisfactorily seen as simply a glorious aspect of the historical Śākyamuni in his “transformation body” (*nirmāṇakāya*). Following this thread, Pandit (2015) considers this panel a possible conflation of two episodes of the life of the Buddha, namely, 1) the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, with the two *nāga*-kings Nanda and Upananda shown below and upholding the lotus, and 2) the story of Indra’s visit to the Buddha while he was staying in the Indraśaila cave. In order to make this identification, Pandit notes that Śakra or Indra has his usual mitre with his thunderbolt weapon shown in human form (*vajrapuruṣa*) with a

¹⁵⁷ I have elsewhere written a paper on the origins and spread of these triads in South Asia and beyond (Revire forthcoming b).

¹⁵⁸ In Tibetan Buddhism, *mañḍalas* are commonly found on scrolls or as wall-paintings, but for important rituals the *mañḍala* is traced onto consecrated ground using colored powders which may be erased upon termination of the ritual. No evidence of this survives in early Indian Buddhism.

¹⁵⁹ Compare with the panel from Cave 67 depicting a similar triad, and where two additional Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* are equally seated in the upper right and left corners [Fig. 4.90].

tripartite *vajra* emerging from his head,¹⁶⁰ both depicted sitting on the left side of the lotus stalk on which the Buddha's feet are placed. Pandit characterizes the two persons seen on the other side of the lotus stalk as merely a heavenly being (*gandharva*) and a nymph (*apsara*).

However, Laura Giuliano discloses (2001: 254, fig. 7) that these figures should be identified as the Gandharva Pañcaśikha and his beloved nymph, known as Bhadrā Sūryavarcasā. Pañcaśikha was the celestial musician who played his harp and attempted to distract or even charm the Buddha while preparing him to teach the Dharma to Śakra. A recent study by Edith Parlier-Renault (2015) on this iconographic subject shows that the music played by Pañcaśikha not only prepared the Lord of gods to listen to the words of the Buddha but also enabled the Master to switch from his meditative state to his preaching duty, thus fulfilling the prerequisite of a “perfectly enlightened being” (*samyaksambuddha*), as opposed to a “lone Buddha” (*pratyekabuddha*) who achieves Buddhahood only for himself. This perhaps explains why the Buddha preaches and is seated in *bhadrāsana* and not cross-legged in meditation, as we have already observed on a narrative relief from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa showing the same story [Fig. 3.13].

If the story of the Indraśaila appears as a natural inspiration for depiction inside a cave, there is more. Phyllis Granoff (2013: 20ff) recently observed that the place where Śakra actually found the Buddha was not a “natural cave,” but rather a “rock-cut temple” with doors, windows, etc. Her examination of the inscriptions from the so-called western caves also reveals that the Indic word for “cave” (*guhā*) is never employed, but only such Prakrit or Sanskrit terms as *leṇa/layana* for “resting place,” or *grha* for “dwelling house.” The reason she gives is that natural caves “were either considered uncanny and frightening places, or were entrances to fantastic other worlds. In either case they were not suitable as temples in which the deity dwelt, to which images were donated, and where people could come for worship,”¹⁶¹ whereas, on the contrary, rock-cut temples were perceived as the “abode of the gods.”

Having considered Granoff's position, a narrative context is not very convincing for panel of Cave 90; it is more tempting to see it as a devotional work of art, perhaps an early

¹⁶⁰ The identification as Vajrapuruṣa was also made previously by other scholars; see, in particular, Giuliano 2001: 253. Similar anthropomorphic figures of Vajrapuruṣa were identified on earlier reliefs at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, while their greatest number have been found carved in the later Buddhist caves of Ellorā where they seem to appear mainly as a personification of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi's weapon (*ibid.*: 247–251, 254ff, figs 1–5, 9–14, 50). Giuliano sees close analogies between the reliefs from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and the Kaṇherī panel.

¹⁶¹ Two ruined panels, however, have been noticed in the so-called cemetery of Kaṇherī, under a natural cave (AIIS # 85524–25).

attempt to represent the Buddha fields (*buddhakṣetra*) of the five directions, later known to have been governed by the five Jinas of Vajrayāna Buddhism.¹⁶² This interpretation cannot be totally ruled out since other panels, specifically from Cave 90, seem to be showing a similar fivefold arrangement of Buddhas [Figure 4.106].¹⁶³ One may object, however, that these five sculpted Buddhas are not strictly arranged in the four cardinal directions (east, south, north, west), plus the center, but are actually represented in the four corners of the panel. The five Buddhas are of different sizes, probably giving them different statuses: the central one is the largest while the two at top right and left are smallest. Furthermore, the five-Buddha system of later tantric Buddhism is not known to have developed this early in India, if at all in the western Deccan caves, and no inscriptions ever refer there to the cult of the five Jinas.

As a matter of fact, the five Buddhas purportedly represented here are contrary to the overwhelming presence of triadic arrangements that one can observe ubiquitously throughout these sites. This situation, according to Geri Malandra (1996: 202), “may simply reflect an earlier teaching similar to what was classified in the Tibetan tradition as *kriyātantric* Buddhism (as reflected in a text like the *Mañjuśrīmulakalpa* [sic]).”

In my opinion, the Buddha in the center in this panel is still Śākyamuni, manifesting his cosmic glory and omnipresence by duplicating himself. At the same time, he shows his compassion by preaching to the gods and denizens of our present world system (*sahāloka*), as well as to the magical underworld of the *nāgas*, often generically referred to as Pātāla in Indian cosmology. This underworld apparently played a prominent role in the early development of Buddhist *tantras* (Mayer 2007).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See S. Huntington, *ibid.* Surat Pandit also wrote that “the number and placement of Buddha figures in this panel force[s] us to accept that this must be a *mandala*” (2015: 50), although he does not accept that it is of the Five Jinas (*ibid.*, n. 17).

¹⁶³ The panel on the lower right of the same interior wall depicts a central standing Buddha, with four seated Buddhas in the corners preaching the Dharma. The two shown on the top right and left are in the pendant-legged pose, while the other two are cross-legged; they all perform the teaching gesture with two hands, except the one at the bottom left who only uses his right hand raised [Fig. 4.99]. But this might just be a biased way of looking at the whole wall. If one looks up, two more standing Buddhas and a Bodhisattva could legitimately be included in the series to constitute the group of seven past Buddhas, plus the Buddha-to-be. A sense of symmetrical arrangement might also be at stake, although the overall impression with these intrusive panels is that they are often haphazardly arranged with no particular fixed, or limited, number of Buddhas intended [Fig. 4.100]. Due to the donative nature and strong expectation that the sculptures might bring spiritual merits back to the donor(s), we could well say, the more sculptures of the Buddha, the better!

¹⁶⁴ For a recent discussion on a similar notion of the “cosmic Buddha” Śākyamuni, seen in the context of sixth-century central Asian and Chinese works, see Howard 2010.

In texts of the so-called *kriyātantra* class, such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (i.e. *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*), the promulgation of *mantras* and *sūtras* is attributed to Śākyamuni as the main Buddha, but not yet to the transcendent Vairocana, who starts to figure in this role only in subsequent strata of tantric literature.¹⁶⁵ We also have to remember that the performance of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī is considered, according to different Buddhist traditions, as one of the ten, twelve, or even thirty “indispensable acts” or “obligatory deeds” that all Buddhas must follow on their final life time.¹⁶⁶

To complete the picture, four standing Buddhas of equal size are carved on each side of the above panel. According to the Huntingtons (*ibid.*), these could be identified as the so-called “human” or *mānuṣi* Buddhas (eight in total) who appear in series. The idea of “serialization,” that is, that the Buddhas follow each other sequentially in different time periods, is one of the basic tenets of early Indian Buddhism, still accepted today by all Buddhist traditions. Even though the names of these Buddhas vary from one list to another, seven past Buddhas are generally accounted for in Indian inscriptions and are presumably depicted in the art of Kaṇherī [Figs 4.80 and 4.107] as well as in other western Indian caves. Perhaps for symmetrical reasons eight Buddhas were represented in the above relief, presumably also including the future Buddha Maitreya amongst the group. Their individual identification, however, is not possible as they all are in the same posture and of the same size, though it is expected that their differentiation might have been possible originally on the basis of their characteristic *bodhi*-trees added with the paintings, now lost.

Nāsik

Popularly known as Pandu Lena or Pandava’s caves, the group of twenty-four cave excavations is located on the north face of a hill called Triraśmi in ancient times, eight

¹⁶⁵ For more on this shift from Śākyamuni to Vairocana, see Ōtake 2012; also Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013.

¹⁶⁶ See Burnouf 1876: 151–152, Skorupski 2001a: 32, 35 and 2001b: 41, and Strong 2001: 12–13, 107. The *Divyāvadāna* reads as follows: *dharmatā khalu buddhānām bhagavatām jīvatām tiṣṭhatām driyamānānām yāpayatām yaduta daśāvaśyakaraṇīyāni bhavanti | na tāvad buddhā bhagavantaḥ parinirvānti yāvan na [...] śrāvastyām mahāpratihāryam vidarśitam bhavati* | (ed. Cowell & Neil 1886: 150), i.e. “It is the rule (*dharmatā*) that living, abiding, existing, animate Buddhas, Blessed Ones must necessarily accomplish ten [deeds]. A Buddha, Blessed One does not enter *nirvāṇa* as long as [...] (the Buddha) does (not) display a great miracle in Śrāvastī” (trans. Cohen 1995b: 274). In Dhṛp-a III 205, the Pali commentator is reported as saying: *yasmā tam sabbabuddhānam mahāpāṭihāriyakaraṇaṭṭhānam*, i.e., “Sāvattī is the place where all the Buddhas have performed their great miracles” (trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 40). The Great Miracle at Śrāvastī is also part of the Eight Great Events portrayed in pictorial art, especially popular in Bihar and Bengal during the Pāla period (Chapter 5).

kilometers southwest of modern town of Nashik. Located on the ancient trade route connecting the ports of western India and north and south Indian cities, Nāsik was a major city during the ancient period (Ray 2013). The earliest Buddhist excavations are datable to first century BCE and the place was in occupation up to approximately the sixth century CE, the primary burst of activities occurring during the second century CE as attested by the number of inscriptions from this period.¹⁶⁷ After a long hiatus, the succeeding period saw little new excavation but mainly alterations of earlier ones with the addition of intrusive Buddha and Bodhisattva images. Suraj Pandit calls the Nāsik region the homeland of the Traikūṭaka dynasty, whose name seems to derive from the words for a three-peaked mountain (*trikūṭa*) and who were possibly the feudatories of the Ābhīras (2012a: 14, 91ff). The dominions of the Traikūṭakas further included the coastal region and the northern part of Maharashtra as we have already seen at Kaṇherī.

Most of the caves at Nāsik are *vihāras* except for Cave 18, which is a *caitya*-hall thought to be as old as the one at Karla (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 263ff). Few studies have dealt with the late Buddhist art and iconography depicted in the Nāsik caves and which concern us here. The exception is Claudine Bautze-Picron's article (2000b) in which she meticulously describes Caves 2, 15, 20, and 23–24.¹⁶⁸ Although produced by different craftsmen, she observes evident internal consistencies between these late productions or intrusions. Moreover, obvious stylistic and iconographic similarities are also noticed with the late caves of Ajaṅṭā, Auraṅgābād, and even Ellorā. In concluding her study (*ibid.*: 1225), she places the late production at Nāsik between Ajaṅṭā and Auraṅgābād, with possible links with Kaṇherī or Karla, thus roughly estimated to the early sixth century onwards. My own investigation tends to confirm this general observation and chronological sequence. It is also clear that the art of Nāsik follows its own distinct iconographic tradition and reveals significant new features for the study of Buddhist iconography in the western Deccan. In practical terms, the sculptors who worked at Nāsik might have belonged to different guilds even while sharing a common artistic tradition.

¹⁶⁷ The various inscriptions which are legible in Brāhmī script confirm that the region of Nāsik in that period was ruled by three dynasties: the Kṣatrapas, the Sātavāhanas, and the Ābhīras. The Sātavāhanas and the Kṣatrapas seem to have always been in conflict over regional supremacy. Presumably, all the kings supported Buddhism at Nāsik, one way or another, though they were not Buddhist themselves. The inscriptions also confirm that, apart from royalty, local merchants and landlords also supported and donated huge sums for the development of these caves (Senart 1905–06; Rees 2009).

¹⁶⁸ Cave numbers have been changed over the years from those which were originally published by Fergusson & Burgess 1969. For example, Caves 15–16 were once numbered XI, Cave 20 = XV, and Caves 23–24 = XVII. The modern numbering goes from west to east.

Early Refurbished Excavations

Cave 2

Pandit (2012a: 91) considers Cave 2 to be originally dated to the Sātavāhana-Kṣatrapa period and then modified and reused later during the Traikūṭaka age in the late fifth–early sixth century.

Therein, three large panels cover the left and back walls of the small cave [Figures 4.108–110].¹⁶⁹ They all represent the same triad as discussed above, but with a few stylistic differences (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1205–1207, figs 3–4). For example, three lotuses supporting the Bhadrāsana Buddha and the attendant Bodhisattvas are attached together on the panels on the left wall and the right side of the rear wall, whereas only the Buddha’s feet are supported by a double lotus on the third panel, situated between the two others on the left side of the rear wall. Furthermore, in the first two panels, the Bodhisattvas are somewhat more modest in size and details of the throne are less refined. It is remarkable that both attending Bodhisattvas are clad as ascetics and both bear a *caitya* in their hairdo; the only difference is that the one on the viewer’s right holds a lotus stalk. They have been identified as Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara respectively (I. Kim 1997: 161). The third panel has a long-necked bird spitting out from the mouth of the *makaras* decorating the throne and on which two *nāgas* are mounted and saluting the Buddha in *añjali*.

Cave 20

Cave 20 is a large monastery first started by an ascetic, but for which, according to an inscription found *in situ*, completion was accomplished during the seventh regnal year of the Sātavāhana king Yājñaśrī Sātakarṇi (late second century) by the wife of a *mahāseṇāpati*, i.e. a general (Senart 1905–06: 94). The cave also witnessed later additions in the form of cells, a shrine at the rear-wall, and an enlargement of the hall possibly during the early sixth century (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: pl. XXVI.1).

¹⁶⁹ See also AHS # 72729–31.

The main shrine Buddha is seated in *bhadrāsana*, supported by an elaborate lion throne, with his feet resting on a double lotus flower [Figure 4.111]. The throne back is flanked by a symmetrical heraldic arrangement of crouching elephants, surmounted by prancing lions,¹⁷⁰ with two *makaras* turning outward. The combination of the *makaras*, lions, and elephants adorning the back of the throne is a common type found in Maharashtra from the late fifth century onwards and nearly always in association with a preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, emphasizing his royal character (Auboyer 1937: 89, 94–95; 1949: 114). The Buddha performs the preaching gesture by holding the little finger of his left hand between the thumb and forefinger of his right. He is further attended by two standing *caurī*-bearers, with celestials flying over his head surrounded by a large nimbus. This triad, notes Bautze-Picron (2000b: 1205), reflects the same iconographic composition commonly seen at Ajañṭā. The two attendants are identified on the basis of their adornments and attributes as Avalokiteśvara, on the viewer’s left, and Vajrapāṇi, on the right. The shrine porch, just outside, sees the additional presence of two colossal guardian Bodhisattvas acting as Dvārapālas, each attended by a smaller female figure [Figure 4.112].¹⁷¹ Two miniature Buddhas are represented seated cross-legged on a lotus on top of them. These Bodhisattvas have been tentatively identified, from left to right, as Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, due to the presence of a *caitya* and a miniature Buddha image in meditation in their respective headdresses (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1204, fig. 2; see also AHS # 72742–43). But, as found elsewhere in the western Deccan caves (see *infra*, Chapter 4, n. 201), we should be careful with the identification of these Bodhisattvas since their individual characteristics seem to be rather fluid during this period of transition and are not yet securely fixed by iconographic conventions. The appearance of large Bodhisattva-Dvārapālas became more important in the course of the sixth century onwards, as attested also at Auranṅābād and Ellorā.

The caves to which I now turn are thought to be excavations belonging only to the latter period, that is, *circa* the sixth century.

Later Excavations

Caves 15–16

¹⁷⁰ A lion combined with some kind of horned creature (i.e. *yāli* or *vyāla*). The two horns twisted behind the ears are similar to those of a ram or a goat. Such combinations of *vyālas* with lions, otherwise known as leogryphs, are frequently observed adorning thrones in India. According to Auboyer (1937: 96–98; 1949: 125–129), these “horned lions” imply a strong royal and solar symbolism for the throne they adorn. See also Vogel 1948.

¹⁷¹ See also AHS # 72744, # 84790–1.

Caves 15 and 16 are placed one above the other, so much so that J. Burgess thought that the two were only what remains of the inner shrines belonging to an original two-storeyed cave (XI), “the whole front of which has disappeared, and the upper is only accessible by a ladder” (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 271). At any rate, both caves have similar compositions with their interior shrines carved with seated Buddhas on each of their three walls.

Cave 15 is located at ground level and is the most easily accessible. It consists of a small open shrine with three sculpted panels helping us to date the cave on stylistic and iconographic grounds. On the rear wall, a central Buddha sits in *bhadrāsana* on a lion throne with his feet resting on a lotus-stool [Figure 4.113]. Below the lotus pedestal, we notice a wheel flatly depicted and flanked by a pair of deer. The back-rest of the throne has a decoration where, from top to bottom, a *nāga*-king, a long-necked bird emerging from the mouth of a *makara*, a mounted *vyāla*, and the head of an elephant are seen on each side. This throne decoration is similar to that observed in Nāsik Cave 2 and also at Auragabad Cave 2, tentatively dated to the early sixth century (see *infra*). As usual, the Buddha is attended by two standing and nimbed Bodhisattvas, only one of which remains complete on the Buddha’s proper right. Two small depictions of a teaching Buddha seated cross-legged are carved above each Bodhisattva (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1208f, fig. 6; Pandit 2012a: 92). While the presence of a wheel and a pair of deer at the level of the Buddha’s feet presumably refers to the disciples (*śrāvakas*) and the episode of the first turning of the wheel, the attendance of two contiguous Bodhisattvas makes it impossible to doubt the Mahāyāna context of this ensemble.¹⁷² The sculpted panel carved on the right wall, now mostly in ruins, was probably similar to the central composition just described above. Only the lotus pedestals and the feet of the two standing Bodhisattvas, as well as a portion of the Buddha’s *makara* throne can be observed today [Figure 4.114]. On the opposite, left wall, a cross-legged Buddha sits and preaches on a full-blown lotus held by two *nāga*-kings. A row of smaller Buddhas sitting in the same position were originally carved on each side, but only those on the right have survived. The depiction fits well with the description of the popular theme of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī as the story is known in its extant Sanskrit recension (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1207f, fig. 5; also *supra*, esp. **Chapter 4, n. 155**).

¹⁷² Certain Mahāyāna texts, such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, or later tantric and exegetical systems recount several turnings of the wheel, each referring to a various stage of teaching the so-called *hīnayāna*- and *mahāyānasūtras* or even the *yogatantras* (Snellgrove 2004: 79–80, 94, 119, n. 4; Weinberger 2003: 93). Naturally, the first cycle of teachings to the Śrāvakas is not simply cancelled or superseded by the *sūtras* or *tantras* of the last two cycles.

Cave 16 is located immediately on top of Cave 15. The arrangement of the single shrine is similar to that below, with sculpted panels carved on the three walls, but this time all reliefs depict a triad with the central Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* and preaching in the usual manner with his two hands [Figures 4.115–117].¹⁷³ The same throne decorations are observed, although in one instance a lion is absent at the base, probably due to the unfinished nature of the carving (Pandit 2012a: 93). The attendant Bodhisattvas are divided into two types: the royal, which is adorned with jewellery and wears a crown or tiara, and the ascetic, which is devoid of ornamentation and has matted hair (*jaṭāmukuta*). Some carry specific attributes, such as a three-pronged *vajra*, or a lotus stalk, with their left hands, but all hold a fly-whisk (*caurī*) in their right hands. In addition, a small figure of the Buddha sitting cross-legged performing the teaching gesture is carved above each of their heads. The identification of these Bodhisattvas with the ascetic Avalokiteśvara and the royal Vajrapāṇi is tempting, even though a small *caitya* is possibly present in the hairdo of the ascetic Bodhisattvas. However, the presence of a *caitya* emblem in the headdress was not necessarily perceived as a specific attribute of Maitreya during the early stage of Indian Buddhist iconography. In fact, Inchang Kim has remarked that Avalokiteśvara can also appear with the same emblematic *caitya* on front of his *jaṭāmukuta* and that Nāsik was probably the place of origin for this iconographic trend (1997: 160ff, 247).

Cave 23

The large Cave 23 today comprises four separate or open shrines with several reliefs of Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* attended by Bodhisattvas, the identities of which are not always easy to discern. Originally, these shrines were probably independent caves with a common veranda sharing a water cistern. My description of the cave follows the order and numbering of the reliefs and carved shrines published by Bautze-Picron (2000b: 1209ff, fig. 1), proceeding from the cave’s extreme left to the right part on the western side.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ For more views, see also AIIS # 84721, # 84724–5, # 85255, # 85925.

¹⁷⁴ For another attempt to describe Cave 23, see Pandit 2012a: 93ff. Pandit is of the opinion that the large cave originally contained about six small cells for monastics, later converted into shrines, which he subdivides into A to F (also conflating Cave 23 with the two additional shrines that comprise Cave 24 in Bautze-Picron 2000b). In his overview, Pandit heavily draws from the recent doctoral dissertation by Manjiri Thuse, titled “Buddhist Caves at Nashik: An Analytical Study,” submitted at the Deccan College, Pune, 2009. Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult the original work. Therein, the description goes from right to left where Pandit’s Cave 23 A refers to Sanctuary IV in Bautze-Picron, Cave 23 B = Sanctuary III, Cave 23 C = Sanctuary II, and Cave 23 D =

Four intrusive sculpted panels, including three Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* (two triads — one of which is further bracketed by two standing Buddhas — and one Buddha standing alone) and one scene depicting the *mahāparinirvāṇa*, are on the perpendicular wall to the extreme left of the cave that cuts off Cave 24 [Figure 4.118].¹⁷⁵ Another broad panel of a Bhadrāsana Buddha in triad is carved on the front wall, to the left of the first shrine. In this latter panel, the preaching Buddha sits on a low couch decorated with lions at its base. There is no *makara*-back rest, an unusual omission for Nāsik which might suggest that the panel was left unfinished (the hollowed rock all around the Buddha is a further indication of this possibility). Two celestials with garlands fly over the Buddha’s nimbus. Both Bodhisattvas carry a fly-whisk. One, to the Buddha’s right, wears a tiara and some jewellery, but evidences no specific attribute. The second is clad as an ascetic, wears a miniature Buddha image in his hairdo, and also holds a long-stemmed lotus [Figure 4.119].¹⁷⁶ Could they again represent two aspects of Avalokiteśvara: the royal and the ascetic types?

Just outside the first shrine, on the left, another intrusive sculpture of the Buddha enthroned in *bhadrāsana* is carved with no personal attendants flanking him but with two celestials bearing garlands over his head [Figure 4.120].¹⁷⁷ His highly ornamented lion throne is related to other examples found at the site, but without *nāga*-kings surmounting the *makaras*. No symmetric sculpture occurs on the opposite side, strengthening the impression that this high-relief was added later, i.e. possibly after the inner shrine was consecrated and hence already functional.

Inside the first shrine, well preserved sculptures cover the three walls. The central composition presents the ubiquitous triad with a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* seated on a throne fully decorated with lions and *makaras* [Figure 4.121].¹⁷⁸ His feet rest on a lotus pedestal, below which a pair of deer and a wheel “was started but never finished” (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1212, fig. 8). Two *caurī*-bearers stand next to him. The one on the Buddha’s proper right holds a blossomed lotus in his left hand and wears a tiny effigy of the Buddha performing the teaching gesture in his headdress, a common feature at Nāsik [Figure 4.122]. He is identified with Avalokiteśvara even though the emblem of Buddha (Amitābha?) is

Sanctuary I. The other “caves” are described either in a very bad state of preservation (Caves E and F = Cave 24) or as incomplete (Caves G through K).

¹⁷⁵ For two more views, see AHS # 72752–3.

¹⁷⁶ See also AHS # 72756.

¹⁷⁷ See also AHS # 72751.

¹⁷⁸ See also AHS # 72727.

generally depicted in meditation, not in the teaching gesture.¹⁷⁹ To the left of the Buddha stands the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi wearing a crown with three crests, large earrings, and a necklace, bearing the *vajra* in his left hand at waist level. In addition, two celestial figures with curly hair carved in the upper corners fly toward the Buddha's head while each bears a garland offering.

On the left and right walls of the shrine, two colossal Bodhisattva images mirror, in a grander scale, those attending the central Buddha. Avalokiteśvara dressed as an ascetic is carved on the left wall. The Bodhisattva stands and is surrounded by a large mandorla as well as eight small seated male or female deities arranged in two vertical rows (*ibid.*: 1212f, fig. 9). On the opposite right wall, a large image of a crowned Vajrapāṇi similarly stands, holding his *vajra*, framed by two rows of bejewelled deities seated symmetrically (*ibid.*: 1213f, fig. 10).

The large and iconic representations of these two Bodhisattvas, although still intrinsically connected to the central Buddha, echo the sudden development of their independent cult in the region during the sixth century. By this time, both Bodhisattvas have become important deities in their own right and are no longer perceived as mere Buddha's attendants bearing the fly-whisk. On the contrary, their devotional status has become so enhanced that they are now attended in turn by lesser deities.

Admittedly, the above triadic arrangement, viz. the Buddha attended by Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, is commonly depicted not only at Nāsik but also in all late western Deccan caves. This iconographic composition is, in my view, an early visual manifestation of the triads that are later encountered and reflected in several tantric and ritual texts. Bautze-Picron (*ibid.*: 1215f) also suggests that this popular triad observed at Nāsik was first inherited from Ajaṅṭā and might best be explained by the concept of the three families — i.e. that of the Tathāgata, the Lotus, and the Thunderbolt/Diamond — mentioned for example in the **Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi* and illustrated in the *garbhadhātumaṅḍala*. However, a few discrepancies with this text make linking it firmly with our carvings difficult. For instance, Bautze-Picron concedes that, in the above *maṅḍala*, the central Buddha

¹⁷⁹ Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann argues that, until about the seventh–eighth centuries, only Avalokiteśvara is entitled to bear a miniature image of the Buddha in his headdress. Nowhere do the early texts specify that it must be Amitābha, just a generic Buddha or Jina; moreover, she asserts that the diversity of the hand gesture is quite common in early Indian art (1948: 123–125, 141, 308–310). Indeed, besides Nāsik, there are other instances of small Buddha images, seemingly associated with Avalokiteśvara icons protecting from the great perils, displaying either the preaching gesture, granting protection, or the earth touching pose, for example on the porch of Ajaṅṭā Cave 4 (Spink 2005b: 8–9) or Auraṅgābād Cave 7 (AIIS # 97174).

Vairocana should be depicted in meditation, not preaching as in our sculptures. Additionally, Vairocana is never described as seated in *bhadrāsana*, or even wearing a monastic cloth, since he is always represented bejewelled. Moreover, it is unclear that the **Vairocanābhisambodhi* would have been known in the sixth century.¹⁸⁰ On the contrary, Stephen Hodge has convincingly argued that the **Vairocanābhisambodhi*'s composition or “revelation” ought to date to the mid-seventh century at the earliest.¹⁸¹ Thus, with the exception of Ellorā, it would probably be too late to have served as a textual source for carvings at Nāsik, Auraṅgābād, and elsewhere in the western Indian caves. However, other early tantric texts such as the **Susiddhikarasūtra* and the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa/Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* also refer to the three families (*kulas*). Although the determination of their exact dates and places of composition is difficult,¹⁸² these texts still give a prominent role to Śākyamuni as the main Buddha, not yet to Vairocana as in the **Vairocanābhisambodhi* and subsequent tantric texts.¹⁸³ As far as the art historical evidence goes, I am of the opinion that the vast majority of triads that we observe here at Nāsik and other western Indian caves were an experimental stage, possibly based on an amorphous set of proto-tantric materials or even cycle of ritual texts, later to be compiled in the **Susiddhikarasūtra* or the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa/Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*; however, further work still needs to be done in this direction.¹⁸⁴

On the front wall of Cave 23, between the first and second shrines, a square niche is carved with another image of the seated Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, performing the popular teaching gesture (AIIS # 84811). Here, the Buddha sits on a low couch decorated with flanking pilasters, but no supporting lions in profile; he is not attended by any figures. This plain carving makes it likely that it was intrusive and left unfinished. It can be stylistically

¹⁸⁰ Wayman and Tajima (1992: 8ff) speculate that the text may have had its origins in Maharashtra and that it was composed *circa* the mid-sixth century probably by a Brahmin newly converted to Buddhism, but this interpretation is forced and the arguments are not compelling.

¹⁸¹ See Hodge 1994: 65ff and 2003: 14–15. The original text in Sanskrit is lost but the Indian master Śubhākarasīma (637–735), with the help of his Chinese disciple Yixing (683–727), translated it into Chinese *circa* 724–725 (Ch. *Da Piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing*, T. 848; trans. Giebel 2005). On these key figures and esoteric developments in China during the mid-Tang period, see Orzech *et al.* 2011: 273ff, 339ff.

¹⁸² These early tantric texts as we now have them were assembled and compiled over a certain period of time and from a variety of sources that make the study of their precise origins difficult to ascertain. For a recent study of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa/Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, see Wallis 2002 and Delhey 2012. The **Susiddhikarasūtra* is preserved only in Tibetan and in Chinese, the later translation dating to 726 (Ch. *Suxidi jieluo jing*; T. 893; trans. Giebel 2001).

¹⁸³ For a recent study on the original significance of the figures of Śākyamuni and Vairocana in early Indian and Chinese exegeses, see Ōtake 2012; also **Appendix A**.

¹⁸⁴ For a preliminary analysis of such texts in relation to triads, see Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013.

compared with the Buddha seated in the same attitude on a low couch carved on a lintel from Sārnāth, approximately dated between the early sixth and early seventh centuries [Figs 4.20a–b].

To the immediate right appears a second shrine, which Pandit describes as an early cave later converted into a “Mahāyāna shrine” (2012a: 98–99). Only a single Buddha is in this shrine [Figure 4.123], in front of which the broken base of a monolithic *caitya* belonging to the earlier period is still present. The back of the Buddha’s throne is decorated and incised in very low-relief. This relief consists of the typical *makaras*, *vyālas*, elephant heads, and lions.¹⁸⁵ The two celestials seen above the Buddha’s head are carved in a peculiar manner wearing a cap or tiara (AIIS # 84810). In all respects, the composition is stylistically close to that encountered outside the first shrine, on the left (see *supra*), and presumably belongs to the same period (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1216).

Further to the right, the third shrine, now open, displays a central Buddha image also seated in *bhadrāsana* preaching with his two hands. The Buddha’s head is surrounded by a large nimbus and he wears a diaphanous cloth which may or may not cover both shoulders. The throne decoration (with no lions on the base) and the rest of the composition are similar to other triads at the Nāsik site with two garland-bearers and a pair of attending Bodhisattvas clad as ascetics [Figure 4.124].¹⁸⁶ Bautze-Picron (*ibid.*: 1217) identifies them as Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara on the basis of the ornamentation shown in their headdresses (i.e. a *caitya* and a miniature Buddha image, respectively). No carving appears on their lotus pedestals, surely another sign of the triad’s incompleteness or its dilapidated state. While the left wall depicts three rows of teaching Buddhas, each seated in the cross-legged position, the opposite right wall shows another triad centered on a Bhadrāsana Buddha with his feet supported by an unfinished pair of deer flanking a wheel [Figure 4.125].¹⁸⁷ Two small devotees are on the lower right and left of the sculpted panel. The lower half of the Buddha is reconstructed and his right hand is partially broken from the shoulder to the elbow, while only the upper half of the Bodhisattva standing to his proper right remains. The Bodhisattva once standing on the other side of the Buddha is now lost. However, two more Bodhisattvas seated in *bhadrāsana* and carved on the two upper corners with their hands in an apparent *añjali* gesture, where an observer would expect to find Buddha images sitting in the cross-

¹⁸⁵ According to Auboyer (1949: 134ff, 152), these four “animals,” often depicted on Indian throne ornamentations, represent the four “great elements” (*mahābhūta*), viz. air, water, fire, and earth.

¹⁸⁶ See also AIIS # 72772.

¹⁸⁷ For more views, see AIIS # 72770–1.

legged position, are remarkable [Figures 4.126–127]. The image to the viewer’s left, possibly Avalokiteśvara, is dressed as an ascetic and wears the typical *jaṭāmukuta*; at least another similar representation in this pose is found at Ellorā (see *infra*, Cave 4). The other Bodhisattva, on our right, wears jewels, including a diadem, some earrings, bracelets, and a necklace, and might be categorized as an aspect of Mañjuśrī (*ibid.*: 1218).¹⁸⁸ If these identifications are correct, this would probably be the earliest attested occurrences of these two Bodhisattvas seated in this posture from India.

Finally, the fourth shrine, to the extreme right of Cave 23, is comprized of an inner *cella* and private veranda with porch, guarded by two huge standing Bodhisattvas, in front of which can be seen a wide water cistern. Two pillars and one pilaster still stand intact in the veranda, which can be compared with and dated stylistically to *circa* the early sixth century (Pandit 2012a: 95). The rear wall of the inner shrine is carved with a typical triad centered on a Bhadrāsana Buddha, seated on a lion throne and highly decorated with *makaras*, *vyālas*, etc. As is typical, the Buddha is flanked by two Bodhisattvas, apparently an ascetic Avalokiteśvara and a crowned Vajrapāṇi, above which a pair of *vidyādharas* can be seen flying towards the Buddha’s nimbus [Figure 4.128].¹⁸⁹ On the left and right walls of the inner *cella* a central Buddha is seated, meditating cross-legged on a lotus. On either side are three smaller Buddhas seated similarly in the cross-legged posture, but with alternating meditation and teaching gestures (Bautze-Picron 2000b: fig. 17). These depictions recall the popular theme of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, as already seen in Cave 15. The lower portion of the side walls, where traces of the two ubiquitous *nāga*-kings ought to appear, is unfortunately too damaged here to comment on.

Cave 24

The last cave of the Nāsik complex, Cave 24, includes two badly deteriorated shrines that still contain some fine Buddhist imagery (Bautze-Picron 2000b: 1224f, fig. 18). The two shrines are carved in the same ways as noted above, with traditional triads centered on a Bhadrāsana Buddha on each of its walls, further bracketed by a large standing Buddha. The emblems of a *caitya* and seated miniature Buddha are finely carved in the headdresses of the attending Bodhisattvas which are all clad as ascetics. Upon each of these Bodhisattvas, other small

¹⁸⁸ A peculiar teaching form of Mañjuśrī, known as Mañjuvara, is sometimes presented seated in *bhadrāsana* in medieval Indian art, i.e. after the eighth century. See Figs 5.129–130 for some examples from Orissa.

¹⁸⁹ See also AHS # 72747.

cross-legged Buddha images perform the teaching gesture. Unfortunately, the lower portion of the rock has completely given away and all the legs of the larger figures have disappeared [Figures 4.129–130].¹⁹⁰ A small intrusive panel depicting a similar triad is also carved on the wall that separates Cave 23 from Cave 24 [Figure 4.131].¹⁹¹ In this panel, both standing Bodhisattvas are dressed as ascetics and attend the central Buddha while holding different attributes with their left hands, that is, a flask and a lotus. Hence, Maitreya and/or Avalokiteśvara could be predicted according to our modern knowledge of Buddhist iconography (e.g. Mallmann 1948; I. Kim 1997). However, I maintain that their proper identification during this period of transition in the fifth–eighth century, based on these sole characteristics, is far from certain. The iconography of these Bodhisattvas was very much in flux in India during this period.

Indeed, we have already noticed great flexibility in the representation of the Bodhisattvas, which is increased because their attributes and symbols are often commonly shared. For example, both Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara can exhibit the same *caitya* emblem in their hairdos. Possible cases of Avalokiteśvara with a *caitya* in his hairdo are not only observed at Nāsik, but also at Kaṇherī as noted earlier. While Avalokiteśvara remains a constant member of triads in western Indian caves, the identity of his counterpart Bodhisattva on the other side of the Buddha seems far less consistent. In general, in the company of Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara usually stands on the Buddha’s proper left; when he counterbalances Vajrapāṇi or other Bodhisattvas, he ought to stand on the Buddha’s right. However, we have observed some discrepancies and regular interchanges at Nāsik concerning the respective position of Bodhisattvas as attendants of the Buddha in triads, thus enhancing this confusion. The growing significance of the cult of Bodhisattvas at Nāsik, especially of Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi as seen inside the first shrine of Cave 23, certainly indicate their increased popularity and a gradual independent religious devotion towards them throughout western India.

Auraṅgābād

The Auraṅgābād caves are twelve artificial rock-cut Buddhist shrines (plus one so-called “Brahmanical cave,” Cave 6A) located on a hill running roughly east to west, a few kilometers north of the modern city of Aurangabad. The oldest excavation is Cave 4,

¹⁹⁰ For more views, see AHS # 72757, # 72759, # 72761, # 72763.

¹⁹¹ See also AHS # 84809.

a *caitya*-hall, excavated in the early centuries CE (Phase I). Most of the other caves were dug out during the late fifth–sixth century (Phase II) and seem to have been left sometimes presumably unfinished.¹⁹² The caves are thus separated into two main chronological phases and two geographical groups depending on their location to the east or the west of the site’s centerline.¹⁹³ The sculptural carvings inside the shrines belong to some of the best achievements of Indian rock-cut art and can be compared to the best art of Ajañṭā and Ellorā. Indeed, some scholars have started looking at these Auraṅgābād caves as a missing link between the two renowned sites (e.g. Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 385ff; Gupte & Mahajan 1962: 225ff; Spink 1967b). After an exhaustive study, Pia Brancaccio (2011: 5) was compelled to describe them as “a gold mine waiting to be exploited.”

In general, the caves of Auraṅgābād are not large and are deemed later than those of Ajañṭā; many of them probably date to the period of the early Kalacuri kings (*ca* 550–620 CE) who followed the Vākāṭakas as rulers of the same region, although no dedicatory or commemorative inscriptions were found *in situ*. Spink (1967b) thinks that a few caves from the western group actually drew much inspiration from Ajañṭā and could be dated to the late fifth century. However, he assigns most of the other caves at Auraṅgābād to the middle or the last half of the sixth century CE. All of his discussion is based on the pillar types and their decorative motifs compared with Ajañṭā and Ellorā; he does not describe the stylistic and iconographic features of the sculptures.

Deborah Brown Levine (1966) was the first to attempt such a stylistic analysis of the Auraṅgābād caves. She drew a fine line between the early caves (Caves 1 and 3) belonging to the second phase and the later excavations (Caves 2, 5–9). According to her, Caves 1 and 3 (to which we can now add Cave 4A) are structurally and stylistically closest to Ajañṭā’s late *vihāra* excavations.¹⁹⁴ Levine further observed that the late group of excavations at Auraṅgābād abandoned this *vihāra* plan, adopted earlier at Ajañṭā, and thus transformed the caves into authentic shrines, devoid of monk cells, similar to many of the Buddhist cave-temples at Ellorā (see *infra*).

¹⁹² Caution should be exercised here concerning these so-called “unfinished” caves since, in pre-modern India, a monument was already considered “finished” and functional once the shrine was consecrated and complete for ritual. On the concept of finishing rock-cut temples, see Dehejia & Rockwell 2011.

¹⁹³ The westernmost caves comprise the first group and are numbered from 1 to 5. The second group is located some 500 m further east and includes Caves 6 to 9. The easternmost group is one kilometer further to the northeast and includes Caves 10–12 which appear to be “unfinished” and will not be discussed here.

¹⁹⁴ Brancaccio proposes (2000: 41), “the strong affinities in design, imagery, and sculptural details between Auraṅgābād Cave 3 and some of the latest caves at Ajanta (26 and 2) indicate that a few of the same hands might have worked at both sites.”

Levine also saw a clear uniformity in the development of the shrine antechamber imageries from Ajaṅṭā to Auraṅgābād and Ellorā. For example, she observed that the paintings of the two Bodhisattvas or Dvārapālas found discreetly on either side of the entrance of the shrine chamber or antechamber at Ajaṅṭā Cave 1 were replaced by sculpted images at Auraṅgābād and later at Ellorā. This development, according to Levine, reflected the powerful emergence of the cult of attendant Bodhisattvas (and their female aspects in the guise of Tārās) at the site, as well as the fulfillment of new ritual and devotional practices. All of these developments may be linked to the strong impact of laity at Auraṅgābād, represented, for example, by the many life-size devotees carved in stone and kneeling at the Buddha's feet (Brancaccio 2000).

As with Ajaṅṭā Caves 16 and 26, during the second phase of excavations at Auraṅgābād, the Bhadrāsana Buddha is the accepted image in the early Caves 3 and 4A. It is also the conventional image in the later Caves 2, 6–7 and 9 of the sixth century (Brancaccio 2011: 13–23, 113ff, 125ff, figs 18–19, 37, 44–45, 61, 87, 99–100). Again and again the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* is arranged as the central figure in triads, surrounded by two standing Bodhisattvas.¹⁹⁵

The Western Group

According to Brancaccio, Cave 3 “probably marked the beginning of a second major phase of patronage at Auraṅgābād, when the available rock next to the earliest and most sacred *caitya* was occupied.” She also considers it “the first cave at this site that can be linked to the practice of *Mahāyāna*” (2011: 12). Notably, the main shrine encloses a colossal and regal image of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, seated on a lion throne adorned with *makaras* and *vyālas*. His feet rest on a double lotus, near which a dilapidated crouching deer reminiscent of the First Sermon can be discerned [Figures 4.132–133].¹⁹⁶ The Buddha is also flanked by a larger-than-life *caurī*-bearer on each side, presumably two Bodhisattvas (*ibid.*: 114), while

¹⁹⁵ With the exception of Cave 5, which houses a Buddha seated cross-legged as its main icon (Brancaccio 2011: 15, 156f, fig. 48). Perhaps there was insufficient space or enough rock left to carve a massive image in *bhadrāsana*.

¹⁹⁶ According to the *Lalitavistara*, and celebrated at length in the text's twenty-sixth and penultimate chapter, the turning of the wheel of the law is a grandiose and cosmic event with the presence of thousands of beings and deities (trans. Foucaux 1884: 335ff; DTC 2013: 312ff). This iconography may also well hint at the delivery of some other Mahāyāna teachings such as the *Lotus Sūtra* which precisely conflates the First Sermon at Sārnāth with the second turning of the wheel by the Buddha on Mount Ḡḍhrakūṭa, i.e. Vulture Peak (trans. Kern 1884: 70, vv. 33–34).

flying couples carrying garlands converge on him from above. This again suggests that the Buddha was deliberately assimilated to the status of king, a visual metaphor that has a counterpart in many Buddhist texts. However, the most striking characteristic of this shrine is the presence of two groups of life-size kneeling devotees worshipping the Buddha (Brancaccio 2011: figs 37–40). Could these figures, carved for eternity in stone, be life portraits of lay donors or patrons in princely attire, perhaps local rulers who presumably sponsored the cave (Brancaccio 2000)? Brancaccio further notes the “direct juxtaposition of the Buddha and the king [the alleged patron] in Aurangabad cave 3” and discerns “a subtle reference to the interplay between the kingly nature of the Buddha and the divine nature of the king” (2011: 96).

Immediately to the right of the earlier *caitya*-hall, is the open shrine Cave 4A, discovered during conservation work, also probably dating to the late fifth century.¹⁹⁷ Currently damaged, it is protected by a modern concrete vault. The shrine contains a similar image of a preaching Buddha seated with legs pendant on a highly decorated lion throne flanked by two Bodhisattvas [Figure 4.134]. Cave 4A’s Buddha image is similar to the one carved in the body of the monolithic *caitya* of Ajañṭā Cave 26 (*ibid.*: 115). Brancaccio (2000: 45) thinks that this independent shrine was sponsored by a wealthy donor (an Aśmaka ruler?), probably in conjunction with the lay patronage of Caves 1 and 3. The presence of this unique structure at Auruṅgābād suggests that, by this period, the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* was conceived in a universal manner as a cultic image of the Dharma-king. The Bodhisattvas on either side of the Buddha, holding fly-whisks and constantly attending him, surely enhance the cosmic and royal aspect of this image type.

Cave 2 is datable to the sixth century. It has a vestibule and central shrine located within a corridor dedicated for circumambulation. Several intrusive panels are found on the side walls of the corridor and often depict the same triadic arrangement that we have seen at other sites where the central Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, flanked by his usual Bodhisattva attendants, may be supported by the two ubiquitous *nāga*-kings [Figures 4.135–137].¹⁹⁸ On several occasions, a small squatting female, tentatively identified as Lajjāgaurī, also appear in the panels (Brancaccio 2011: 135ff; see also *supra* for a separate discussion of this goddess). These panels were probably commissioned by different individuals — mostly lay people,

¹⁹⁷ Spink (2005a: 325ff; 2007: 305) relates this small shrine to the very last phase of patronage at Ajañṭā which he assigns, along with the neighboring Auruṅgābād Caves 1 and 3, to Aśmaka patronage just as he does with Cave 26 at Ajañṭā.

¹⁹⁸ These panels are called “intrusive” because they were not part of the initial iconographic program of the cave and were added later onto the walls. See also AIIS # 97272, # 97274–76.

many of them women, among which very few were monks or nuns — often represented as small portraits of kneeling devotees in the lower corners of the compositions (Brancaccio 2000; 2011: 11).¹⁹⁹ The shrine's main large preaching Buddha has a nimbus behind his head; he sits with his legs pendant on a lion throne, the back of which is decorated with elephants, *vyālas* (each of which has a rider on its back), and *makaras* from the jaws of which emerge a long-necked bird [Figures 4.138–139]. In addition, several small panels inside the shrine on the side walls represent the Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, either alone, or attended by two Buddhas. Two large-scale guardian Bodhisattvas stand outside the shrine at the doorway and are identified with an ascetic type to the viewer's right and a princely type to the left [Figure 4.140]. Could they represent two different aspects of Avalokiteśvara? Obviously, this suggestion already proposed earlier would have to deny the conventionally accepted theory that two Bodhisattva attendants in a Buddhist triad necessarily have to represent two different figures.²⁰⁰ A long lotus stalk held by both figures, each supporting a miniature meditating Buddha, however, would support the hypothesis of a single Bodhisattva represented twice, although nothing can be for sure at a time when the iconography of Bodhisattvas was not yet rigidly codified.²⁰¹ But, as Nandana Chutiwongs aptly said (2002: 33), nothing in Indian art

¹⁹⁹ Brancaccio (2011: 129ff) thinks that the *Lotus Sūtra* may have inspired some of the imagery in these panels. Episodes of the same text also appear to have been illustrated in paintings from Caves 9 and 10 at Ajaṅṭā (see *supra*).

²⁰⁰ Both Bodhisattvas guarding the shrine doorway in the antechamber of Bagh Cave 2 bear identical images of the Buddha in their headdress performing the hand gesture of granting protection (see AIIS # 69082, # 99177, # 99182–4, # 99188). These can be tentatively identified as two forms of Avalokiteśvara, i.e. a royal type, on the viewer's right, and an ascetic type, on the left. Mme de Mallmann (1948: 148–151) preferred to identify them respectively as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, while Inchang Kim (1997: 137–138) sees Avalokiteśvara on the right and Maitreya on the left. The visual and inscriptional evidence we have from Sārnāth (Chapter 4, n. 64), however, tend to support my identification as Avalokiteśvara in both cases, no matter what gesture the Buddha in the headdress is performing. The seated Avalokiteśvara in *bhadrāsana* from Ellorā Cave 4 (see *infra*) also bears a Buddha granting protection in his headdress.

²⁰¹ In this vein, Carmel Berkson's identifications of attending Bodhisattvas appear to have been confused in a number of instances (1986: 80, 83, 190, 196–197). Thus, the Bodhisattva with a small figure of a Buddha on his headdress is always identified by her as Maitreya, and the one bearing a *caitya* as Avalokiteśvara, rather than the other way around as we would normally expect. See Robert Brown's review of the book (1988a) for a general warning regarding Berkson's iconographical identifications at Auraṅgābād. In her defence, however, Brancaccio (2011: 139ff) notes the fluidity of the Bodhisattva iconographies at Ajaṅṭā and Auraṅgābād, which may explain why what has generally been described as a *caitya* (?) in the headdress is often worn by the Bodhisattva who also holds a long lotus stalk. As it happens, a Bodhisattva with the shape of a *caitya* in his crown bearing the *vajra* is also observed at times in tandem with Avalokiteśvara (*ibid.*: 168, n. 14; e.g. Vajrapāṇi in Auraṅgābād Cave 6). Thus the *caitya* emblem in the headdress does not seem to have any specificity here and is not necessarily associated with the Bodhisattva Maitreya during this period (see also I. Kim 1997: 158ff, 169f, 247). In contrast to Berkson and I. Kim (*ibid.*: 155–157), the identity of the ascetic figure on the right of the entrance of Cave 2 with another form of Avalokiteśvara is fairly certain, once we accept the possibility of a dual representation of the same Bodhisattva. This may be true not only because of the small icon of Buddha observed

counters the idea that the same person or deity can be depicted twice, side by side. This suggestion also emphasizes the conception of the two-fold nature of Avalokiteśvara, his ascetic mode and, at the same time, his royal or divine character. Whatever the case, Levine (*ibid.*: 186) has compared these door attendants to the great Dvārapālas at Elephanta for which a mid-to-late sixth century dating is suggested.²⁰²

To complete our description of Bhadrāsana Buddha imagery in the western group, mention should also be made of a few intrusive panels on the surface walls of Caves 1 and 5. Two of these carvings from Cave 5 conform to the panels that fill the corridor walls of Cave 2. They similarly depict a Buddha seated on a throne with his feet resting on a lotus flower supported by *nāgas* flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas [Figure 4.141]. In other cases, the two *nāga*-kings are absent, but the identity of Vajrapāṇi with his *vajra* in his left hand, on the Buddha’s proper left, is clear [Figure 4.142]. In “unfinished” Cave 1, a depiction of seven small Buddhas seated in a row is present outside the veranda on the left wall [Figure 4.143]. These seven figures are bracketed at both ends by two standing Bodhisattvas, possibly Maitreya on the right and Avalokiteśvara on the left.²⁰³ P. Brancaccio suggests that these two flanking Bodhisattvas were not originally included in the set, but were added after the original panel was conceived (2011: 10). These figures surely represent the seven past Buddhas, a common theme in Indian Buddhist art. They are also depicted seated in this manner at the back of the corridor wall, on the right side, of Cave 2 (Gupte & Mahajan 1962: 227–228).

The Eastern Group

The eastern group of caves continued to be excavated throughout the sixth century after completion of Caves 2 and 5 from the western group. In Caves 6 and 7 we see the embryonic

in his matted hair, but also because of the attributes he holds in his hands (i.e, a long-stemmed lotus on the left and a coiled rope or *pāśa* on the right), and the deerskin he wears across his shoulder. For Brancaccio (*ibid.*: 142ff), this ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara seemingly “attests to the conceptual and iconographic exchange that took place between the Śaiva tradition” and may even anticipate “later esoteric forms of the deity” as Amoghapāśa.

²⁰² An early sixth-century dating for the cave excavation has been assigned by Brancaccio (2011: 125ff), who further opines that the architecture and sculptural evidence of Caves 2 and 5 of the western group, as well as the entire eastern complex at Auranḡābād (Caves 6–9) belong to the same phase of patronage as the early Śaiva caves of Ellorā, strongly linked to the Pāśupata cult. Spink (1967a and 1967b: 9–10) attributed the excavations of these caves to the early Kalacuri kings who possibly controlled large parts of Maharashtra by the mid-sixth century.

²⁰³ Berkson (1986: 57) proposed that these figures represent the two traditional disciples of the Buddha, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, but this is unlikely since they do not wear monastic garb.

expression of the new Vajrayāna ideal, with the dominating presence of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, where female imagery is also omnipresent (Brancaccio 2011: 159ff).

The layout and decoration of Cave 6 is a combination or re-elaboration of Caves 2 and 3 with the presence of a central shrine and a circumambulating corridor. The main shrine houses another Bhadrāsana Buddha of massive scale, with a head disproportionately large compared to the body (Brancaccio 2011: 17–18). The Buddha is seated on an elaborate throne with two lions at its base, flanked by two Bodhisattvas (AIIS # 97196, # 97199–202). Particularly unique about the Auraṅgābād main shrine Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* is the manner in which the folds of the robes are minutely incised and fall between the legs in a U-shape [Figure 4.144]. This motif creates an almost flat surface or platform on the main icons onto which offerings or garlands could have been deposited. In Cave 6, two rows of kneeling followers with their hands in *añjali* can be seen carved in stone on each side of the main shrine, males to the right, females to the left of the Buddha (*ibid.*: figs 62–63; AIIS # 97206). Two large standing and crowned Bodhisattvas guard the entrance to the shrine (AIIS # 97203). On the viewer’s right is probably Vajrapāṇi with his attendant, a smaller figure with a fierce appearance and crossed arms that may be the personification of his *vajra*, i.e. Vajrapuruṣa (Giuliano 2001: 259–261; Brancaccio 2011: 171ff) [Figure 4.145]. Six side cells open into the corridor that runs around the main shrine. Most cells are empty; two located at the rear corners have been transformed into small shrines with attendant Buddha images seated cross-legged.

The layout of Cave 7 is similar to Cave 6 (Brancaccio 2011: 18–22); the difference is that Cave 7 consists of a pillared veranda before entering the main shrine; additionally, it is surrounded by a circumambulatory passage with three cells on each side and two at the rear. The cave has clusters of sculptures, in particular female images — the most important of which is generally considered a Tārā, feminine counterpart of Avalokiteśvara — which are among the best specimens at Auraṅgābād (AIIS # 97180–81, # 97186).²⁰⁴ For example, the dancing woman inside the shrine in the midst of seated female musicians (*ibid.*: 192ff, fig. 88; AIIS # 24662) can be stylistically compared with the Śiva Naṭarāja panel in Cave 21 at Ellorā (Levine 1966: 188, pls 18–19), a late sixth century excavation. The cells at the rear of the circumambulatory passage as well as the main shrine contain sculptures of the preaching Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* on a lion throne [Figures 4.146–149]. On either side

²⁰⁴ On these female deities, see Brancaccio 2011: 181ff. The latter author cautions, however, that “we should remember that Tārā between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century was not yet conceived as a female *bodhisattva* and was not the focus of an independent cult” (*ibid.*: 186).

of the porch entrance, seated female deities and dwarfish figures attend two huge standing Bodhisattvas, one Avalokiteśvara protecting from the “eight great perils” (*aṣṭamāhābhaya*) on our left and a crowned Bodhisattva on the viewer’s right, comparable to the Vajrapāṇi image from Cave 6 (*ibid.*: 160ff, 179f figs 70–80; AIIS # 97174).

The *maṇḍala* scheme of Auraṅgābād Caves 6 and 7 has often been mentioned (e.g. Berkson 1986). John Huntington (1981) first attempted to identify the Bhadrāsana Buddha of the main shrine in Cave 6 with the Jina Vairocana flanked by Padmapāṇi Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, as explained in the *garbhadhātumaṇḍala* of the so-called **Mahāvairocanasūtra* or **Vairocanābhisambodhi* (also transmitted under the title **Mahāvairocanābhisambodhitantra*).²⁰⁵ The similar iconographic program of contiguous Cave 7 would have been, according to the same author, devoted entirely to the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* as developed in the *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha*. As seductive as this hypothesis may be, several problems occur with his interpretation when reading the iconography of the caves and with his applied methodology based on subsequent and far-distant Shingon traditions and texts.²⁰⁶

While later Chinese and Japanese sources may presumably offer interesting insights into early South Asian Buddhist iconography, in this case no exact correspondence between the two iconographic programs is available. In the Japanese *maṇḍalas*, Vairocana is never depicted as seated in *bhadrāsana* wearing monastic garb as in the western Deccan caves, but is always described as in royal attire, cross-legged, displaying the meditation gesture (*dhyāna*) in the *garbhadhātumaṇḍala*, or the “Enlightenment-tip” gesture (*bodhyagrī*)²⁰⁷ in the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* (Tajima 1959: 64–65, 172–173). Moreover, applying this reading of the “double *maṇḍala* tradition,” as found in modern-day Japan to western Deccan caves, can be perceived as an “anachronistic Shingonization” of early Indian Buddhist practices with no

²⁰⁵ The full title of this work in Sanskrit was restored as **Mahāvairocanābhisambodhivikurvītādhiṣṭhānavaipulyasutrendrarājanāmadharmaparyāya*, i.e. “Topic of the Dharma called King Indra of the large Sūtras with the marvellous Transformations of Mahāvairocana as a blessed basis” (Wayman & Tajima 1992: 1, 235). The inclusion of the epithet Indrarāja in the title enhanced the importance of the text; however, the Chinese commentary adds that “because the title of the sūtra was too long, it was not kept completely” (trans. Müller 1976: 24–25; cf. also Giebel 2005: xiii).

²⁰⁶ The exact date of composition of these texts in India is unknown, but is generally given as mid-to-late seventh century. A *terminus ante quem* is also furnished by the availability of Chinese and Tibetan translations made in the first half of the eighth century (Orzech *et al.* 2011: 263ff). For English translations and studies, see Müller 1976; Todaro 1985; Hodge 2003; Giebel 2001 and 2005; also Weinberger 2003.

²⁰⁷ Several other dubious reconstructed names from Sanskrit are given for this gesture (e.g. Saunders 1985: 102, 235, nn. 1–3). The term *bodhyagrī*, however, is clearly attested in primary Sanskrit sources (Mallmann 1975: 393, nn. 4–5) although, oddly enough, it has never really been observed or recognized in ancient Indian sculptures.

historical validity.²⁰⁸ J. Huntington's hypothesis, therefore, remains unproven and largely speculative.²⁰⁹

In contrast, P. Brancaccio challenges the validity of the idea that these caves were originally designed to represent a three-dimensional *maṇḍala*. She asserts this although she observes some intriguing similarities between a series of six female figures associated with Avalokiteśvara from the side shrine at the entrance of Cave 7 with the six *vidyārājñīs* or deities personifying the magic powers of *mantras* observed in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa/Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*. To her, this correspondence suggests “that the body of imagery found in later caves at Aurangabad may reflect the devotional substratum subsequently developed and articulated in the text” while it may also offer “insight into the genesis of the esoteric tradition in the western Deccan” (2011: 175–176, 186). Although the actual date of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa/Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* and its place of compilation are problematic, I agree with her that the text belongs to a body of practices and a period when the religious landscape was evolving quickly from full-fledged Mahāyāna traditions to early esoteric ritual prescriptions. In addition, it is also one of the first sources in Buddhist literature to include a marked number of female deities just as we saw depicted in the art of Cave 7. In other words, Brancaccio's idea may be very helpful in reconstructing the kind of religious atmosphere in which the eastern caves at Aurangābād developed and which equally left its imprint on later Buddhist iconography in other caves at Ellorā (see *infra*). Yet it cannot serve as a basis for identifying a specific *maṇḍala* arrangement of the caves.

Finally, the “unfinished” and last Cave 9 of the eastern group was possibly excavated towards the end of the sixth century or at the very beginning of the seventh century. It includes three shrines in different states of completeness (Brancaccio 2011: 22–24, 195ff). Due to the abrupt interruption of work at the site, the main Buddha in the central shrine was only roughed out, but each of the two side shrines house a complete Bhadrāsana Buddha as its main icon guarded by two Bodhisattvas with almost identical features and

²⁰⁸ Charles Orzech (1996: 210, n. 3, 216, n. 18) has similarly warned against such attempts made by several Japanese scholars to impose their views and traditions backward vis-à-vis Chinese esoteric Buddhism of the eighth century.

²⁰⁹ Moreover, the fact that the Bhadrāsana Buddha in the main shrine of Cave 7 is not attended by the usual two Bodhisattvas but surrounded by six seated Buddhas, three at each corner (J. Huntington 1981: 51, fig. 7 k and l; see also fig. in Berkson 1986: 147), may further imply that we are here simply dealing with the group of seven past Buddhas, not the transcendental Jinas.

ornamentation²¹⁰ and two *nāga*-kings at the doorways [Figures 4.150–151]. As a result, Brancaccio suggests that “perhaps different patrons were responsible for each of the shrines, or perhaps excavation in the cave proceeded from the sides to the centre and a shortage of financial support prevented the stone carvers from finishing the central shrine” (*ibid.*: 23).

Ellorā

Located some 30 km northwest of Aurangabad stands the monumental cave-complex of Ellorā, often presented as the epitome of Indian rock-cut architecture. Out of thirty-four caves, twelve are Buddhist (Caves 1–12), possibly excavated during the periods of the early Kalacuri, Cālukya, and Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasties, between approximately the early seventh through the mid-eighth century. The Ellorā caves as a whole, unlike Ajañṭā, were never totally abandoned; it has been recognized as an important religious center of different faiths (*tīrtha*). Several written and royal records indicate that the Hindu and Jain caves, in particular, have been visited regularly since the early 700s to the present. However, the total absence of dedicatory inscriptions from Ellorā’s Buddhist caves confirms that their patrons chose to remain anonymous and were probably not tied to the prestige of a local ruler.

Progressing from south to north along the cliff, one discovers successively the caves of the Buddhist group numbered consecutively rather than purely chronologically.²¹¹ Since the Ellorā caves are among the latest Buddhist rock-cut monuments of India, discussions usually point out tantric or esoteric elements associated with later developments in Buddhism. Though seated Buddha images still play a significant role at Ellorā, they are often attended by two, six, eight or more Bodhisattvas and, naturally, it is the sculpted images of these Bodhisattvas as well as other (often female) deities such as Bhṛkuṭī, Cundā, Mahāmāyūrī, and Tārā, which have received stronger scholarly attention (e.g. Gupte 1964). For example, Geri Malandra (1997) has investigated the concept of the *maṇḍala* as an organizational scheme of Buddhist deities and Bodhisattvas for the shrine or hall imagery here. According to her, two or three-dimensional *maṇḍalas* are found carved inside the main halls as well as within the shrines of both the earliest and latest caves at the site. Incidentally, it is only during Ellorā’s earliest phases that the Buddhas in the shrines sit with their legs

²¹⁰ The identification of this pair is problematic. Berkson identified them as an instance of two Avalokiteśvaras (1986: 204, nos 5–6, 209), while I. Kim (1997: 185, n. 148), who cannot accept the idea that two attending Bodhisattvas may in fact represent the same deity, prefers to see Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya.

²¹¹ To navigate the caves online, see: <http://elloracaves.org/about.php>.

down in *bhadrāsana*, presented in full-form and literally taking up space within the sanctum, while Bodhisattva or fly-whisk attendants always stand and flank the Buddha's throne. In the following, I briefly describe and discuss individual imagery as found in their programmatic contexts in Caves 2, 3, 3A, 4, 5, 5RW, 6, 8, 8A, 9, 10, 11.3, and 12.3, in a relative chronological order and sequence according to three periods of Buddhist activity determined by Malandra (1983: 113ff; 1997: 123ff).²¹²

The First Period (Caves 6, 5, 2, 3, 3A)

The Buddhist excavations during the First Period at Ellorā may have begun *circa* 600 CE and continued to the mid-seventh century. This period saw the decline of Kalacuri power and rise of the Cālukyas where strong stylistic similarities between Ellorā and the contemporary monuments of Aihole and Bādāmi are observed (Malandra 1983: 140ff; 1997: 5ff, 24ff).²¹³

According to Malandra, the oldest Buddhist excavation at the site is Cave 6, the organization and arrangement of which is a little difficult to make out because of its poor state of preservation. The antechamber in front of the shrine is carved with sculptures of two huge guardian Bodhisattvas [**Figure 4.153**]. On the viewer's left, the sculpture is an ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara with his usual attributes, i.e. stemmed lotus, rosary, deerskin, and Buddha image in his headdress. Two flying celestials are above him, while two male and female attendants are located in smaller size below. On the other side of the door, the corresponding Bodhisattva has a *caitya* in his crown and has been variously identified as Maitreya or Mañjuśrī (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 375; Malandra 1997: 28, figs 21, 35). However, I think a strong case can be made that this sculpture represents Vajrapāṇi because of the presence of its small attendant with crossed arms and three-pointed crown (AIIS # 43132). This small figure is assuredly Vajrapuruṣa, the personified *vajra* (Giulano 2001: 254f, figs 9–10). In the shrine's interior, the central Buddha sits preaching with right shoulder and breast bare in *bhadrāsana* on a lion throne [**Figure 4.152**].²¹⁴ He is accompanied by the usual attendants holding fly-whisks in their right hands, both bearing a

²¹² For earlier descriptions and a somewhat different chronology, see Gupte & Mahajan 1962: 107ff; Fergusson & Burgess 1969: 367ff; also Burgess 1883: 1–22. According to Gupte (1964: 29, 32ff), the Buddha is shown at Ellorā at least fifty-two times in *bhadrāsana*, and one hundred and seventy-nine times in *padmāsana*.

²¹³ An attempt to study the early chronology of Ellorā showing that the Buddhist phase was preceded by a Brahmanical period during the late sixth century is Spink 1967a and 1967b. For an in-depth study of the development of the Cālukyan rock-cut architecture in relation to other cave temples in western India, see Tarr 1970.

²¹⁴ See also AIIS # 97550, # 97552.

caitya in their headdresses (AIIS # 55732, # 97546–47, # 97551, # 97553).²¹⁵ On the side walls, three rows of three Buddhas sit in a cross-legged position, while below them are worshippers and other seated Bodhisattvas. Malandra (1997: 26ff) reckons that these carvings represent the core of a two-dimensional rock-cut *maṇḍala* of some kind. Although, here and later, no textual sources known to us today clearly explain the layout of the interior shrines, a clear emphasis on Buddhist triads exists throughout the site, as we have seen previously in other western caves.

The next cave in the sequence is Cave 5, a large and oblong *vihāra* supported by twenty-four pillars, which may have served as an assembly hall (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: pl. LIX). As with its earlier counterparts at Kaṇherī and Bagh, the *vihāra* has long parallel carved benches the length of its center, almost certainly for the kind of ritual recitations that still take place in similarly planned Himalayan monasteries today. It contains two side chapels (one of which once contained a Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, now very damaged; AIIS # 1105), multiple lateral cells, and an antechamber with a main shrine at the back of the cave. Inside, a large Bhadrāsana Buddha in a preaching gesture sits [Figure 4.155], attended by two Bodhisattvas, the one at our left, characteristically with his ascetic headdress (but seemingly containing a *caitya*, not a Buddha image), a deerskin, and a lotus (AIIS # 55733–34, # 97564). The other figure, to the right is crowned, again with a *caitya* carved at its front (AIIS # 97565).²¹⁶ The Buddha's throne is elaborate, with birds' heads and rich scrolls emerging from the mouth of the *makaras* at the top. Large flying figures fill the space overhead. At the door two huge Bodhisattvas guard the shrine [Figure 4.154]. Avalokiteśvara, at the left of the entrance, has the expected ascetic headdress, with a seated Buddha at its front, along with rosary, long-stemmed lotus, and deerskin. The right Bodhisattva has a *caitya* in his crown and seems to hold a flower. The latter Dvārapālas are also attended by two small graceful female figures on either side.

Cave 2 was probably begun shortly after Cave 5, a large, peculiar cave-complex because of its lateral galleries along each side, behind which five compartments contain Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* on lion thrones with conventionally elaborate backs, attended by Bodhisattvas and flying dwarfs or couples above [Figures 4.156–157].²¹⁷ Burgess notes

²¹⁵ Gupta (1964: 41) identifies them both as Maitreya but this is perplexing for reasons already exposed (Chapter 4, n. 201).

²¹⁶ These Bodhisattvas wearing the *caitya* in front of their headdresses are constantly described as Maitreya in the literature on Ellorā (e.g. Gupte 1962 and 1964) although it can be problematic in some instances as in the present case or as we have seen above at Ellorā Cave 6. See also I. Kim 1997: 173–174, n. 109.

²¹⁷ See also AIIS # 43309–10, # 43312–13, # 97584–88.

that these galleries carved on the side of the chamber were perhaps “afterthought[s]” since many of the figures are clearly unfinished (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 370, pl. LVII; also AHS # 19166, # 97587) [Figure 4.158]. These ten unfinished Buddhas may be precursors to the seated Buddhas flanking the third floor’s hall of Cave 12 (hereafter 12.3; see *infra*).

Several “intrusive panels” depicting Buddhist triads also appear in the interior and exterior of the cave [Figures 4.159–160].²¹⁸ The main shrine is guarded by two large-scale Bodhisattvas [Figure 4.161].²¹⁹ One is dressed plainly as an ascetic and is identified as Avalokiteśvara since he has a Buddha image shown on his matted hair and holds a long lotus-stalk. The other richly dressed Bodhisattva’s identity is uncertain. The colossal Bhadrāsana Buddha in the shrine sits on a lion throne showing the conventional rearing *makaras* spouting birds’ heads, leonine *vyālas*, and crouching elephants at its sides, as well as running *nāgas* on the throne’s back [Figure 4.162]. This Buddha is shown preaching with his two hands at solar plexus level,²²⁰ attended by his usual *caurī*-bearers, who are mainly miniature replicas of the outside guardian Bodhisattvas, and flying garland-bearers. On each side of the shrine walls, a huge Buddha figure stands in a gesture of bestowing a boon. Taken together, could these three Buddha images from the main shrine represent the Buddhas of the Three Ages (Past, Present and Future), and the ten carved in the side walls of the main hall, Buddhas of the Ten Directions (*daśadigbuddha*), signifying that Buddhahood encompasses the whole space and time in which we reside?

Lastly, Cave 3, while slightly smaller, is of a similar plan and approximately the same age as Cave 2 (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: pl. LVII). The hypostylar hall has five lateral cells on each side which were never fully completed nor converted into subsidiary shrines. The main shrine’s image at the rear of the cave is almost identical as in Cave 2, a seated Buddha in *bhadrāsana* accompanied by the usual standing Bodhisattvas and standing Buddhas on both side walls, the only exception is that the figures are more abraded here [Figure 4.163].²²¹

Between Caves 3 and 4 stands a little shrine (Cave 3A) where the focus is again a central Bhadrāsana Buddha arranged in a triad on its rear wall [Figure 4.164]. The expected

²¹⁸ One of this triad clearly shows the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and his Vajrapuruṣa identified by the three spikes emerging from the top of the head (Giuliano 2001: 255f, figs 11–12). For more views on intrusive panels, see AHS # 43319–20, # 43328, # 43331.

²¹⁹ See also AHS # 97581.

²²⁰ For another view, see AHS # 55746. At Ellorā, while performing the gesture, the Buddha’s left hand often holds the hem of the robe which falls into fine folds below.

²²¹ See also AHS # 55741.

ascetic Bodhisattva with *jaṭāmukuta* at the left and a crowned Bodhisattva attendant leaning upon a dwarf at the right attend the central Buddha's lion throne with its elaborate back, while celestials with ascetic headdresses and dwarfs fly above (AIIS # 43249, # 55738).

The Middle Period (Caves 4, 5RW, 8, 8A, 9 and 10)

Cave 4 dates to the seventh century. In its original state, it is sometimes described as a two-storey cave because of the half collapsed shrine above that can be seen from a distance (see *infra*, Cave 5RW). At any rate, in what remains of the antechamber, on the left wall, a prominent and unique carved panel of Avalokiteśvara seated in *bhadrāsana* occurs [Figures 4.165a–b].²²² The central pleat on his robe between his legs is quite peculiar and would be stylistically encountered again in Cave 12.3. Avalokiteśvara is here recognized by the tiny seated Buddha image granting protection on the crest of his high matted hair with long pending locks. He also wears a deerskin on his left shoulder and holds a rosary with his raised right hand raised and long lotus bud in his left hand. Two standing female deities attend him, similarly holding either a rosary or a flower. Could this Avalokiteśvara be a blended form of Raktalokeśvara, the “Red-colored body” aspect of Avalokiteśvara, attended by Tārā and Bhṛkuṭī, identified on the basis of some *Sādhanas* (cf. Mallmann 1948: 54 and 1975: 109; B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 138–139)?²²³ This is impossible to prove since its original color is unknown. Above the Bodhisattva, at the upper corners, two smaller Buddhas hover: one standing and the other seated cross-legged on a lotus.

Two Dvārapālas guard the main shrine of Cave 4, both wearing elaborate headdresses, with a dwarf standing between each of them and the central door. Inside the shrine, the central Buddha image majestically sits on a highly ornamented throne decorated from top to bottom on each side with a *makara* spitting a flying celestial, a mounted *vyāla*, and a crouching elephant. The Buddha preaches in the usual manner, but sits peculiarly under the foliage of a tree, the species of which is difficult to determine [Figures 4.166–167].²²⁴ Could this sapling be considered a representative of the great cosmic tree, symbol of the *axis mundi*? Unusually, two bas-relief *caurī*-bearers stand behind the throne while an additional richly

²²² See also AIIS # 43241.

²²³ Gupte (1964: 77ff) is of the opinion that the two forms of Raktalokeśvara found in the *Sādhanas* have been combined in one single aspect at Ellorā.

²²⁴ For more views, see AIIS # 19163, # 97576.

dressed Bodhisattva flanks the Buddha on his left. Presumably another Bodhisattva would originally have stood on his proper right, but is now destroyed.

The other ruined shrine (Cave 5RW) above Cave 4, half of which has fallen down, is not accessible without a ladder. This shrine was once guarded by two Dvārapālas, with only the left one remaining. Cave 5RW also contained the common triad centered on a Bhadrāsana Buddha [Figure 4.168].²²⁵ Because of its incongruent orientation, it was more likely once a shrine wing to Cave 5 rather than an upper storey for Cave 4 (see *supra*).

Cave 8 consists of a central shrine surrounded by a corridor presumably dedicated to circumambulation, an architectural concept already expressed in Auraṅgābād Caves 6 and 7 (cf. *supra*). The shrine door entrance is guarded by the usual ascetic and princely Dvārapālas and their respective female attendants [Figure 4.169].²²⁶ Inside the sanctuary, the enthroned Buddha is flanked by two Bodhisattvas which are, in turn, attended by a tall female figure each holding a bunch of flowers in the hands. Notably, the Bodhisattva on the Buddha's proper right is a peculiar four-armed Avalokiteśvara, which may represent the manifested form known as Raktalokeśvara, the "Red-colored Lord of the world," as drawn from the later *Sādhanas* (see *supra*). If this interpretation is correct, a case can be made that these various Buddhist sculptures arranged as three-dimensional *maṇḍalas* were possibly carved at Ellorā to celebrate certain visualization practices.

Another sub-shrine branded as Cave 8A lies just outside to the left, in the vestibule of the preceding cave. It is a raised platform with two frontal pillars, carved on the back wall, with the pervasive triad consisting in the middle of the preaching Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* on an elaborate *makara* throne, flanked on each side by two Bodhisattvas dressed with similar ornaments and a Brahmanical cord, topped by the ubiquitous celestials bearing garlands [Figure 4.170].²²⁷ The Bodhisattva on the Buddha's proper left possibly carries a three-pronged *vajra* in his right hand, in which case he may be styled as Vajrapāṇi. To the proper right of the other anonymous Bodhisattva, on the left wall, a fine image of Avalokiteśvara stands, dressed as an ascetic with a deerskin on his left shoulder. He holds the long lotus stalk and water flask in his left hand and in his matted hair a miniature effigy of the

²²⁵ See also AHS # 1101, # 43265.

²²⁶ See also AHS # 97538.

²²⁷ For more views and details, see AHS # 1125–27, # 1131, # 43029–31, # 43033, # 97530, # 97532.

Buddha in the preaching attitude is visible.²²⁸ On his immediate right, a female deity, probably a Tārā, holds flowers and leaves.

In order to access the Cave 9 balcony, the visitor needs to go through a small passage via Cave 6. In this passage another carved panel of the ubiquitous triad with a seated Buddha in *bhadrāsana* can be found [Figure 4.171].²²⁹

Cave 9 has a nicely carved façade with a covered portico supported by two pillars. The façade's lower part shows a frieze of seven small attended Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*, separated from each other by a standing Bodhisattva flanked by two female figures [Figure 4.172]. The cave's back wall is divided into three compartments with carved panels [Figure 4.173].²³⁰ The central compartment contains a Bhadrāsana Buddha majestically seated, preaching on a lion throne and accompanied by garland bearers. The left and right standing Bodhisattvas from the observer's point of view are dressed, respectively, in the garb of an ascetic and of a prince, each attended by two small female deities. The left Bodhisattva is no doubt Avalokiteśvara, judging from the presence, in his ascetic hairdo, of a tiny Buddha with a right hand raised. The identity of the other bejeweled attendant is less secure. Even though he has an apparent *caitya* in his crown, he also seems to hold a *vajra* in his left hand which would help to identify him with Vajrapāṇi. Traces of plaster and faded paintings remain, which would perhaps have originally assisted in differentiating the figures through distinctive colors.

The most impressive triad of the Bhadrāsana type at Ellorā is found at the apsidal end of Cave 10, "the cathedral temple of the Buddhist caves," the only *caitya*-hall at the site (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 377). There, the preaching Buddha and Bodhisattvas front the rock-cut *caitya*, as in Ajaṅṭā Cave 26, but in an even more grandly conceived manner [Figures 4.174a–b].²³¹ The Buddha sits on an elaborate lion-*makara* throne and preaches under a sacred tree (*caityavṛkṣa*), carved on the arch immediately over his head. The scene is accompanied by multiple *vidyādhara*s on each side, wearing garlands and other paraphernalia, including a rare example of a conch-shell (*śaṅkha*), possibly illustrating a ritual lustration (*abhīṣeka*) over the head of the newly Enlightened One [Figure 4.175]. However, this supposition might be contradicted if we assume we are dealing with a pair of

²²⁸ This is not necessarily meant to be Vairocana. Avalokiteśvara images carrying a similar miniature preaching effigy of the Buddha are observed in the late caves of Nāsik (see *supra*).

²²⁹ See also AHS # 42965–68, # 97526–27.

²³⁰ See also AHS # 42962, # 42965–67.

²³¹ For more views and details, see AHS # 19098, # 19100–2, # 44277, # 44278. See also Burgess 1883: pl. XVI.1.

personified *nidhis* holding the conch and the lotus (i.e. *śaṅkhanidhi* and *padmanidhi*), symbolizing richness and fertility falling from the heavenly waters (cf. Bautze-Picron 2002b). At any rate, the tree can be firmly identified by the shape of its leaves as the *aśvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*), that is, the *bodhi*-tree of Śākyamuni, the Buddha of our world and time. In addition to its obvious symbolic and religious character, the *abhīṣeka* has clear resonance in the context of Indian kingship, since it is an intrinsic part of the ancient consecration ceremony of kings, itself connected to the legitimation of their divine and royal status (Gonda 1966). The natural association of the historic figure of Śākyamuni with the Enlightenment episode at Bodhgayā, possibly conflated here with the subsequent preaching of the First Sermon at Sārnāth, does not automatically preclude more esoteric levels of interpretation for identifying this icon. Vairocana, the personification of ultimate Enlightenment and a higher manifestation of Śākyamuni, would be the most natural contender since he is also conceived as a Buddha of cosmic dimensions, intimately connected with the emergence of nascent tantric Buddhism which we so decisively observe later in Ellorā Caves 11 and 12.²³²

As we have seen in other western Deccan caves, the addition of attendant Bodhisattvas reflects their increased importance since the late fifth century, even though these are often hard to distinguish in earlier contexts, frequently lacking, or even substituting, specific attributes. But in Ellorā Cave 10, the accompanying Bodhisattva on the Buddha's proper right is almost certainly Avalokiteśvara holding his expected lotus (*padma*) and rosary (*akṣamālā*), bearing a deerskin on his left shoulder, and with a possible ruined Buddha effigy in his headdress. The Bodhisattva on his left may or may not be Maitreya wearing a small *caitya* in the crown (on this attribute, see discussion *supra*). In addition, the monolithic *caitya* has twelve small niches along the drum (Burgess 1883: pl. III.2). Of these, two contain no images and the remaining ten are carved with single seated Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* [Figure 4.176]. Could they again evoke the Buddhas of the Ten Directions as we have

²³² In the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* narrative, Siddhārtha, known as Sarvārthasiddhi, the Bodhisattva who became enlightened or more precisely “consecrated” as Vajradhātu/Vairocana, after having reached the fifth stage of Supreme Enlightenment (*pañcābhisambodhi*) in Akaniṣṭha heaven, travelled down and taught rites and methods of the “first” *yogatantra* to the attending gods on the summit of Mount (Su)Meru and then descended further to the everyday world by taking possession of his “physical body” as Śākyamuni (Todaro 1985: 175ff; Weinberger 2003: 60–61, 174–176; Snellgrove 2004: 120–121; Skorupski 2005). See also *infra*, **Chapter 4, n. 261**. Yet, there are certain problems in ascribing this textual source as being possibly behind the iconographic inspiration at Ellorā since the text makes use of the more complex five-Buddha system which is clearly absent here. Having acknowledged this fact, however, Malandra (1983: 297ff; 1997) curiously and repetitively identifies the preaching Bhadrāsana Buddhas housed in the main shrines as Vairocana, whereas from external appearance, they should be identified as Śākyamuni. For a discussion on the meaning of the name (Mahā)Vairocana in tantric Buddhist literature, see **Appendix A**.

anticipated in Cave 2? The triforium or frieze carved in relief above the pillars in the main hall depicts repetitive panels showing a pentad composed of a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, flanked by two Bodhisattvas, and further bracketed by two other standing Buddhas, perhaps constituting a triadic arrangement of the Buddhas of the Three Ages [Figures 4.177–178].²³³ On the upper level veranda of Cave 10, several intrusive panels occur on the left wall, including various small seated Buddhas, one of which represents the standard Bhadrāsana Buddha arranged in a triad with a neatly carved inscription running in two lines just below [Figures 4.179–180]. This is the only ancient epigraph found so far in the Buddhist caves at Ellorā; it reads as follows:

1. *ye dharm(ā) hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ
ca yo ni-*
2. *rodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇa[h]*

Translation:

All things proceed from a cause; this cause has been declared by the Tathāgata; all things will cease to exist; this is that which is declared by the Great Śramaṇa [Buddha] (Burgess 1883: 13; with minor stylistic changes).

This is an isolated case of the famous and sacred Buddhist formula, “On Causation,” in Sanskrit, also known as *Pratītyasamutpādagāthā*, widely used in ancient South (and Southeast) Asian epigraphy, and often found engraved or stamped on *caityas* or *stūpas*, Buddhist images, miniature tablets, etc. during the medieval period since at least the sixth or seventh century (e.g. Sykes 1856; Boucher 1991; Skilling 2008b). The formula is neither donative nor dedicatory *per se*, but is a key “canonical” citation.²³⁴ It may have served, in “*sūtra*-style,” to empower or sanctify an image, or an object — here the carved panel — with the essence of the Buddha’s teaching (Bentor 1992). In later tantric contexts it is generally

²³³ See also AHS # 19103–04, # 55684, # 55686.

²³⁴ The formula is cited here as part of the most common *hy avadat* group for which the precise canonical source, and therefore its “sectarian affiliation,” is unknown to date. Skilling (2008b: 508) explains that, in most likelihood, the *Ye dharmā* verse used in its various recensions “circulated independently, orally or in ritual manuals, by ritual masters, by craftsmen, by painters, by scribes, without any explicit reference to any ‘cannon’.”

imbued with much more elaborate *pratiṣṭhāvidhi* or “consecration rituals.” The script cited above appears to be an early variety of Nāgarī, also known as Siddham or Siddhamāṭṭkā,²³⁵ perhaps dated to the late seventh or early eighth century on paleographic grounds.²³⁶ Since the inscription is probably contemporary with the carved panel, this would constitute an approximate *terminus ante quem* for the intrusive building activity of this *caitya*-hall at Ellorā, the latest of its kind in western India and also the latest cave of the middle period.

The Late Period (Caves 11 and 12)

The latest Buddhist shrines at Ellorā, Caves 11 and 12, are three-storeyed buildings dating to approximately the first decades of the eighth century [Figure 4.181].²³⁷ Interestingly, no residential cells were cut at any floor of Cave 11 or Cave 12.3. The Huntingtons remark that this new cave plan with three storeys is a unique feature in the western Deccan, possibly related to evolving Buddhist practices now clearly divided into three phases, such as “an initiation or introductory phase, a more advanced practice, and finally, the stage for the true *ācāryas*, or highly developed spiritual masters” (S. Huntington 1985: 272–273).

To make a more modern comparison with the Kathmandu valley in Nepal, we observe such a division and practice in temples where a Śākya or Vajrācārya Newar Buddhist takes ordination and practices first Śrāvākayāna or “the way of the hearers,” then he takes Mahāyāna and, only later, Vajrayāna vows (Gellner 1996). Accordingly, the space of a contemporary Newari temple has different sections or floors for each practitioner, just as possibly occurred at Ellorā Caves 11 and 12 over a thousand years ago. Even though it may be dangerous to read back evidence from modern times to an earlier period and a different area, the fact remains that Vajrayāna is a system of ritual practices that did not exist separately from Mahāyāna, which itself did not exist separately from the Śrāvākayāna

²³⁵ For a general discussion of the term and the varieties of script that it denotes, see Sircar 1970–71: 115–116. The latter observes: “Scholars have given various names to this alphabet, two of them, often used, being Kutila and ‘Early Nāgarī’. But the name Siddhamāṭṭkā is more authoritative since Al-Bīrūnī (eleventh century A.D.) uses this name for the alphabets of certain regions, and the Chinese applied the name Siddham to the same script.”

²³⁶ Burgess (1883: 13) says “eighth or ninth century,” but Malandra (1983: 31–32, n. 104) gives good reasons to place it a little earlier.

²³⁷ Cave 11 has long been known as Do Thal, because in the past it was thought to consist of only two storeys. Cave 12, on the contrary, has always been known as Tin Thal, which means three storeys. Gupte (1964: 3) contends that the period in which Cave 11 was excavated underwent “political disturbance,” possibly between the Cālukyas of Bādāmi and the early Rāṣṭrakūṭas, for hegemony over the region. Malandra (1997: 61f) agrees that these two caves should be seen as early Rāṣṭrakūṭa-period monuments, but at a time during which the Cālukyan sculptural style remains strong as it developed throughout the Deccan in the early eighth century.

schools since they shared common ordination lineages. Malandra (1997: 62ff) further argues that Cave 11 (unfinished) and especially Cave 12 were the first attempts in India to unfold a newly elaborate *maṇḍala* into three dimensions and on three levels or floors.

In these caves, the central Buddha images housed in the main shrines are nearly all seated cross-legged in the gesture of taking the earth to witness with the right hand on the right knee, fingers pointed down, while the left hand is on the lap, signifying Enlightenment. By now, the imagery of the Bhadrāsana Buddhas has clearly fallen out of fashion. The only exception is found in the main shrine of the third floor in Cave 11 (hereafter 11.3), which is probably the earliest carved shrine in this cave, assuming excavations started at the top floor and then moved downward.²³⁸ In Cave 11.3, the Buddha sits conventionally in *bhadrāsana* on a lion throne, as in the other earlier Caves 2 through 10, albeit with new elaborate back designs,²³⁹ performing the common preaching gesture [Figures 4.182–183].²⁴⁰ He is attended by two Bodhisattvas, possibly two forms of Avalokiteśvara, one of which, on the viewer’s left, is richly ornamented and clearly recognizable by the tiny Buddha on his crown (AIIS # 55674); the other, on our right, is dressed in ascetic guise and apparently holds a rosary in his right hand and a lotus stalk in his left (AIIS # 55682).

In Cave 12, Bhadrāsana images in a preaching attitude are also found almost exclusively on the third floor²⁴¹ — albeit not in the main shrine — where they inhabit niches located on the side walls of the pillared hall. Cave 12.3, in the words of Burgess, “is the most striking among the Buddhist caves” (Fergusson & Burgess 1880: 383), probably because it is entirely devoted to the worship of the Buddhas [Figure 4.185].²⁴² More precisely, four Buddha images are carved in very high-relief on the left, shorter side wall, and five on the right wall. The total of nine Buddhas does not seem to have immediate resonance other than serving as an auspicious number. This group of Buddhas can be somewhat compared to the ten unfinished sculptures in *bhadrāsana* located along the side walls of Cave 2. However,

²³⁸ That the ground floor or first storey is more or less unfinished confirms this assumption.

²³⁹ In later thrones at Ellorā, such as here in Caves 11 and 12, the throne-back is slightly different in design from its earlier prototype. In these thrones, a horizontal crossbar projects past two vertical posts and forming a “T shape” (Malandra 1997: 48). The *makaras* are then carved on top of this beam that rests on the heads of the rearing *vyālas*, who are conventionally supported by elephants.

²⁴⁰ See also AIIS # 055683.

²⁴¹ Another Bhadrāsana Buddha image is in a smaller shrine next to the stairway leading from the second floor to the third. This Buddha, crudely executed, is flanked both by standing Bodhisattvas and by standing Buddhas and is seated on a lion throne with a profiled wheel between his heels. Two large recumbent deer carved in the round appear on the ground, appropriately in front since the Buddha displays the preaching gesture [Figure 4.184].

²⁴² The seven past Buddhas sit in the crossed leg pose on the right and left sides of the back wall. Moreover, the monks’ cells of Cave 12 are limited to the first and second storeys.

here in Cave 12.3, the Bhadrāsana figures (reliefs L2, L3, R3, R4) alternate with Padmāsana ones (reliefs L1, L4, R1, R2, R5). All of these deeply carved Buddha images are with their usual attendant Bodhisattvas with elaborate thrones and converging flying figures above their heads [Figures 4.186–189].²⁴³ On a stylistic note, the lower garment of these Buddhas shows a decorative pleat in the middle, between the legs, a significant detail which is quite peculiar to Ellorā Cave 12.3 (with the exception of the Avalokiteśvara panel in Cave 4) and is also found on Buddha images from Central Java (Chapter 6; also Revire forthcoming b). Often the attendant Bodhisattvas are hard to distinguish, lacking specific attributes, but here a number of representations of Avalokiteśvara with his expected lotus and Buddha in headdress on the Buddha’s right occur, with Vajrapāṇi on his left with the thunderbolt lifted up on a long floral stem, a new feature in the western Deccan, although a typical trait of eastern and central Indian sculpture.²⁴⁴

The transitional iconographic move towards the blossoming Vajrayāna is also fully acknowledged in Caves 11 and 12 with the multiplication of female figures, as well as a new array of Bodhisattvas arranged in nine-square diagrams or *maṇḍalas*. In addition, the Buddha’s left attendant is consistently and securely identified as Vajrapāṇi.²⁴⁵ Indeed, Gupte (1964: 88, 93ff) identifies at least twenty-nine sculptures of him at Ellorā, both as Dvārapāla and shrine attendant, the great majority from Cave 12, where he appears nineteen times.

Conversely, it is intriguing to observe that Bhadrāsana Buddha images are, slowly but surely, losing favor as time passes. While the vast majority of shrine imagery depicts preaching Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*, with feet down, during the early and middle periods, almost all the late shrines from Caves 11 (with the exception of the main shrine in Cave 11.3) and 12 house seated Buddhas in *padmāsana*, i.e. the meditation posture with crossed legs, in which Siddhārtha reached Enlightenment upon the Vajrāsana.²⁴⁶ Clearly, the primary focus of worship was on the rapid attainment of *bodhi*, a decisive mark of the Vajrayāna, and not only on the merits that would accrue to others, judging by the absence of epigraphic data such

²⁴³ See also AHS # 55713–14, # 55721, # 55724.

²⁴⁴ See also AHS # 55719–20, # 55722–23.

²⁴⁵ The intricacies of the rise of Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva in Vajrayāna as an “eternal escort” to the Buddha are well summarized in Lamotte 2003b: 132ff.

²⁴⁶ The analogy with the episode of Enlightenment at Bodhgayā is further emphasized by the presence of Bhūdevī, i.e. the earth goddess, Aparājītā, trampling on the back of Gaṇapati, and four-armed dwarfs (the four Māras?), found at the base of the Buddha’s diamond throne (*vajrāsana*) in several shrines of Caves 11 and 12. See Malandra 1997: figs 169–172, 227–228, 255–256. For a description of the “Vajrāsana Buddha” according to the *Sādhanamālā*, see B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 77–78.

as the engraving of special prayers, including the *yad atra puṇyam* formula, which was ubiquitous at Ajaṅṭā and other earlier caves (cf. *supra*).

However, the purpose of this section is not to study the complexities of Buddhist iconographic development at Ellorā, which was evolving in fascinating ways as early tantric influences, rituals, and “oral texts” were progressively penetrating into the region, perhaps from Orissa in eastern India (Gupte 1964: 146ff; Malandra 1997: 16–17). As we know, texts, rites, and images hold a variety of relationships, sometimes mutually interdependent, sometimes not. Such a situation has raised the question of whether the Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* that we observe at Ellorā and elsewhere in the western Indian caves can be easily “read” and interpreted in the light of various (tantric) Buddhist scriptures, iconographic treatises, or ritual manuals. Could this iconographic type be studied and better understood in this early tantric context and through the examination of later strata of Buddhist *tantras*? Do we have the preserved texts to even ask these questions? These are some of the issues that I tried to address above, and answer — mostly in the negative —, albeit perhaps not always very conclusively.²⁴⁷

4. Summary and Discussion

4.1 A Royal and Solar Iconography?

“Why is the image as it is?” asked Joanna Williams (1975: 171) in her approach to Indian art. In the present chapter, I endeavored to answer this fundamental question focusing on the *bhadrāsana* as a pose. I showed the increasing preference for iconic images of this type during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period, adopted widely in both Buddhist and Hindu iconography. In the above iconological survey, we have seen that several deities, from female goddesses such as Śrī-Lakṣmī or other “Mothers,” to Sun god images of Sūrya or Āditya, the universal manifestation of Viṣṇu as Viśvarūpa, and eventually the Buddha, all adopted this majestic sitting position. It has become manifest as well that the Buddha’s imagery in *bhadrāsana* most likely drew from various visual Brahmanical precedents and iconographic sources and built upon such earlier artistic models.

²⁴⁷ Malandra (1997: xix) also admits that “no literary sources — formal or otherwise — are available to ‘explain’ the structure and, by inference, Buddhist practices at the site.” However, she considers that Ellorā “offers something different, a new ‘text’ that must be reconstructed from visual sources,” and invites us to visualize the Buddhist rock-cut complex as an “unfolded” *maṇḍala*. See also Malandra 1996.

In addition to the inherent royal and solar symbolism (on which see also **Appendix A**) linked to this *bhadra*-pose and hands gesture in the omnipresent attitude of “turning the law,” I have also examined other possible meanings for this “auspicious pose” in Buddhist and Hindu sculpture during the period. That the posture is also connected at times with feminine sources of power and fertility, possibly bringing auspiciousness to the worshipper, is interesting and deserves further discussions.

In all likelihood, the Buddha icons in *bhadrāsana* had multiple levels of meanings not only for the artists, donors, and patrons, but also for the viewers, or rather worshippers, who interpreted the work. The “viewers” should not be left out when studying such works of art, but we do not often know, and it is even doubtful, if visitors at Sārnāth, Ajañtā, and other sites during the ancient period, would have been able to understand the iconographic intricacies of these Buddha images, displayed frenetically all over the place. At Ajañtā, specifically, as Robert DeCaroli aptly observes: “it is not at all clear who had access to the site or was permitted to see the lavish interior decorations. The lack of visibility inside the dark rock-cut structures only increases the number of questions about the artwork’s intended audience” (2011: 143). The issue for worshippers was to feel “the living presence” of the Buddha and understand the enduring nature of his teachings as manifested through this new powerful iconic type set permanently in the stone.²⁴⁸ But in light of DeCaroli’s comments concerning the likely lack of accessibility of many caves to the casual “viewers” or devotees, a case can be made that the audience need not be composed only of humans. Indeed, DeCaroli contends that much of the local imagery at Ajañtā may in fact not have been destined towards the human eyes but used mainly as apotropaic devices to tame local and spirit-deities, especially the powerful Nāgendra mentioned in verse 25 of the Cave 16 inscription and which is commonly taken to denote the “Lord of serpents” (Mirashi 1963: 111; Cohen 1998: 374ff).²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ It is remarkable that the Buddha is almost always referred to as a “person” in Ajañtā’s inscriptions, rather than as an “image” (Owen 2001: 31, n. 10). Schopen (1990), based on epigraphic sources from the fifth century onwards, also argues that the Buddha was perceived as an actual “resident” of most Indian monasteries and caves.

²⁴⁹ The word *nāga*, meaning both “serpent” and “elephant,” may have caused some confusion between the two sets of beings in the interpretation of Cave 16 inscription. In Mirashi’s translation, the epigraph refers to the “best of mountains [...] which is inhabited by the lords of serpents [*bhujagendra*] in the thickets of the slopes [...] a canopy, which is provided with a large reservoir of abundant water and is also ornamented with a shrine of the lord of the Nāgas [*nāgendra*] and the like” (1963: 111, vv. 23, 25). Nāgendra or *nāga*-Lord, Mirashi adds in a footnote, surely “refers to the shrine of the Nāga Rāja ‘in the staircase leading down from the front of the cave’.” Although it is not clearly stated, it appears that Mirashi (and others scholars after him) took this to be a synonym of *bhujagendra*, meaning “Lord of serpents.” However, dependant on context, Nāgendra can

As for the donors, the very few epigraphic records associated with Bhadrāsana Buddhas that I have been able to find and review in this chapter all come from the western Indian caves and, with the exception of the colossal shrine Buddha image from Cave 16 at Ajañṭā (to be discussed further below), they refer to the pious gift of some Śākyabhikṣus, i.e. Bodhisattva monks who may claim kinship to Śākyamuni’s own family (Cohen 2000). Presumably these donations allude to Buddha Śākyamuni only, the archetype of all Buddhas and spiritual mentor of most Buddhist monks during this period. Naturally, one finds that the Buddha Śākyamuni’s relationship with his “extended family” (i.e. the Śākyas) was often conceptualized through royal and warring ideologies (Deeg 2011). In other words, just as the Śākyas would have been Siddhārtha’s army and followed him into war had he become a Cakravartin, in the same way, an “army” of monks would gather around the king of Dharma, the Lion of the Śākyas, viz. the Buddha who maintains righteous and celestial order. In the following, I discuss in more details these imperial and cosmic connotations intrinsically linked to the historical Buddha.

4.2 The Buddha as “Pantokrator”

The fervor and rapidity with which the Bhadrāsana Buddha type appeared almost simultaneously at Sārnāth and the western Indian caves, during the late fifth century, is remarkable. In the caves, the Buddha is often shown attended, with his feet supported by a lotus upheld by two *nāgas* and sometimes also represented with the deer and wheel motif which, in the context of Sārnāth, evokes the First Sermon at the Deer Park. In addition, Śākyamuni is often depicted in all his glory as a Cakravartin, or even as a cosmic figure, regularly sitting on a *śimhāsana* adorned with *makaras*, in the auspicious pose called *bhadrāsana*, with two fly-whisk escorts. All these accompanying details clearly bespeak royalty, emphasizing his spiritual, if not cosmic, authority as well as his worldly actions, in particular the teaching gesture of turning the wheel of the law.

Chapter 1 showed that not all kings have the right to the lion throne, which is strictly reserved for a Mahārāja or a Cakravartin. In the religious sphere, only the Dharma-king can claim royal splendor. The regal nature of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* was already alluded to

likewise be glossed as the “lordly elephant” or “Lord of elephants,” in which case Airāvata (Airāvāṇa), the white elephant which Indra took as his mount or vehicle (Hopkins 1915: 126–127), may also be invoked. Incidentally, this “*nāga*-king” is located just inside the famous elephant gate, referred to by Xuanzang as the entrance to the caves (Beal 1884: II, 259), located at the exact center of the curving scarp of the complex (Cohen 1998: figs 3–4; AIIS # 96859).

by Auboyer (1949: 153ff) and Bourda (1949: 310). Pia Brancaccio reaches a similar conclusion connecting the “auspicious pose” with sovereignty:

The most convincing indication that the Buddha was perceived as a king of the *vihāras* at Ajanta and Aurangabad is the way he appears in the shrines, sitting on an ornate throne in *bhadrāsana* [...]. This position unquestionably alludes to kingship. In the Ajanta paintings kingly protagonists of *jātakas* such as Mahājanaka in cave 1 (left wall) and Viśvantara in cave 17 (left wall) are represented sitting on elaborate thrones in the so-called European fashion when they address public audiences and exercise their royal functions. In Ajanta cave 2, on the left wall, the Buddha appearing as a *bodhisattva* in Tuṣita heaven, prior to his birth as Śākyamuni, also sits on a throne in *bhadrāsana* and *dharmacakramudrā* as he preaches to the gods. In the antechamber to the shrine of Ajanta cave 17, the Buddha is represented in the same way as he is represented preaching in connection with his descent from Trāyastriṃśa heaven (2011: 113).

Moreover, just as Viṣṇu was “the solar and royal god par excellence” (Auboyer 1949: 136), we can find similar literary traces of this regal and cosmic metaphor throughout the biographies of the life of Śākyamuni, preserved in various traditions and languages (e.g. Senart 1875; Foucaux 1884). Accordingly, a crucial moment seems to have been his sojourn on Mount Meru where — immediately after performing the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī — the Buddha sat on Indra’s throne and taught the Dharma to the gods in Trāyastriṃśa.²⁵⁰ As noted earlier, moreover, the artistic depictions related to this narrative cycle, i.e. the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, immediately followed by the Ascent (and subsequent Descent) of the Buddha to/from Trāyastriṃśa,²⁵¹ are particularly popular in late fifth or sixth century sculptural reliefs and paintings from the western Deccan. In the former episode, according to

²⁵⁰ In various Buddhist accounts, many important texts were delivered by the Buddha in the abode of the Thirty-three (Skilling 2008a).

²⁵¹ This ascending movement of the Buddha, is of course, reminiscent of the sun course and the myth of Viṣṇu’s three strides (*trivikrama*) by a seemingly insignificant man (the dwarf *avatāra*), who turns out to be a divine sovereign (Viṣṇu). On the solar significance of these three steps which cover and conquer the whole universe, see V.C. Srivastava 1960: 90ff and Gonda 1969: 55ff. For a similar observation linking the Buddha and Viṣṇu, see the study of murals at Pagan related to the sermon on Mount Meru by Bautze-Picron 2008b.

the *Divyāvadāna* (ed. Cowell & Neil 1886: 162, 401), the Buddha displays before the entire world the “Buddha-glory” (*buddhāvataṃsaka*), also called “Buddha-play” (*buddhavikrīḍita*), through his “Buddha-power” (*buddhānubhāva*) in which he created countless emanations of himself seated on lotus blossoms. We have also seen that in the dedicatory inscription of Varāhadeva at Ajaṅṭā Cave 16, the rock-cut sanctuary is designed to present the universe in microcosm. More specifically, it is equated to the *surendramandira*, a metaphor used to describe the cave as the heavenly palace of Indra (i.e. Vaijayanta). Verse 27 celebrates Cave 16 in these terms: “[It resembles] the palaces of the lord of gods and is similar to a cave in the lovely Mandara mountain” (trans. Mirashi 1963: 111),²⁵² a description that emphasizes the celestial nature of this place and its cosmic centrality, which may or may not be the same as Mount Meru, the nexus of a heavenly realm.²⁵³ In another verse of the same inscription (v. 22), the Buddha is styled as *yatīndra*, i.e. “Lord of ascetics,”²⁵⁴ while in the neighboring Cave 17 inscription, he is mentioned as both *munirāja* (v. 24) and *munīndra* (v. 28), i.e. “King” and “Lord of sages” (cf. Mirashi 1963: 111, 129; Cohen 1995: 361, 370–371, and 2006: 312, 321).²⁵⁵

The conflation in this epigraphic record of Indra, the archetype of the Cakravartin ideal, the righteous monarch, and the heroic king *par excellence* with the ascetic Buddha is significant.²⁵⁶ Indeed, as Leela Wood (2004: 113) emphasized:

²⁵² [*Su*]rendramandirāṇām ruciman mandarakanda[rānurūpaṃ] (ed. Cohen 2006: 312). Cohen’s translation reads: “Resembling the caves in Mandara mountain, [it] rivals the splendor of Surendra’s temples” (1995b: 362).

²⁵³ According to conflicting Indian sources, Brahmā’s abode (i.e. Brahmapura) is located on top of Mount Meru, while Indra’s mountain is otherwise known as Mandara, a distinct peak lying east of Meru (Hopkins 1915: 10, 140ff). It is common, however, to find Meru and Mandara conflated in most Buddhist texts. For example, Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (fourth–fifth century CE) states that Indra/Śakra’s palace is located in the exact center of the plateau at the peak of Meru (trans. La Vallée Poussin 1991: II, 463f). For more on Meru Buddhist cosmology, see E. Huntington 2013.

²⁵⁴ Mirashi translates this epithet as the “best of ascetics” and Cohen interprets it as the “ascetic Indra.”

²⁵⁵ The association of royal symbolism and the figure of the Buddha is made clear in *The Book of Zambasta*, relating events that occurred while Śākyamuni was absent in Trāyastriṃśa heaven for three months: “Jambudvīpa had become such as when no Buddha has been here, just like [...] a land where there is no king” (trans. Emmerick 1968: 347). In the following account, we are told that King Udayana of Kauśāmbī managed his anxiety by commissioning the first Buddha image. On this tale, see **Appendix B**.

²⁵⁶ In the Pali Canon, the Buddha is said to have been born up to thirty-six times as Sakka in his past lives (e.g. It 15; trans. Masefield 2000: 11). Asceticism, heroism, and royalty are deeply interconnected in ancient Indian tradition, from the Vedic ritual texts and hymns, to the Epics. Further, in Buddhist literature, we find both a reinterpretation and a remarkable continuation of Vedic-Epic ideas and imagery of the brilliant, ascetic warrior-king. The inner heat (*tapas*) of the ascetic man makes him glow and shine. The figure of Indra is usually presented as hostile to the ascetic ideal. According to various Buddhist narratives, the Lord of gods becomes aware of an ascetic or mystic when his throne is heated by excessive austerities produced by the latter. These severe practices cause the excessive heat generated by *tapas* to rise and warm Indra’s throne, making him

As *munīndra*, the Buddha's nature combines the cosmic and the human. For the Buddhists of Vākāṭaka Ajanta, he is at once an emperor, who is far greater than Indra, and an ascetic who has renounced the world. Indra's rule is limited to Trayastrimśa heaven and thus to the most inferior of the three *dhātus*, the *kāmadhātu*, within which it is located. In contrast, the Buddha rules the cosmos as its prime being precisely because he has renounced the world (*pura*) for the forest (*vana*).

By occupying the divine throne of the Lord of gods,²⁵⁷ Claudine Bautze-Picron (2010a: 28ff) further argues that Śākyamuni was thus able to endorse the royal function of this deity and rule over the all universe. It is as if the Buddha, taking on a new cosmic dimension as “Pantokrator,” has drawn to himself the attributes and power (*indriya*) of “the Mighty One, Lord of gods” (*śakro devānām indraḥ*) to teach the Dharma.²⁵⁸ To further substantiate this, several other caves (e.g. Ajaṅṭā Cave 26, Karla, Kuda) evidence the recurrent depiction of a new visual formula in carved relief where a “flying” crown or tiara is held by celestials over the head of a pendant-legged Buddha, enthroned on a lion-*makara* chair attended by fly-whisk assistants. The Buddha, who had earlier on been shown in India art, if at all, mainly as an ascetic, now is increasingly portrayed as a great king or Cakravartin. Clearly, Śākyamuni's kingship and religious authority ought to be emphasized from now on, not his austerities.²⁵⁹

uneasy. Minoru Hara (1975) enumerates several passages from the *Mahābhārata* as well as the Pali *jātakas* in which Indra interferes with certain ascetics by ways of dissuasion, seduction, and even violence. These narratives indicate that even the gods fear ascetics and their powers since these can lead them to attain higher forms of sovereignty. The Buddha, however, is said to have rejected such extreme practices of austerities since they are not conducive to *nirvāṇa* (cf. Kloppenborg 1990).

²⁵⁷ As shown in **Chapter 1**, a late Pali work transmitted in Thailand equates the “auspicious throne” (*bhadrāsana*) with the “red marble stone” or throne of Indra. See also *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* I 250, 24.

²⁵⁸ To the question “What is the meaning of the word *indriya*?” Vasubhandu reportedly says that “in general, *indriya* signifies *adhipati* or ruler” (trans. La Vallée Poussin 1991: I, 153). The term literally means “belonging to Indra,” hence connotes among other things, “supremacy, dominance and control.” The term is attested in the general meaning of “power, force, etc.” in Vedic Sanskrit or “governing, ruling or controlling principle” in a more specific Pali sense (SED, PED, s.vv.). See also Snodgrass 1988: 62ff.

²⁵⁹ The superiority of the later tantric Buddha Vairocana over Indra, the king of the Vedic pantheon, is made even more explicit in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*, i.e. “Elimination of all evil destinies.” In this narrative, Indra/Śakra and his fellow residents in Trāyastriṃśa are powerless to help their deceased colleague Vimalamañiprabha, not even knowing into which realm he has been reborn. They must therefore seek the aid of Vairocana, first locating their fallen cohort in the most tortuous hell (*avīci*) and, second, setting forth a *maṇḍala*

In all of these sculptures and reliefs, the Buddha is conceptually shown “crowned” only when sitting in *bhadraśana*, “in which case the wheel flanked by the deer is also carved in the lower part of the relief,” Bautze-Picron aptly observed (2010a: 43). “On the other hand, when he sits with crossed legs in *padmāsana*, neither the coronation nor the wheel and deer are illustrated.” In **Chapter 3**, I showed the occurrence of a textual precedent in the *Lalitavistara* which describes the “great consecration” (*mahābhīṣeka*) of the Buddha seated on a lion throne immediately after he gave up the austerities and the cross-legged posture upon reaching Enlightenment (see Lal 376, vv. 65–69). Since the Vedic period, the great *abhīṣeka* is a rite whereby the anointed one wins supreme power, luster and royal glory, and becomes intrinsically connected to Indra, the prototypical ideal king.²⁶⁰ Later during the early medieval period, as Ronald Davidson observed (2002: 123ff), the “relationship between the initiatory ritual of the *abhīṣeka* and the coronation ritual of kingship is [especially] explicit” with the development of *maṇḍalas* and tantric Buddhism.²⁶¹

In sum, the depiction of the enthroned Buddha with legs pendant became a pervasive iconographic theme in the western Indian caves during the late fifth century onwards. While this posture may, at times, have alluded to specific narrative episodes connected to earthly miracles and celestial conversions, it was more commonly used as a propagandist visual device to display the omnipotent and supramundane Buddha Śākyamuni as “Pantokrator,” i.e. Lord of the universe. This emphasis on the Buddha’s cosmic nature was a significant breakthrough because it decidedly marked a decisive moment in the history of Buddhist art in India when the regal symbolism of the Buddha image became more flagrant and more vividly accepted in plastic form, as we shall further see in the next chapter dealing with eastern India and the Himalayan regions during the Post-Gupta and Pāla-Sena periods.

with the proper prescribed death rites for his benefit. Accordingly, Indra performs these specifically Buddhist tantric rites through which Vimalamaniprabha is liberated from hell and reborn in a better destiny. For a study and translation of this text, see Skorupski 1983.

²⁶⁰ The *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (VIII 12–14) mentions a special form of royal unction called *aindra mahābhīṣeka*, i.e. “Indra great unction,” by which the Lord of gods becomes a great king anointed on a throne. See also Gonda 1966.

²⁶¹ In the same vein, Adrian Snodgrass (1988: 91f) adds that “many Buddhist mandalas represent the Buddha enthroned at the centre of Indra’s palace on the summit of Meru, wearing the ‘crown’ and adornments of a sovereign.” For example, in the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* narrative of the first chapter, (Mahā)Vairocana, alias Vajradhātu, after achieving Enlightenment in Akaniṣṭha, descended to the “jewelled pavilion” made of vajra-jewels (*vajramaṇiratnaśikharakūṭāgāra*) located on the peak of Mount Sumeru (*sumerugirimūrdhan*), where he sat on the lion throne (*siṃhāsana*) and eventually emanated the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* composed of thirty-seven deities. If we subtract the four Tathāgatas from this group, a clear correspondance between the thirty-three remaining deities born from Vajradhātu/Vairocana and the thirty-three gods (*trāyastriṃśa*) of Indra’s heaven is produced (ed. Yamada 1981: 10; trans. Giebel 2001: 25). I wish to thank Kimiaki Tanaka for this reference. On the iconography of “crowned Buddhas,” see Bautze-Picron 2010a.

CHAPTER 5: EASTERN INDIA (BIHAR, BENGAL, ORISSA) AND THE HIMALAYAS

1. *The Pāla-Sena Classical Age (ca 737–1200 CE)*

The Pāla realm was officially founded with the “election” of Gopāla I as the king of Gauḍa in *circa* 737.¹ The dominion reached its peak under his direct successors, Dharmapāla (r. *ca* 762–794 CE) and Devapāla (r. *ca* 794–829 CE), son and grandson respectively,² who adopted from then on the imperial titles *parameśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka mahārājādhirāja* and styled themselves in an “ecumenical” manner, *paramasaugata* or “supreme follower of Sugata” (i.e. the Buddha).

Then at its height in the early ninth century, the Pāla Empire was the dominant power in the northern subcontinent, with its territory stretching across parts of modern-day northern and eastern India, that is, mainly Bihar and Bengal, now also covering part of Bangladesh. Until the discovery of the Jagajjibanpur (West Bengal) copperplate in 1987, mentioning the hitherto unknown Mahendrapāla (r. *ca* 829–844 CE), fourth king of the main Pāla dynastic branch,³ the Pāla Empire was generally described in terms of a gradual disintegration following the death of Devapāla. Actually, Mahendrapāla appears to have retained most of Pāla control over Bengal and Bihar. Later, Mahīpāla I (r. *ca* 974–1022 CE), of the collateral Pāla branch, defended imperial bastions in Bengal and Bihar against Cōḷa invasions and

¹ According to the Khalimpur copperplate inscription, Gopāla I was the son of Vapyaṭa (Kielhorn 1896–97). Later records assert that he was a Kṣatriya belonging to the legendary solar dynasty and an active Buddhist patron, a claim reiterated by Tāranātha (1575–1634) in his *History of Buddhism in India* (Tib. *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i chos bskor gyi byung khungs nyer mkho*) of 1608 (Chimpa & Chattopadhyaya 1970: 257ff). These assertions, however, are unreliable and clearly appear to be a later attempt to obscure the Hindu (probably Vaiṣṇava) humble origins of the dynasty (Buchanan 1975: 12ff). Four Gopāla kings of the Pāla dynasty are known to us to date. See *inter alia* G. Bhattacharya 1998; also Furui 2009 and 2013.

² Only relative data are available on the genealogy and sequence of events of the Pāla rulers. The chronology is based mainly on the regnal years of the kings, from copperplate grants, inscribed images, and manuscript colophons, generally without any well-known calendar era. Susan Huntington (1984: 32–37) lists all the chronologies attempted up to 1984 by different scholars. Gouriswar Bhattacharya prefers a chronology without tangible dates, and gives only the years of the rulers' reigns known thus far (see his “Genealogy” chart published in Bautze-Picron 1998a: 123). In the following, however, I use Rajat Sanyal's new scheme of Pāla chronology and succession of kings (either 2014 or forthcoming). I am grateful to him for sharing some of his unpublished data.

³ To be sure, a certain Mahendrapāla had been mentioned earlier in some Pāla records, but prior to this copperplate discovery, historians believed that these mentions referred to the Gurjara-Pratihāra king Mahendrapāla I, not a distinct Pāla ruler, son and successor of Devapāla (G. Bhattacharya 1988).

managed to recover parts of some lost territories.⁴ However, a series of subsequent invasions considerably reduced the power of the Pālas. Rāmapāla (r. ca 1071–1124 CE) was the last strong ruler who tried to revive the Pāla Empire with limited success before it got considerably weakened with rebellions in many areas. The expanding Sena dynasty finally dethroned the Pālas in Bengal in the course of the twelfth century.⁵

The Pālas, whose rulers bore names ending with the suffix *-pāla*, i.e. “protector,” were astute diplomats and military conquerors as much as they were important promoters of classical Indian philosophy, literature, painting, and sculpture. The proto-Bengali, or, rather, Gauḍī script developed under Pāla rule. The Pālas also built large temples and monasteries (*mahāvihāras*), including the Somapura Mahāvihāra (Paharpur), and patronized several great monastic universities such as Nālandā and Vikramaśīla (probably today Antichak). At their peak, the universities attracted scholars and students from near and far with some travelling from as far away as Tibet, China, Korea, and Central Asia. These monastic universities formed a large network and it was common for great scholars to move easily from place to place and position to position (Dutt 1988: 352ff).⁶ Archeological and epigraphic evidence also notes contact with the Śailendra dynasty of Indonesia, one of whose kings, “attracted by the manifold excellences of Nālandā,” built a monastery.⁷ In addition, the Pālas partook of cultural and economic relations with the Tibetan Empire and even the Abbasid Caliphate. Islam first appeared in Bengal during Pāla rule, as a result of increased trade between Bengal and the Middle East. Abbasid coinage found in Pāla archeological sites,⁸ as well as records of Arab historians,⁹ point to flourishing mercantile and intellectual contacts.

⁴ For two recently published copperplates of this king, dealing with donations of villages to Brahmins, see Furuī 2010 and 2011.

⁵ For a recent reappraisal of Pāla-Sena political history, I refer to Sanyal 2014.

⁶ To give just one significant example, mention should be made of Atiśa (ca 982–1054 CE), a famed Bengali Buddhist master and one of the major figures in the spread of eleventh-century Buddhism in Tibet (Chattopadhyaya 1967).

⁷ Bālaputradeva, the Śailendra king of Suvarṇadvīpa, which most probably refers to the Śrīvijaya kingdom in southeast Sumatra, sent an emissary to Devapāla, asking for a grant of five villages for the construction of a monastery at Nālandā (Sastri 1924; Jordaan 2000; Zakharov 2012). Other explicit written evidence for direct contacts between ancient Java and Bengal may appear in the Kelurak inscription (stanza VII) of Central Java which speaks of a “royal preceptor” (*rājaguru*), possibly hailing from Bengal (*gauḍīdvīpaguru*). See Bosch 1928: 18–19, 21, 29.

⁸ For example, a silver coin dated 788 CE of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn Ar-Rašīd (r. 786–809) was found at Paharpur. See Nazimuddin & Sanday 1986: 27.

⁹ Here, I think primarily of Al-Bīrūnī (973–1048 CE) who wrote an encyclopedic work on India called *Kitāb taḥqīq mā le’l-Hend men maqūla maqbūla fi’l-‘aql aw marḍūla* (“The book confirming what pertains to India, whether rational or despicable”) in which he explored nearly every aspect of Indian life, including religion, history, geography, geology, science, and mathematics. See *Encyclopædia Iranica* (s.v.), online edition: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/biruni-abu-rayhan-index> [Accessed on 25 September 2016].

Under the Pāla kings, a period of comparative peace and prosperity emerged that saw a great rise in general patronage of Buddhist monuments and sculptures. During this period, a school of Buddhist art that was to spread its influence throughout most of the Buddhist medieval world arose in eastern India (S. Huntington & J. Huntington 1990). By this time, Buddhism was a general mixture of Mahāyāna philosophies traditionally practiced in all its manifestations in northern and eastern India, but particularly characterized by a marked resurgence of attention to *Prajñāpāramitā* discourse and *Mañjuśrī* texts (Kinnard 1996a; Harrington 2002). However, as time passed, traditional forms of Buddhism became more and more imbued with tantric practices involving secret rituals and magic (R. Davidson 2002). The tantric influence clearly grew strong and became most pronounced at Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, and other large monasteries during the Pāla period. Various classes of Vajrayāna literature developed as a result of royal Pāla courts sponsoring both Buddhism and Hinduism. For example, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (i.e. *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*), which later came to be classified under *kriyātantras*, states that *mantras* taught in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *tantras* would be equally effective if used by Buddhists since they were all thought to be originally preached by Mañjuśrī (Sanderson 2009: 129–130).

This religious prosperity continued until the twelfth century when Buddhism, except for the Himalayan regions, declined gradually in eastern India after the rise of Hindu philosophies and the waning of Buddhist patrons on the subcontinent (Verardi 2011b: 360–372). The final blow was delivered when the great monasteries, the last visible symbols of Buddhism in India, were attacked during the Muslim offensive that swept across northern India at the turn of the thirteenth century (Basham 1954: 73–74).

2. Corpus Analysis

2.1 Hindu Sculptures from Bihar, Bengal, and the Himalayas

It is often said of the Pāla rulers that the dynasty was the last Indian “stronghold” of Buddhism for nearly four hundred years. Susan Buchanan in her study of Pāla patronage (1975) clearly demonstrates that this was an overstatement. If the second and the third Pāla kings, Dharmapāla and Devapāla, clearly made significant contributions to such great Buddhist monasteries as Nālandā,¹⁰ they, at the same time, patronized Hindu establishments

¹⁰ See Sastri 1942: 84ff. No inscriptions or monuments assigned to the period of Gopāla, the first Pāla ruler, are known. To this statement, Susan Huntington adds: “Even if the [following] Pālas gave donations to the

as well. In all likelihood, almost every other Pāla ruler did not actually profess Buddhism but adhered to Hinduism, even though they used the *dharmacakra* royal seal and the title *paramasaugata*.¹¹

In this regard, it may be significant that the earliest of the known Pāla-period inscriptions on a stone lintel from Bodhgayā, the Buddhist site of Bihar *par excellence*, actually depicts Brahmanical, not Buddhist, figures [Figure 5.1]. This inscription is dated in the twenty-sixth regnal year of Dharmapāla, *circa* 788 CE, and records the installation of a four-faced image of Mahādeva (Śiva) for the benefit of the inhabitants of Mahābodhi (S. Huntington 1984: 39–40, Appendix no. 5). Specifically the sculpture depicts, in an apparently archaic style, the Śaiva-Pāśupata god Lakulīśa squatting and strapped as an ascetic in *bhadrāsana*, flanked by the standing figures of Sūrya and Viṣṇu. Thus, the work, dating from the late eighth century, clearly suggests the presence of Hindu practice at the Buddhist site. This need not surprise us for, as Jacob Kinnard wrote, “Bodhgayā is not, and never has been, *only* a Buddhist site. Hindus have been visiting Bodhgayā since at least the Buddha’s own lifetime [...]. Buddhists and Hindus had not only shared the space of Bodhgayā for many centuries, but they had also shared the image of the Buddha” (1998: 817–818).¹² Other seated images of Lakulīśa in *bhadrāsana* are known from Bihar [Figure 5.2], including a fine carved pillar from Rajaona, near Lakhi Sarai, with Lakulīśa receiving *abhiṣeka* from Brahmā and Śiva (Asher 1986: 230, fig. 4).

Some Brahmanical triads (*trimūrti*) from Kashmir, produced in stone as early as the sixth century and disclosing certain Gupta stylistic elements, also show Brahmā and Viṣṇu similarly, or even simultaneously, seated in *bhadrāsana* (Siudmak 2012: pls 64, 70). In one sculpture, the four-headed Brahmā is shown independently with only three visible heads (Siudmak 2012: 145). Of note, the drapery is worn in the open mode in the same manner as some Buddha images [Figure 5.3]. A separate composition of Viṣṇu from Kashmir with three visible heads, incorporating the animal faces of Varāha and Narasimha, is also depicted squatting in *bhadrāsana* [Figure 5.4a]. The fourth fierce head (*kāpila/raudra*), however, appears on the reverse [Figure 5.4b], a significant iconographic detail which would probably not have emerged before the ninth century. In fact, a later date in the eleventh century has

monasteries, it is not known if this money was spent in the creation of images and paintings, or if so, whether the kings had any influence over the artists in the creation of their work” (1984: 45, n. 70).

¹¹ For a more recent review on the patronage of the Pālas and other dynasties such as the early Candras of southeast Bengal, see Sanderson 2009: 82ff, and Bautze-Picon 2016: 167–170.

¹² In the same vein, see Appendices 1 and 2 by Federica Barba in Verardi 2011b: 401–435.

been suggested for this sculpture.¹³ Such images of Viṣṇu, often standing, are referred to as Vaikuṅṭha Caturmūrti in the iconography of Kashmir (Pal 1988a: cat. no. 14; Siudmak 2012: 380ff, pls 175, 177–180, 200–202, 213–214). However, as prescribed in the *Jayākhyasamhitā*, one of the cardinal texts of Pāñcarātra literature, Viṣṇu Vaikuṅṭha may be depicted as riding his vehicle Garuḍa. Rarely, as here, he is also accompanied with his consort Lakṣmī who sits on his left thigh.

Another unique sculpture from Kashmir has been identified as Viṣṇu slaying the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha (Pal 1988a: cat. no. 10; Pal 2008b: fig. 76) **[Figure 5.5]**. According to the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* (also known as *Śrīmad Devībhāgavatam*), Madhu and Kaiṭabha are considered conspiring demons, designed to annihilate Brahmā. However, Brahmā spotted them and invoked Viṣṇu who killed them both. In doing so, he took up his boundless cosmic form (*viśvarūpa*) with eight arms, immeasurably immense, and then, as the narrative goes, placed the two demons on his massive thighs and beheaded them with his discus (*sudarśanacakra*).¹⁴ This led to Viṣṇu being called Madhusudanaḥ, i.e. “the destroyer of Madhu,” which is the seventy-third name in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, a list of 1,000 names of Viṣṇu. Besides the discus, the god is seen to be carrying other weapons, including the bow, hence he is also known as Śārṅgin, i.e. “bowman or archer,” another epithet of Viṣṇu. Numerous additional examples of four-armed Viṣṇu, seated with legs pendant, straddling Garuḍa’s shoulders, are known from Bihar and Nepal during this period **[Figures 5.6–7]**.¹⁵ Each of Viṣṇu’s hands holds an implement consisting of the mace, the discus, the citron-fruit, and the conch variously distributed. His female counterpart (*śakti*) Vaiṣṇavī is sometimes similarly depicted in *bhadrāsana* with the feet of the goddess held on the hands or upon the wings outstretched of the flying solar bird **[Figures 6.8–10]**.¹⁶ Narasimha, the “man-lion” *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, is also occasionally represented in *bhadrāsana* in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, where, for example at Brahmaur, the deity sits on a throne decorated with stylized mountain scenery in the center and gaping lions at both ends **[Figures 5.11a–b]**.¹⁷ Naturally, the cult of Viṣṇu seems always to have appealed to the warrior caste and particularly to

¹³ See Pal 1988a: cat. no. 23. For other similar examples, see Postel 1985: 100–101, figs 118–119.

¹⁴ For the narrative, see book I, chapter 9, pp. 29–33 (Vijñānānanda 1921–22).

¹⁵ Pal 1974: 75ff, fig. 108. For a few other published examples, see Banerji 1933: pls 48a, c; Pal 1974: figs 30, 109, 111–112; Asher 1980: pls 107, 189, 237; Misra 1998: III, 132, F. 172; Bautze-Picron 2002a; Guy 2014b: 17.

¹⁶ Numerous relief examples of Vaiṣṇavī as part of the “Seven Mothers” or *saptamātṛkās* are known from Bihar and Bengal. In this grouping, Vaiṣṇavī is the only “Mother” who sits in this manner. See Ghiraw 2008: cat. nos 3–4, 6–8, 10–14, 16–19; also Huntington Archive # 4460.

¹⁷ See Ohri 1988: 108–109; also Pal 2008b: fig. 68; Siudmak 2012: 177–178, 428, pl. 72.

conquering monarchs, for whom the heroic god has remained a symbol of regal bravery. Thus Viṣṇu's favorite association with the sitting posture in *bhadrāsana*, especially when he assumes supreme form or when he is represented as a Universal King wearing the tiara, is significant.¹⁸

Of course, the quintessential “royal, solar, and auspicious” pose is not limited to any particular Hindu god since several other deities can also be portrayed at times in *bhadrāsana*, including Gaṇeśa seated on a lion throne (Siudmak 2012: pl. 77), or Skanda riding the peacock with its tail feathers expanding like rays of light behind the head of the god [Figure 5.12].¹⁹ A few stone or bronze squatting images of Agni, the Vedic god of sacrificial fire with its distinctive flamed aureole, are also known from Bihar or Bengal during the Pāla period [Figures 5.13–14].²⁰ In addition, a large number of depictions of Śrī-Lakṣmī, the goddess of good fortune and sovereignty, are known from Kashmir or nearby Himachal Pradesh where she is often seated in *bhadrāsana*, combining the pose with an actual scene of coronation during her *abhiṣeka* (Srinivasan 2010: 89ff; Siudmak 2012: pls 61, 75; Guy 2014b: 14) [Figures 5.15–17]. In particular, the sculpture now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art shows her with a large crown, confirming the association of this posture and insignia with royal power [Fig. 5.16].²¹ To this non-exhaustive list, we can add early stone reliefs of Hārītī, again in *bhadrāsana*, from Nepal (Pal 1974: 42–43, figs 58–59), stone and brass images of Durgā from Himachal Pradesh (Postel 1985: figs 79, 128), one emaciated image of the dreadful Cāmuṇḍā, also from Nepal (Pal 2003: cat. no. 34), and a mysterious relief of Yama as the judge of the deceased with his consorts, all seated in the pendant-legged pose [Figure 5.18].²²

¹⁸ An intriguing early sculpture in *bhadrāsana* from Nepal, possibly a royal portrait of a Licchavi ruler, indicates these intricate connections between solar, royal, and Vaiṣṇava symbolisms (Pal 1974: 46–48, fig. 64).

¹⁹ See also the sculpture of Skanda-Kārttikeya from Shahkund, Bhagalpur district in Bihar (Sinha 1979: pl. 31). For an example from Orissa, see AIIS # 95108.

²⁰ See Huntington Archive # 6353, and Pal 1988a: cat. no. 89a. For more examples, see also Banerjea 1956: 524, pl. 45–4 (= AIIS # 34658 and Huntington Archive # 5199); Sotheby's New York, sale on 18 December 1981, lot 77, and Sotheby's London, sale on 29 November 1982, lot 212; Christie's Amsterdam, sale on 18 October 2005, lot 237.

²¹ To these sculptures, we can add a large series of gold coins found in Kashmir, the legends on the obverse usually read the name *kidara*. The Kidaras (also known as Kidarites) are considered related to the late Kuṣāṇas and ruled parts of Panjab and Kashmir sometime after the downfall of the Kuṣāṇa Empire in the fourth–fifth centuries CE. These obverse legends identify various kings who are shown standing, while the reverses depict a peculiar enthroned goddess, most likely Ardoxšo or Śrī-Lakṣmī, who also appears on Kuṣāṇa and Gupta numismatic evidence [Fig. 2.1 and Fig. 4.1].

²² For an example of Yama in *bhadrāsana*, with possible aspects of Kubera and Hayagrīva, approximately dated to the seventh–eighth centuries, see Schroeder 2001: II, 750–753, pl. 174A–E, and 2008: 108–109, pl. 30.

2.2 Buddhist Sculptures from Bihar

Although the name “Bihar” in many museum labels loosely refers to the region where the pieces were first collected, these works obviously came from specific sites and workshops. In the following section, I try to determinate the precise provenance of the sculptures under study, often dispersed today in many museum collections. In addition, several important sculptures still exist *in situ*, usually in worship, in several local temples and villages. A certain number of Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* are known to come from the famous Nālandā University, or nearby, which is the first sub-group to be studied. The art style in the Nālandā area is somewhat different from the style produced in the region of Bodhgayā, which in turn differs from styles found in other parts of Bihar.²³

Nālandā and Its Vicinity

Nālandā Temple/Site 3

The most iconic of Nālandā’s structures is the so-called Great Stūpa or, rather, Temple/Site 3 with its huge flight of stairs that originally led to the summit.²⁴ The temple was initially a small structure built upon and enlarged by later constructions. Archeological evidence shows that the final structure was a result of at least seven successive such accumulations of brick construction (Page 1930a: 128–132). The fifth of these layered temples is the most interesting and the best preserved with four corner towers of which three have been exposed. Two towers as well as one side of the great flight of stairs are still decorated with exquisite panels and niches. These depict a variety of fine and generally well preserved stucco figures including the Buddha and Bodhisattvas in various postures.

Three of these panels are of immediate interest to this study since they depict the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana*. On the southeastern corner tower, the lower central panel facing south depicts the Buddha alone seated within an arched niche while a Bodhisattva is found standing on each of the adjacent niches with flat tops [Figure 5.19]. Presumably these

²³ See S. Huntington 1984 for an overview of local idioms where Pāla sculptures are presented according to their sites and regions of provenance.

²⁴ To call the monument a *stūpa* is a misnomer since no relics were found within the structure during excavation. Some local traditions state that the site was the birthplace of Śariputra, chief disciple of the Buddha, and that an early *caitya* possibly marked that event. Xuanzang identifies it as located in the nearby ancient town of Kālapināka (Beal 1884: II, 177). At any rate, by the later Gupta period onwards, the structure clearly took on a new appearance and temple form.

figures formed a triad consisting of a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* with two attending Bodhisattvas. The one on the left as seen by the viewer is too damaged and cannot be identified, but the Bodhisattva on the right is probably Mañjuśrī, judging by his necklace made of tiger canine, who is known to have been worshipped at Nālanda since the seventh–eighth centuries (Bautze-Picron 1989: 75ff). On the eastern side wall of the stairs [Figure 5.20], two additional niches also present a similar triad with a large seated Buddha with his hands held at chest level in a preaching gesture, flanked by two smaller Bodhisattvas seen in profile and standing against the side walls within the same niche [Figures 5.21–22]. In the first of these panels, the Bodhisattva on the Buddha’s proper right holds a rosary, while the opposite Bodhisattva, on the next panel, clearly wears the tiger canine necklace (AIIS # 37958, # 38102). These can be identified as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī respectively.

Both Frederick Asher (1980: 46–47) and Susan Huntington (1984: 21–22; 1985: 225–226) date these stucco sculptures to the late sixth or early seventh centuries CE, possibly under the generous patronage of King Harṣavardhana (r. ca 606–647) as witnessed by his seals found at the site as well as the reports of Xuanzang (Sastri 1942: 14ff, 68–69). The stucco images clearly reflect the earlier Sārnāth Gupta style with stone Buddha images found in the same pose and datable to the late fifth century [Figs 4.12–14]. The drapery similarly covers both shoulders and adheres closely to the body without any indication of garment folds. A major stylistic difference though is that, here, the Buddha is seated on a rectangular seat against a large cushion, but not on a typical *makara*-lion throne. On one occasion [Fig. 5.21], there appears to be a decorative pointed object (a pair of ivory tusks?) emanating from the bolster supporting the back of the Buddha at the level of his shoulders. The Buddha’s head is surrounded by a plain nimbus, to which two flying celestials are added on the second panel [Fig. 5.22]. It is of course entirely possible that the stucco reliefs were painted later with folds on the Buddha’s robe, or foliates on the nimbus. The use of stucco and terracotta panels spread to ornate brick temples from the time of the Gupta period onwards. It was also popular in the Northwest in late Gandhāran art (Luczanits 2008b) which, as far as stucco reliefs are concerned, led one scholar to assert that this region might have served as “the primary source of inspiration for Nālandā” (Paul 1995: 43).

Museum Collections

The Nālandā on-site Archeological Museum keeps several stone sculptures in high-relief and bronzes of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* that are securely reported to come from the site or the neighboring villages. This small corpus will be supplemented and compared with other images located today in other museum collections in India and overseas and for which the provenance, not always documented, can often be traced back to the Nālandā region.

Pre-Pāla Images

As we have already seen, Nālandā was probably already a well-established monastery by the late Gupta period. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that we find a few sculptural remains from the pre-Pāla period at the site, such as the stucco panels still *in situ* at Temple 3 (see *supra*). Two Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* to be discussed below, at present kept in the reserve collection of the Archeological Museum of Nālandā, also predate the Pāla period.

First, a small, worn stone stele, possibly dated to the sixth century, represents a triad centered on a preaching Buddha flanked by a male Bodhisattva on his proper right and a peculiar female deity on his left [**Figure 5.23**]. The two attendants both stand upon a lotus base, with their right hands raised, and are both endowed with a circular nimbus. They can be tentatively identified as Avalokiteśvara and Tārā, his feminine counterpart (Paul 1995: 7–9). Countless similar Buddhist triads are known from other cave-complexes in western India, which are generally attributed to a time span between the late fifth to the early eighth centuries (**Chapter 4**), although none represent a female figure directly attending the Buddha. That such triadic images once existed, however, is known from the travelling accounts of Xuanzang who visited, *circa* 642, the Tiladaka/Telhara monastery (on which see *infra*), located between Patna and Gaya. He observed there three shrines, each respectively housing a colossal image of the Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā (Beal 1884: II, 103). Interestingly, an illuminated manuscript from Nepal also presents a similar triad with a central Buddha in *bhadrāsana* [**Fig. 5.105**].

Figure 5.24 may equally be assigned to the post-Gupta era during the sixth or early seventh centuries. The Buddha is enthroned on an elaborate chair adorned with *makaras* on its back-rest and lions at its base; he also wears a transparent robe which covers both shoulders, so typical of the classical school of art at Sārnāth (Paul 1995: 5–7).

Miniature Steles with the Eight Great Events

Several miniature steles (*ca* 10–15 cm in height) from Nālandā, popular during the Pāla period, depict the group of eight major events in the Buddha Śākyamuni’s life known as the *aṣṭamahāprātihārya* and the locations associated with these events (*aṣṭamahāsthāna*).²⁵

These consist of the four primary sites of pilgrimage related to the Birth in Lumbinī, the Enlightenment at Bodhgayā, the First Sermon at Sārnāth, and the Final Extinction at Kuśinagara. The four ancillary scenes that were standardized in the Pāla period, viz. the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, the Descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven at Sāmkāśya, the Taming of the drunken elephant Dhanapāla/Nālāgiri at Rājagṛha, and the Gift of honey (*madhudāna*) by the monkey at Vaiśālī, all take place within the alleged borders of the Pāla realm whose center of power was located in Bihar (ancient Māgadhā). Perhaps the intention in the making of these steles was the creation of pilgrimage surrogates in stone or clay; these images thus present the full biography of Śākyamuni in a condensed form with each event being reduced to its most essential elements (J. Huntington 1987a; Leoshko 1994). They may thus recreate the “living presence” of the historical Buddha in the Pāla realm, and/or perhaps rather transport symbolically the viewer/worshipper of such images into the past, that is, into the presence of Śākyamuni. In Jacob Kinnard’s words, “in the Pāla milieu the focus falls squarely on the past, on Śākyamuni, and images such as the *Aṣṭamahāprātihārya* make this past available — allow the Buddhists of the present to participate in this past — in a condensed, visual sort of pilgrimage” (1996b: 296).²⁶

In general, these steles can be iconographically separated into two main groups: those constituting the large majority which have their emphasis on a Buddha image seated at the center and touching the earth at the moment of his Enlightenment [**Figures 5.25, 5.27–35**]; and those which are centered on a bejeweled Buddha [**Figure 5.26**], sometimes depicted with

²⁵ These eight miracle sites are distinguished from the eight relic *stūpas* erected after the Buddha’s cremation. A related Tibetan tradition concerns the “praise of eight great *caityas*” (*aṣṭamahāsthānacaityastotra*) or monuments constructed to commemorate the Buddha’s eight eminent deeds. According to one version, these are as follows: 1) Birth at Lumbinī, 2) Enlightenment at Bodhgayā, 3) First sermon at Sārnāth, 4) Great miracle at Śrāvastī, 5) Descent from Trāyastriṃśa at Sāmkāśya, 6) Reconciliation of the Saṅgha at Rājagṛha, 7) Renunciation of the remainder of life at Vaiśālī, and 8) Great Demise at Kuśinagara (Bagchi 1941; Skorupski 2001b; Pakhoutova 2009). In sum, while there is agreement on the eight places, there is no unanimity between these traditions on the events associated with Vaiśālī and Rājagṛha. Furthermore, it seems the Tibetans preferred to emphasize the monuments and their sacred places rather than the visual narratives of the events.

²⁶ Accompanying liturgies also allow the devotee to pay homage simultaneously to the eight great sites and to worship them “from afar” without actually visiting. Several liturgies are preserved in Pali and Tibetan translation from (presumably) original Sanskrit. The Pali version transmitted in Thailand has the refrain “I worship them [the eight great sites] from afar” (*ahaṃ vandāmi dūrato*). See Skilling & Pakdeekham 2010: 150.

a different hand gesture. Seven other miniature narrative scenes are depicted around the large central Buddha image. Some variations in their arrangement can take place, but the infant Buddha's miraculous Birth out of Māyā's side is irremediably represented on the lower left or right of the stele as the Buddha's mother grasps a branch of a *sālā* tree in Lumbinī park. At the very top, the Buddha's Great Demise at Kuśinagara, marking the moment he entered *mahāparinirvāṇa*, is always depicted. Between these two extreme moments of the life of the Buddha other peripheral figures are sculpted in tiers on both sides, recalling the five remaining great events. Often, but no means in every case, presentations of the First Sermon, the Great Miracle, and/or the Gift of honey can have the Buddha seated with his legs down with feet resting on a lotus pedestal.

For example, **Figure 5.27** presents the upper portion of a stele fragment with two such Buddhas in a preaching attitude surrounding the central Buddha. If we compare this stele with fragments of similar miniature steles, complete or fragmentary, also kept at the Nālandā Museum or elsewhere, we can assume that the Buddhas are seated in *bhadrāsana* [**Figures 5.28–35**].²⁷ These scenes evoke the First Sermon and the Great Miracle and are nearly always shown opposite each other, for symmetric reasons, usually either below or above the two standing Buddhas (i.e. the Descent and the Taming of Dhanapāla/Nālāgiri).²⁸ They can normally be distinguished from one another by looking closely at their tiny respective symbols depicted near their feet, viz. the wheel of the law in case of the First Sermon at Sārnāth, and the humiliated and subdued heretic for the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī. The Gift of honey is usually presented on the lowest register at right, from the viewer's perspective, as evidenced by the bowl held on the Buddha's lap [**Figure 5.25b**]. On fewer sculptures, at the artist's discretion, the scene can be placed to the left facing the Birth at right [**Figure 5.26a**].

These steles are generally loosely dated between the ninth through the eleventh centuries, with perhaps a peak in production during the tenth century and culminating with the carving of the nearly three-meter high image of Jagdiśpur, near Nālandā (J. Huntington 1987b; Leoshko 1994). Moreover, the strong kinship in their iconographic content and the similarities in certain motifs such as the elaborate decorations of the throne suggest these miniature steles may have been generally produced in the region of Nālandā, even if they

²⁷ Several miniature steles of this kind are known to circulate in the art market or in private collections worldwide. See for example, Sotheby's London, sale on 29 November 1982, lot 212, and Sotheby's New York, sale on 23 March 1995, lot 21.

²⁸ J. Huntington (1987b: 65) takes these miniature Buddhas to represent Maitreya because of their *bhadra*-pose, but I have already argued against this forced interpretation in **Chapter 4**.

have been sometimes discovered elsewhere. Of great interest, for example, one such gilded stele [Figure 5.32a] was discovered faraway from its Bihar homeland, deposited inside the crypt of Wat Ratchaburana in Central Thailand, an early Ayutthaya monument dating to the fifteenth century (Cœdès 1959). It bears the ubiquitous *Ye dharmā* formula composed in “Sanskritized Prakrit” and uses the Gauḍī script on the back [Figure 5.32b]. This reads as follows:

1. [siddham] ye dhāmmā hetuprabhavā tesāṃ hetuṃ tathāgato |
2. *avaca* tesāṃ ca yo nirodho evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇo²⁹

Cœdès dated this inscribed stele from the eleventh or twelfth centuries on stylistic and paleographic grounds. However, the late tenth century is certainly not excluded since it shows several structural features such as the tripartite pedestal and the oval back slab already observed on other tablets of the period.³⁰ Moreover, while Cœdès also proposed a provenance from Bengal, I prefer Bihar, possibly Nālandā, as other similar inscribed objects found there, to be studied below, suggest. For example, a fragmentary stele from the Nālandā Museum bears the same iconography on the obverse [Figure 5.33a] and contains nearly exactly the same inscription on the reverse [Figure 5.33b], hitherto unpublished, which I read thus:

1. [siddham] ye dharmā hetuprabhavā tesāṃ hetuṃ tathāgato *ava-*
2. *ca* tesāṃ ca yo nirodho evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇo ||³¹

Another stele with traces of gilding and bearing the same formula inscribed on its back is also located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [Figures 5.34a–b]; it most likely also comes from the Nālandā region. The inscription remains as yet unpublished and reads almost identically to the above with only negligible scribal variations:³²

²⁹ See Cœdès 1959: 13 (with minor stylistic changes; including the insertion of the *siddham* symbol).

³⁰ Rajat Sanyal prefers to date the inscription paleographically to the tenth–eleventh centuries CE (Pers. Comm.)

³¹ According to Rajat Sanyal, the script should be Gauḍī of the early phase, i.e. tenth century. I am very grateful to him for checking, and at times improving, my reading of the various *Ye dharmā* inscriptions listed in this chapter.

³² The iconography on the obverse of this image is briefly discussed in Behrendt 2014: 15–16, fig. 13, but the inscription on the reverse is unmentioned.

1. [siddham] ye dha(r)mmā hetuprabhavā tesām hetum tathāgato
avaca tesām ca yo ni-
2. rodho evaṁvādī mahāśramaṇoḥ ||³³

These three *Ye dharmā* inscriptions belong to the *avaca* group, a recension already known in fair numbers from other inscriptions in Bihar and West Bengal (Sircar 1949–50b: 224, 226 and 1963: 80, 84) as well as in mainland Southeast Asia since the Pre-Angkorian period (Skilling 1999: 181ff).

The majority of other published examples of the celebrated stanza found in Bihar during the Pāla period are usually said to be written in the commonest Sanskrit form and fall into the *hy avadat* group. How can we account for these discrepancies? Is it possible that this scribal variety reflects some kind of regional, sectarian, and/or temporal disparity? Or is it not, more simply, that the formula was inscribed indifferently by various people of different origins and backgrounds — such as itinerant monks, craftsmen, pilgrims, and ritual specialists — who carried with them their distinct dialectal features and preferences, notwithstanding the find-spots where the inscribed images or objects were actually discovered or produced?

Steles with a Single Event of the Life of the Buddha

Some steles, large or small, depict a single narrative event or miracle such as the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī. The miniature stele (16 cm in height) illustrated in **Figure 5.36a** is recorded as having been unearthed from Monastery 1 and to bear a *Ye dharmā* inscription on the back along with the name of the donor, a certain Samaka **Figure 5.36b**.³⁴ The reading is as follows:

³³ If my reading is correct, the superfluous final *visarga* in *mahāśramaṇo{ḥ}* may either indicate a confusion with the word *mahāśramaṇaḥ* or an omission. In the latter case, the most likely intended reading would be *mahāśramaṇo <gautama>ḥ*, i.e. “the ascetic Gautama.” Another possibility is that the *visarga*-like sign represented with two dots to the right of the letter -o-, and placed before the double *danḍa*, forms part of the stop, whereas the whole sign (◌:ḥ) would indicate a full-stop. See also *infra*, the inscribed brass from Gilgit, line 2 (left side), **Fig. 5.138b**. Rajat Sanyal brought to my attention a close parallel in an Aparājītā sculpture dated in the twenty second year of Vīgrahapāla III where this composition indicating full-stop is represented in reverse order (ḥ:◌).

³⁴ Paul (1995: 55) gives the donor’s name as “Somakona,” and clearly confused the instrumental case ending.

1. *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetum tesāṃ tathāgato vadat[sic] te-*
2. *sāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ | hy a*
3. *devadharmāya[m] samakenaḥ ||*³⁵

The stele represents three-dimensional multiplication of Buddhas shown seated at different levels, in various positions and hand gestures, on top of lotus flowers emanating from the same original stalk held by the traditional pair of *nāga*-kings at the bottom. The cross-legged Buddha at the center is more prominent in size than his counterparts. Both his shoulders are covered by a heavy monastic robe; he is flanked on either side, immediately to its rear, by two replicas of Buddhas in the teaching gesture with their legs pendant. Another group of three seated Buddhas is replicated in miniature at the top of the composition where side-figures are again shown in profile in *bhadrāsana*. This triad of Buddhas is a customary means to depict the miracle of multiplication during the Pāla period in both stone sculptures and paintings as witnessed by several examples to be studied later. **Figure 5.36** is attributed by Debjani Paul (1995: 56) to the late ninth or early tenth centuries, but a dating in the late tenth century or even later is not to be excluded on the basis of the following.

A contemporaneous date can equally be proposed for the larger size stele in high-relief **Figure 5.37** which also represents a triad of Buddhas performing the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī. It can be fruitfully compared in its subject matter as well as in its body proportions and stylistic treatments with an image found not far away at Rohoi, Patna district, inscribed from the twelfth or thirteenth regnal year of King Vighrahapāla [**Figure 5.39**]. Susan Huntington has stressed (1984: 47, Appendix no. 17) that this king is not to be mistaken with Vighrahapāla III, placing it in the mid-eleventh century, but should rather be identified with Vighrahapāla I, allegedly reigning sometime in the mid-ninth century. This is probably too early, however, and a compromise date can be sought if we identify this king rather with Vighrahapāla II, as did Rajat Sanyal in a recent publication (2014: 178f), who reigned in the second part of the tenth century.³⁶ Weather-worn **Figure 5.38**, now located in the exterior

³⁵ I thank Rajat Sanyal for checking and improving my reading, especially of the third line. See also Sastri 1942: 111 (reg. no. S.I. 386). According to Sanyal, “the engraver inadvertently omitted the ligature ‘hy a’ on line 1 (i.e. *hy avadat*), and later engraved the *akṣara* at the end of the stanza after the *daṇḍa* on line 2. It provides an interesting, though not uncommon, case of engraver’s mistake. The third line can be translated as ‘[This is the] pious gift by Samaka.’ Palaeographically, the inscription should be assigned to the later half of the tenth century CE, showing the nascent stage of development of Gauḍī script found on numerous eastern Indian inscriptions” (Pers. Comm.).

³⁶ In a private conversation, Rajat Sanyal adds that the composition of the script in the inscription fairly represents a transitional phase from mature Siddhamāṭṛkā to Gauḍī which he places in the middle of the tenth

garden of the Patna Government, may date to approximately the same period and belong to a related sculptural workshop [cf. **Figs 5.72–73**].

A small number of stone sculptures in various sizes also depict the preaching Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana*, either alone or sometimes attended by kneeling devotees at his feet. In all likelihood, these scenes represent the delivery of the First Sermon, especially if attested by the depiction of the wheel symbol and a pair of deer present on the pedestal. **Figure 5.40** at the Nālandā Museum is fragmentary; only the lower portion of the Buddha’s legs remains seated on a throne supported by a crouching lion on each side. The top of a flamed wheel can be seen below the feet resting on a lotus stool. A dilapidated inscription may also be discerned along the base running on both sides of the molding, seeming to represent a portion of a donative inscription.³⁷ This sculpture stylistically belongs to the tenth century just as do **Figures 5.41–43**, in slightly better condition, kept at the Government Museum in Patna and the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art in Kolkata. **Figure 5.44**, another fine headless Buddha now located in storage at the Lucknow State Museum, has a very elaborate throne-back decorated with *vyālas* and also bears the complete *Ye dharmā* stanza on its base.³⁸

Two other fine miniature stone images that follow the same stylistic patterns as the above were securely recovered in Nālandā from Monastery 11 during the 1933–34 excavations. They are now deposited and displayed in the Archeological Museum at the site (G.C. Chandra 1936: 278f, pls CXLI, figs 14 and 16). Both depict the Buddha seated on a high pedestal in *bhadrāsana* in the attitude of preaching the law with his two hands at chest level. The Buddha wears a heavy drapery with garment folds covering both shoulders. A wheel of the law and two deer front the feet of the images. On both sides of the Buddha in **Figure 5.45a**, two Bodhisattvas stand with their respective right hands raised, and hold lotus stalks with their left hands. Susan Huntington identifies this Buddha as “probably Maitreya” and dates this image to the tenth century (1984: 114, fig. 132). However, for reasons already discussed in **Chapter 4**, it is probably better to identify all these Buddha simply as

century CE. His current estimate for the reign of Vīgrahapāla II is ca 962–974, whereas no direct evidence is known to date for the rule of Vīgrahapāla I.

³⁷ I read the word *dharmā* and then the letters *ka* and *ra* on the right side of the wheel which may well be part of a religious formula of donation (i.e. *deyadharmā*, etc.). Rajat Sanyal (Pers. Comm.) proposes to read “*śrībhik[ṣu]dha(r)mmākara*” in mature Siddhamātṛkā script of the tenth century.

³⁸ To my knowledge, **Fig. 5.44** remains unpublished. It is almost impossible to decipher the complete inscription on the pedestal from the photograph alone. However, the possibility of reading it inductively remains, based on the hypothesis (confirmed by other published examples) that the inscription contains the *Ye dharmā* formula. The reading of the following Sanskrit words “*nirodha evam[vā]dī mahāśramaṇaḥ*” can indeed be deciphered at the end of the inscribed line, but we cannot say if the stanza belongs to one recension or another (*avaca* or *hy avadat* group).

Śākyamuni in *bhadrāsana*, attended by two Bodhisattvas. The other stele in **Figure 5.46a** is made of red stone; the Buddha here has no attendants. The *Ye dharmā* stanza is engraved on the back of each steles, both still unpublished. The script of the first inscription represents a good example of a transitional phase between Siddhamāṭṛkā and Gauḍī (Rajat Sanyal, Pers. Comm.) [**Figure 5.45b**]. Here is my reading:

1. *ye dharmmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ te-*
2. *ṣā(m) tathāgato hy avadat teṣā(m) ca yo*
3. *nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*

The second inscription is peculiar inasmuch as it is written in the negative [**Figure 5.46b**], the purpose and significance of which is intriguing and mysterious.³⁹ The simplest explanation for this mirror image inscription is that the scribe was copying from a sealing mold, or that it actually served as a model for the production of such molds. Once flipped over [**Figure 5.46c**], I propose the following tentative reading:

1. *ye dharmmā hetuprabhavā hetu(m) ttu[sic]-*
2. *ṣām tathāgato hy avaca te-*
3. *ṣām ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī*
4. *[mahā]śramaṇaḥ |*

If the reading of the latter inscription is correct, this is a peculiar example of the *Ye dharmā* Sanskrit formula belonging to a hitherto unknown *hy avaca* group. This is neither the common *hy avadat* nor the *avaca* groups, but a combination of both types.⁴⁰ This linguistic phenomenon adds nicely to the other evidence of hybridity already collected above on the back of three other miniature steles [**Figs 5.32b–34b**], presumably also from the Nālandā region.

Lastly, two cognate sculptures of a single preaching Bhadrāsana Buddha from Bihar are located in the Berlin Museum. In both instances, the wheel of the law is depicted with a pair of deer at the feet of the pendant-legged Buddha. A *Ye dharmā* formula in Sanskrit (*hy avadat* group) is inscribed at the top of the first stele for the first line while the second

³⁹ See also Huntington Archive # 3471–72.

⁴⁰ For a recent study of variant groupings and categories of the *Ye dharmā* formula, see Strauch 2009 and Hinüber 2015b.

line runs on the throne cross-bar at the level of the Buddha's shoulders [Figure 5.47]. The second image was perhaps similarly inscribed but its upper portion is unfortunately lost [Figure 5.48]. The proposed date for these steles is tenth century with their suggested provenance as Nālandā or the region lying westwards (Bautze-Picron 1998a: cat. nos 21 and 47).

It is possible that this type of stele sculptures in high-relief depicting a single great event of the life of the Buddha were once part of complete sets of eight, each sculpture showing a different miracle. For example, separate reliefs depicting the Descent of the Buddha and the Buddha subduing the elephant Dhanapāla, both found at Tetravan (Broadley 1872: 281–282; Asher 1970: 110–111, pls XII–XIII), may belong to a cognate series of that relief of the First Sermon [Figs 5.75–76] or even perhaps that of the Great Miracle also from Tetravan discussed below [Fig. 5.74]. The miniature steles can be taken to represent replicas of sculptures many times their sizes. We must remember, however, that despite the large number of steles celebrating these miracles found in Bihar, no two pieces are exactly identical. To my knowledge, many of the sculptures studied above remain unpublished — before this dissertation — and their exact origin is often unknown although it may be assumed that they generally came from Nālandā or its immediate vicinity. A small number of large images are still being discovered and worshipped *in situ* in the surrounding villages of Mustafapur, Ghosrawan, Tetravan, and Telhara, or a little farther away at Amethi, Bodhgayā, or Jethian (see *infra*). It is highly possible that artists and sculptors working at Nālandā may have also travelled and worked at some of these neighboring sites.

Miniature Caityas

Miniature *caityas* in stone (and terracotta) have been found in great numbers at Nālandā and other principal sites in eastern India during the Pāla period. Although their exact find-spots are often unknown, it is thought that such miniature *caityas*, sometimes inscribed, were offered or erected by pious devotees, pilgrims, and monks around the main shrine of important Buddhist cultic centers. When complete, the stone *caityas* are made of several sections, including a molded base and a high, conical set of discs comprising a surmounting umbrella. The middle hemispherical section, constituting the dome and drum, nearly always incorporates small niches, usually four facing the cardinal directions, and contain images of seated Buddhas (e.g. Bénisti 1964) or Bodhisattvas.

The stone *caitya* from Nālandā belongs to this category and is stylistically assigned to the early Pāla period (ca late eighth–ninth centuries). It exhibits a Buddha seated in a niche and repeated identically on four sides [Figures 5.49a–d]. The Buddhas are seated in *bhadrāsana* with their hands systematically performing the gesture of “Turning the Wheel of the Law” with both hands. It is difficult to identify each Buddha. The most common interpretation is that they could be Buddhas of the four cardinal points whose lists and names vary from one source to another.⁴¹ At any rate, it is likely that the people of Bihar saw no distinction between one Buddha and another during this period and it is also possible that this arrangement of four simultaneous Buddhas simply commemorates the miracle of multiplication at Śrāvastī.

Similar compositions of four Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* and assigned to specific cardinal directions in India are rare, but not unknown. An earlier and larger monolithic *caitya* from Kaṅherī Cave 4, in Maharashtra, shows the same arrangement [Fig. 4.82]. Another similar four-sided miniature *caitya*, stylistically more sophisticated in its ornamentation, is kept at the Asutosh Museum in Kolkata [Figures 5.50a–d]. I suggest that the latter piece also comes from Bihar, quite possibly from the same monastic environment as that of Nālandā, but that it should be dated a little later to approximately the tenth–eleventh centuries.

Bronzes

Three intact bronze images of the Buddha shown seated in *bhadrāsana* in the attitude of preaching the law are reported from Nālandā. Unfortunately, the Nālandā Museum reported that the latter two were stolen on 22 August 1961 (Bautze-Picron 2003b: 85, Appendix nos 3–4). The second bronze has been found and is now in the custody of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The present whereabouts of the third image are still unknown. These small bronzes were likely originally made for private use and the worship of monks and residents at Nālandā and kept secluded from public gaze.

⁴¹ Considerable literature has been written on the Buddhas of cardinal directions in the context of *stūpa* symbolism. See *inter alia* Mus 1934: 175–198; Bénisti 1960: 81ff; also Snodgrass 1988: 131ff. One of the oldest textual references to the four cardinal Buddhas or Jinas (viz. Akṣobhya in the East, Ratnaketu in the South, Amitābha in the West, and Dundubhisvara in the North) is to be found in the *Suvarṇa(pra)bhāsottamasūtra* (*Golden Light Sūtra*), a text which won great esteem in East Asia (T. 663–665). For a translation of this text from the Sanskrit, see Emmerick 1970. Over time, the names of Ratnaketu and Dundubhisvara changed to become Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi of the fully developed esoteric *maṇḍala* of five Jinas.

The unstolen, most well-known piece, published several times, is today part of the metal collection of the Patna Government Museum [Figures 5.51a–b].⁴² This bronze Buddha with traces of gilt sits on a double lotus placed on a lion throne. Below his feet on the pedestal, under the lotus-stool, a miniature wheel flanked on either side by a deer is present. A short inscription noticed by S.A. Shere (1957: 62, cat. no. 13) runs along the front of the pedestal, but is impossible to decipher from published photographs. The elaborate throne-back is adorned with the usual *vyālas* standing on elephants, as well as decorated with curling vegetal designs but with no *makaras*. The throne-back thus shows advancement over earlier ones in that both ends of the crossbar are formed by a pleated knob and are extended vertically and horizontally so as to give it a T-shape. The Buddha’s head is surrounded by a flamed solid nimbus decorated with rows of beads and *cakras*, on top of which a now-missing umbrella once stood. One small empty setting can be seen on the nimbus in which was previously inserted precious stone or glass. S. Huntington dates this image convincingly to the early-to-mid ninth century (1984: 138).

The second bronze, now at LACMA, has a surface that is somewhat corroded but with traces of original gilding still visible [Figure 5.52a]. It may belong to approximately the same period as the above piece since they were excavated together (G.C. Chandra 1936: 279).⁴³ Stylistic similarities as well as some minor differences between the two sculptures are obvious, especially concerning the back of the throne, which is also T-shaped. Its umbrella is equally missing, but two figures (*kinnarīs*?) stand on the upper section and on either side of the oval nimbus which has a beaded and flamed border. In the same manner as above, the Buddha has both hands raised in front of his chest in the *dharmacakra* teaching gesture, in which the right index and thumb touch the tip of the left middle finger, which hand also holds the end of his robe. Another difference is that the monastic robe leaves the right shoulder bare, whereas, in previous example above it covers both shoulders. A hitherto unnoticed inscription is engraved on the lower back of the throne which consists of the usual *Ye dharmā*

⁴² See *inter alia* Schroeder 1981: cat. no. 51A; S. Huntington 1984: fig. 167; Akhtar 2001: 171, pl. XIX. For its provenance recorded from Nālandā during the excavations of 1933–34, see G.C. Chandra 1936: 279, pl. CXLb who mistakenly calls it the “smaller figure” of the two that were found together. It measures 33 cm in height and is larger than the second similar bronze seated in *bhadrāsana* (see note *infra*).

⁴³ This is not illustrated by G.C. Chandra (1936), but we can surmise that this is the “smaller bronze” (18 cm) of the two that he had in mind (see note *supra*). Rowland (1963: 133, cat. no. 21) erroneously gives the provenance as Sirpur and ascribes this bronze a date to the seventh–eighth centuries. This image has been published several times since its robbery from the Nālandā Museum (Rosenfield 1966: 71, cat. no. 62; Pal 1974: 113–114, fig. 186; Schroeder 1981: cat. no. 49F; Ray *et al.* 1986: 134, fig. 145; Pal 1988a: cat. no. 70). It is, however, still published as part of the Nālandā collection by Misra (1998: II, 138–139, F. 79; III, 40–41, F. 33), bearing the following inv. no. 00149; 319/56.

formula [Figure 5.52b].⁴⁴ This inscription is quite damaged, with many *akṣaras* missing, but Rajat Sanyal (Pers. Comm.) confirms that a ninth century dating is possible on paleographic grounds; he proposes the following transliteration:

1. y[e dha]rmmā het[upra]bhavā he-
2. tu[m] teṣā[m] tathā[gato] hy avada[t te]-
3. śām ca yo ni[rodha] evam[vā]dī ma-
4. hāśramaṇa[h]

The iconographic content of the third, now missing bronze, but with photographic evidence remaining, is assuredly the most interesting of all [Figure 5.53].⁴⁵ Again, the Buddha is shown in the preaching attitude seated on a lion throne with his feet resting on a lotus, but now he is placed at the center of a peculiar triad. A large circular halo bordered by beads edged by flames emanates from his back. Inside the halo, two branches of a mango tree with hanging fruit are above the Buddha's head and may or may not refer to a particular episode of the life of the Buddha.⁴⁶ Moreover, the mango trees may well have had particular ties to Nālandā since Xuanzang, in one of his several explanations of the name, says that it was so named after the Nāga who lived there in a reservoir in the middle of the mango grove (Beal 1884: II, 167f). The mango tree is also observed sometimes above the Buddha's head in Pāla-period visual arts (G. Bhattacharya 1990) or could perhaps denote the Puṇḍarīka-tree (*Mangifera indica*) of Buddha Śikhī, a figure of the past (cf. Chapter 4, n. 116). A garlanded umbrella surmounts the enthroned Buddha at the center of this bronze triad who is flanked by a smaller male figure on his proper left holding aloft a sword and a female carrying a lotus on his right. Both attendants are seated in the pose of ease with a single leg pendant and have been identified respectively as Mañjuśrī and Tārā, more specifically Kurukullā the red Tārā

⁴⁴ Related gilded bronzes of Buddha and Bodhisattva images with open nimbi or aureoles were found at Nālandā (Paul 1995: pl. 51, 53, 55–56) and are kept in the Indian Museum of Kolkata (inv. no. 9427/A24280) and the National Museum of New Delhi (AIIS # 2426). Stylistically, the latter image of a standing Avalokiteśvara looks very similar to another gilded bronze from the Museum Nasional in Jakarta with a *Ye dharmā* inscription on the back (Sundstrom 2016: cat. no. 14, inv. no. A28). For a classical study of related bronze art between Nālandā and Java, see Bernet Kempers 1933.

⁴⁵ Stylistically, this is very close to the Buddha image published in Bernet Kempers 1933: 11–12, fig. 2.

⁴⁶ The “Mango Trick” at Śrāvastī, as known from the Pali recension of the Twin Miracle, first comes to mind (cf. Chapter 4). There could be other explanations. For example, the Buddha is mentioned in the Pali Canon staying in the mango grove known as the Pāvārikambavana at Nālandā several times, and while there he taught several *suttas*, such as the *Kevaddhasutta* (D I 211ff; trans. Walshe 1995: 175ff).

(Ray *et al.* 1986: 134, fig. 145; Misra 1998: III, 40–41, F. 34). These identifications are not absolutely certain and need to be qualified.

Mañjuśrī is the Bodhisattva primarily associated with transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*) in Mahāyāna and tantric texts, where he often functions as the chief spokesman of the Buddha. More specifically, he is known by an array of names, for instance in the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*, such as Mañjughoṣa, “Beautiful Voice,” Vāgiśvara, “Lord of Speech,” or else Mantrarāja Arapacana, after his *mantra* recitation based on the mystical *arapacana* alphabet. In the latter incarnation, for example, he is specifically represented with a sword raised above his head symbolizing how he cuts off the darkness of ignorance. This attribute is widely attested to textually for Mañjuśrī from the eighth century onwards, for example in the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* and its commentary (Wayman 1999; Tribe 1994).⁴⁷ However, this form of Mañjuśrī Arapacana wielding the “sword of wisdom” (*prajñākhaḍga*) generally also carries the “book of wisdom” (*prajñāpāramitāsūtra*) in his left hand or at least holds the lotus which bears the book (B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 120–121), a crucial detail not visible in this bronze.⁴⁸ On the contrary, in addition to the sword brandished upright in his right hand, the figure seems to uphold the noose or lasso (*pāśa*), in lieu of the *prajñāpāramitā* scriptures. This set of attributes is more generally ascribed to Vidyārāja Acala or “Immovable King of Knowledge,” also known as Caṇḍa(mahā)roṣaṇa, a powerful and fierce esoteric deity said in the *Sādhanamālā* to emanate from Buddha Akṣobhya (B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 154–155), who protects Buddhist devotees by burning away all hindrances and defilements.⁴⁹ The expressive face seen in this slightly worn bronze seems to express some wrathfulness, which would contrast to the more gentle aspect of his female counterpart. Acala is mentioned extensively in the **Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi*, especially its third chapter (Hodge 2003: 153–158; Giebel 2005: 55–57), and is a popular figure in the Himalayas and East Asia even if he

⁴⁷ The date of composition of the root text is not known with certainty, but its commentary is placed in the late eighth century. However, the **Suṣṭhitamatidevaputrapariṣcchā* may well be another textual source for the iconographic depiction of Mañjuśrī with a sword. The *sūtra* is part of a very large collection of Mahāyāna texts known today as **Mahāratnakūṭa*, compiled and brought to China by Bodhiruci in 707–713 CE (*Da baoji jing*, T. 310). It has been translated in English as “How to Kill with the Sword of Wisdom” (Chang 1983: 41–72).

⁴⁸ Compare this, however, with the little bronzes kept in the Indian Museum of Kolkata (inv. no. 9336/A24268), and in the National Museum in New Delhi (Paul 1995: pl. 64), also from Nālandā. Page equally mentions a Bodhisattva “seated on a lotus flower, the right hand holding a sword and the left a lotus” found in Monastery 1 (1930b: 219), which most likely represents Mañjuśrī in one of his incarnations. For some examples in stone from Bihar, see Bautze-Picron 2015: figs 170–171.

⁴⁹ Linrothe (1999: 103–105, fig. 76, 78, 82–84) also identifies Hayagrīva, the wrathful attendant of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā, with the same attributes, in some instances.

is rarely depicted in Indian art — as far as it has been ascertained to date.⁵⁰ Neither Mañjuśrī nor Acala need be perceived as necessarily separate deities since at least one commentator describe the latter as a wrathful manifestation (*krodha*) of the former, just as Yamāntaka is also known to be an angry form of Mañjuśrī (Wayman & Ryūjun 1992: 5; Mallmann 1975: 465ff). At any rate, while the identification of this subordinated figure to the Buddha as a gentle aspect of Mañjuśrī is hardly plausible in this position, more compelling arguments in favor of Acala depicted in a semi-ferocious mode can be made.⁵¹

The female figure can be firmly identified as a form of the Tārā goddess from the lotus (*padma*) carried in her left hand, while the right hand exhibits the gesture of benevolence or generosity, palm lowered, known as *varada*.⁵² Tārā worship was well established by the onset of the Pāla Empire in eastern India. We know from epigraphic evidence that the Pāla kings held her in great veneration and that she was depicted on Dharmapāla’s banner in particular, possibly as a dynastic emblem (Sircar 1961–62; Mallar Ghosh 1980). Tārā also became a very popular deity with the rise of tantric Buddhism from around the seventh–eighth centuries CE onwards. “Tārā” is in fact the name of a whole class of female deities and several forms of her are known in iconographic treatises or ritual manuals (e.g. *sādhanas*).⁵³ She is broadly classified with five colors, viz. green, white, yellow, blue, and red, each embodying different aspects of Buddhist qualities and virtues. The original colors of this bronze are unknown, so we cannot be sure which colored Tārā was intended. The identification proposed above as the red Tārā, also known as Kurukullā, is however dubious for several reasons. First, according to the *Sādhanamālā* (B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 309), a collection from the twelfth century of 312 *sādhanas* composed earlier during the Pāla period, she should have an effigy of Buddha Amitābha on her crown and be represented with four, six, or eight-arms holding different attributes. Second, and most important, this incarnation requires that she has a much less pacific, even fierce, aspect. None

⁵⁰ An alleged depiction of Acala has been reported by Janice Leoshko on a high-relief attending “Bodhisattva Maitreya” from Telhara in Bihar (1988: 94–95, figs 10–11). She concedes however that “Acala is not usually found as an attendant for Maitreya” (p. 95). In fact, the standing Bodhisattva could well be Avalokiteśvara instead of Maitreya, in which case the identification as Hayagrīva who stands at his feet would be more logical (see note *supra*). Other possible instances of Acala from Orissa are discussed in Donaldson 2001: 219–220, 360ff, figs 76, 184, 344.

⁵¹ Bautze-Picron, while still seeing Mañjuśrī in this image, reckons that it could equally be perceived as a proto–Acala figure (1993: 149).

⁵² Numerous examples of Tārā seated in this position are known from Bihar stone sculptures, especially at Kurkihār, on which see Bautze-Picron 2014: 126ff, figs 184–202, 300, 317.

⁵³ Literally, a *sādhana* describes a particular mode of worship or spiritual practice; it is primarily a visualization practice or a conjuring ritual and is not the instructions for sculpting an icon. However, these texts were apparently also followed by sculptors. On this genre, see Bautze-Picron 1994.

of these characteristics are visible in this image. Alternatively, she could be conceived as a *vidyārājñī*, an occasional name for Tārā as “Queen of Knowledge,” known as the personification of *mantras* and a female counterpart of *vidyārājas*, a class of deities which became particularly popular in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* from the eighth century onwards (Przyluski 1923: 306ff; Wallis 2002: 45–46, 81, 156–157).

This fine, but missing, bronze has been estimated to date between the eighth and tenth centuries (Ray *et al.* 1986: 134; Bautze-Picron 1993: 149). It was excavated from Monastery 1, found among vitrified and burnt debris while other bronze images were damaged by fire or corrosion. In the same stratum, a charter of Dharmapāla, as well as the famous Devapāla copper-plate inscription, was discovered (Page 1931: 159–160 and 1933: 145, pl. LVIIa). Given this archeological context, I am inclined to narrow the dating of this bronze to the period straddling the late eighth and early ninth centuries.⁵⁴ This bronze triad consisting of the Buddha, possibly flanked by Vidyārājñī Tārā and Vidyārāja Acala, unfortunately lost to us today, is an isolated if not unique testimony of esoteric Buddhist practices and rituals circulating at Nālandā at the time, probably seeing the gradual emergence of wrathful (or semi-wrathful) deities, most likely performed in secrecy only by those who were initiated.⁵⁵

Other Sites in Bihar

Māgadha, the ancient homeland of the Buddha, is mainly confined to the modern state of Bihar. Significantly, the state’s name of “Bihar” originates from *vihāra*, referring to the monasteries which abounded in the region. Bihar indeed, in the first millennium CE, had many large monasteries where monks and scholars from distant countries came to collect and study the teachings of the Buddha. Bihar villages are replete with remains of this glorious past. Except for the sites of Nālandā, Vikramaśīla (Antichak), and now Telhara, which have revealed their past through recent excavations, most ancient monasteries are still buried under layers of earth or have simply disappeared, their bricks having been reused in the course of

⁵⁴ Based on differing interpretations of the various epigraphs and historical records, current historians’ estimates of the reigns of Dharmapāla and Devapāla are between *ca* 762 and 850 CE. Since Devapāla’s copper-plate is now properly dated to the thirty-fifth regnal year of this king and since the new chronologies of the Pāla dynasty generally interpret his death as before 850 (R.C. Majumdar 1941: 215–216; Jordaan 2000), the Nālandā inscription, and *ipso facto* the bronze image excavated in the same level, should logically be placed prior to this date.

⁵⁵ For a study of the development of wrathful deities in India and Tibet, see Linrothe 1999. Few other images of fierce deities such as Yamāntaka have been observed at Nālandā (Paul 1995: 104, pl. 82).

time. Several Chinese accounts, including Xuanzang's in the mid-seventh century, describes the stretch from Bodhgayā to Rājagṛha (modern Rajgir) as scattered with auspicious sites associated with the life of Lord Buddha and his disciples, which were part of a Buddhist network of pilgrimages at the time of his visit (Beal 1884: II, 138ff; Dutt 1988: 319–380). Yijing, who stayed in Bihar between 675 and 685 CE, noted in his travelogue that some of these sites and monasteries were the best institutions with distinguished masters for collecting the teachings of the Buddha (Li Rongxi 2000: 154). Such places where stone or bronze images of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* have been reported are listed and briefly described below.

Bodhgayā

Bodhgayā is the famous religious site associated with the Mahābodhi Temple complex in Gaya district. It is the most important of the main pilgrimage sites where the historical Buddha (and all past Buddhas prior to him) obtained Enlightenment under the *bodhi*-tree. Its history is documented by many inscriptions and pilgrimage accounts (Asher 2008). Foremost among these are the relations of the Chinese pilgrims Faxian in the fifth century and Xuanzang in the seventh century (Beal 1884: Ixi; I: 114ff; Deeg 2005: 433ff). The place-name, Bodhgayā, did not come into use until the nineteenth century CE. Historically, the spot where the Buddha attained Enlightenment was first known as Uruvelā, then, later, Sāmbodhi, Vajrāsana, etc. The main monastery of Bodhgayā was also designated as the Bodhimaṇḍavihāra. Now it is called the Mahābodhi Saṅghārāma. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Alexander Cunningham, the first director (1871–1885) of the newly created Archeological Survey of India, painstakingly investigated the site and had the main temple renovated (Cunningham 1892).

Sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries a Hindu *swami* settled down near the crumbling Mahābodhi Temple. This *swami*'s successors, the *mahants* or priests, eventually became powerful and wealthy and began to look upon the Mahābodhi Temple as their private property (Kinnard 1998). It is precisely in the compound of the house belonging to the Śaiva *mahant* that several black basalt stone Buddha images are kept today, one of which is seated in *bhadrāsana* [Figure 5.54]. In many respects, the slightly abraded life-size statue in a preaching gesture is very similar to the more pristine one currently located at the Gaya Museum [Figure 5.55]. Both images have parallel lines showing garment folds. Asher reckons these images were probably based on Nālandā prototypes; no other examples of this

type have been found at Bodhgayā (1980: 76: pls 139–140). They can be stylistically ascribed to the eighth century.⁵⁶

Several other steles in stone still *in situ* or kept in the collections of the Bodhgayā Archeological Museum and the British Museum depict the Eight Great Events of the life of the Buddha, a familiar topic we have already encountered and discussed at length in the section on Nālandā (see *supra*). The central Buddha image — bejeweled or not — can be depicted in a teaching or meditating gesture, or more generally in the attitude of conquering Māra [Figures 5.56–61].⁵⁷ In nearly all of these examples, the outlying narrative of the Gift of honey is shown either at the bottom left or right side of the composition with the Buddha seated frontally in *bhadrāsana* holding the bowl on his lap.⁵⁸ In addition, the scenes of the First Sermon and that of the Great Miracle are sometimes similarly represented with a pendant-legged Buddha to the upper left and right sides of the composition, as for example with the stele still in worship located in a small shrine near the Mahābodhi Temple [Figure 5.60]. Incidentally, this stele is dated to the tenth or eleventh year of King Mahīpāla I whose long reign falls in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries (S. Huntington 1984: 57, Appendix no. 31, fig. 54; Leoshko 1987: 136ff, 147ff, fig. 51). The steles with a central bejeweled Buddha gained great popularity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Woodward 1990: 19ff; Bautze-Picron 2010a: 70ff).

Finally, several nearly identical steles show a single event easily identified as the Great Miracle with a triadic composition of Buddhas, as already observed at Nālandā where only the two flanking Buddha images are represented seated with their legs pendant in three-quarter view (see *supra*).⁵⁹ These adjoining Buddhas directly evoke the Śrāvastī miracle. One of the faculties that the Buddha performed on that occasion was the ability to duplicate himself while he preached the law. The first piece is fragmentary and is located at the Bodhgayā Archeological Museum [Figure 5.62], while a second and third more complete example are still worshipped in the *mahant*'s compound [Figure 5.63] and at a small shrine adjacent to the Mahābodhi Temple [Figure 5.64]. In the latter sculpture, small figures appear

⁵⁶ S. Huntington (1984: 15–16, fig. 7) thinks that the image found in the *mahant*'s compound represents an early attempt by artists to deal and depict this posture at Bodhgayā; thus she proposes a date from around the mid-to-late fifth century. However, since it departs so much from the classical tradition found at Sārnāth and in the western Indian caves, I am not really convinced.

⁵⁷ For an additional example, see Leoshko 1987: fig. 57.

⁵⁸ In Fig. 5.59, the Great Miracle substitutes for the Gift of honey which is depicted as the central piece of this stele. Another exception is Fig. 5.58, presumably also from Bodhgayā, where, in an unusual manner, the Buddha stands (Leoshko 1987: 200–201). See also Fig. 5.66a from Kurkihār for another example of a standing Buddha holding the bowl.

⁵⁹ See also Leoshko 1987: figs 62–64.

in front of the pedestal possibly representing, among others, King Prasenajit and Purāṇa Kāśyapa, the leader of the heretics who challenged the Buddha and who was the cause of his display of miraculous powers at Śrāvastī. The upper section of the work has been refurbished, but, as with the example in the *mahant*'s compound, it may have originally shown branches of a mango tree above the head of the central Buddha, another indication of the scene as related by the Pali recension of the great event.

This iconographic convention for the Great Miracle was much in vogue from the tenth century onwards in Bihar and thus these steles can be safely assigned to this period as well. Although, in most cases, the provenance of these sculptures from Bodhgayā is quite secure, we cannot totally exclude the possibility that they were moved there from another place, either in ancient times or in a more recent period.

Kurkihār

The village of Kurkihār is located 22 km east of Gaya. The large mound this village sits on is the remains of what was probably a Buddhist monastery or *stūpa* in ancient times.⁶⁰ It became famous after 1930 when a hoard of bronze artifacts was excavated from the mound. These antiquities consisted of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in all shapes and sizes, bells, and ritual objects; they are specimens of the finest workmanship. Most of these are now on display in a special room in the Patna Museum (Akhtar 2001: 177ff). One of the two Hindu temples currently at Kurkihār has an extensive collection of Buddhist sculptures found in that region over the years. Other stone sculptures collected earlier from Kurkihār can be seen at the Indian Museum in Kolkata and in other public or private collections (Bautze-Picron 2014). The vast majority of inscribed images found date to the time of King Devapāla in the first half of the ninth century and later.

⁶⁰ Cunningham (1871: 15–16) has tentatively identified Kurkihār as the monastery established at Kukkuṭapādagiri, or “Cock’s Foot Mountain,” the location from which it may derive its name. No scientific excavations, however, have yet been conducted at the site to prove or disprove this hypothesis. The Chinese pilgrims who had visited India in the pre-Pāla period actually never refer to a monastery there (e.g. Beal 1884: II, 142). Asher relates (1980: 119, n. 51) that it may well be the case that the ancient *vihāra* at Kurkihār may not be much older than the earliest images discovered there, that is, from approximately the eighth century onwards. See also Bautze-Picron 2014: 9ff, as well as Prasad’s misgivings on the identification of Kurkihār with the alleged Kukkuṭapādagiri Vihāra (2014: 147).

Steles with the Eight Great Events

At Kurkihār, as Bautze-Picron stresses, “the concept of the [Buddha] image occupies an intermediary position between the narrative tendency of Nalanda and the iconic concept of Bodhgaya.” She has observed that depictions of the Eight Great Events at the site were rare, with only a handful of stone examples found to date (2014: 76, figs 81–83).

Among this set, only one relief, collected at Adhva (Arhwan), a village located near Kurkihār, shows the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* thrice among small border narratives flanking the central image of a Vajrāsana Buddha. This seems to be the image of choice throughout eastern India during the Pāla period; it highlights the event just prior to the Buddha’s Enlightenment, also known as “Victory over Māra” (*māravijaya*). The images in the bordering narratives represent, on the top left and right, and the lower right part of the composition, the episodes of the First Sermon, the Great Miracle, and the Gift of honey, respectively [Figure 5.65]. It is not possible to distinguish each scene and they could be read in a different order, except for the latter scene of the Gift which is nearly always depicted opposite the Birth in the lowest tier. That such miniature details as the wheel, the deer, the subdued heretic, or the hectic monkey that traditionally help us to identify these miniature scenes are absent reinforce the “aniconic tendency” of this stele, already noted as missing on some other artworks at Bodhgayā (Leoshko 1987: 209–210).

Bautze-Picron (1992a: 18) has made the case that the scene of the Buddha holding the bowl, since the Buddha is often depicted seated with both legs pendant, was introduced at this place in the composition, facing the Birth scene, so as to fill as much vertical space as possible and thus fulfill a basic rule of horizontal symmetry with the opposite standing figure. According to her (Bautze-Picron 2014: 76), the present stele also includes motifs reminiscent of the idioms found at Nālandā or its immediate vicinity and is stylistically dated to the second half of the tenth century.

Inscribed Bronze Frame

A bronze flamed halo frame (*prabhāmaṇḍala* or *prabhāvali*) was also discovered at Kurkihār as part of the bronze hoard of 1930 and is now on display at the Patna Museum [Figure 5.66a]. Stylistically speaking, it is very close to three standing crowned images of the Buddha in bronze, also recovered at Kurkihār, and dated to the reign of Vīgrahapāla, most

likely the third king of that name, who ruled in the mid-eleventh century (S. Huntington 1984: 64ff, figs 69–72, Appendix nos 41, 43–44; Bautze-Picron 2014: 23–24, Appendix nos 12–14). The central Buddha image is missing but it likely depicted a seated Buddha, probably crowned, performing the gesture of conquering Māra.

Seven other great events of the Buddha’s life are recognized and grouped around this frame in the usual fashion except that the scene of the Gift of honey at the bottom right shows a standing, not seated, Buddha holding his bowl in his cupped hands. The top left and right sides of the frame show symmetrical preaching Buddhas in *bhadrāsana*, but no additional details help us to identify which of these is attributable to the First Sermon and which to the Great Miracle [Figures 5.66b–c]. Of note, the Buddhas are bejeweled and reflect a new iconographic tendency that gained strong popularity and sudden vigor in Bihar, Bengal, and beyond in Myanmar and Thailand from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward (Bautze-Picron 2010a: 70ff). In all cases, except for the *mahāparinirvāṇa* scene on top, the Buddha is dressed as a monk, also wearing princely regalia, replete with jewels and an ornate tri-lobed crown. These ornate decorations were probably not so much intended as royal insignia, but rather to “idealize” or visually “deify” the Buddha and perhaps even mark his full integration into the emerging esoteric pantheon that became more and more prevalent in this region at the time.

Is it possible therefore that this eleventh-century bronze work from Kurkihār, as well as numerous other late stone steles found in Bihar, likewise depicting the Eight Great Events with crowned Buddhas, took on particular esoteric significance in certain contexts? Importantly, the back of this bronze frame bears a long inscription of seventeen lines in Sanskrit running behind the nimbus, the crossbar, the right and left edges and the bottom base, which may cast some light on the esoteric environment at Kurkihār [Figure 5.66d]. It opens with the consecrated *Ye dharmā* formula followed by a *dhāraṇī* text.⁶¹ The only published, albeit somewhat faulty, reading of this inscription to date is as follows:

⁶¹ For a recent survey on the origins, growth, dissemination, and significance of *dhāraṇī* scriptures in Indian Buddhism, see Castro Sánchez 2011. *Dhāraṇīs* of various kinds are also known to have circulated widely in ancient maritime Southeast Asia (Griffiths 2014a). The success and wide diffusion of those scriptures in East Asia was such that Arthur Waley called it “Dhāraṇī Buddhism” to describe the practices at Dunhuang and elsewhere from the fifth to the eighth centuries (cited in McBride II 2005: 87). While *dhāraṇīs* were indeed a common component of mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism up to that period, it seems that, at the turn of the eighth century, *dhāraṇī* practices contributed to the rise of esoteric Buddhism.

1. [siddham] ye dha[r]mmā hetuprasa(bhavām(vā)hetum teṣān ta-
2. thāgato hy avadat teṣām ca yo nirodha evam-
3. vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ om svasti bhuvanavare
4. **culu culu dhara dhara** sarvatathāgatadhātunadha(?)-
5. vayra(jra)pramukhajayavare mucule smara tathāga-
6. ta dharmmacakrapravartana vaj[r]abodhimaṇḍalā-
7. kārālamḥṛte sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhite vo(bo)-
8. dhaya vo(bo)dhaya vo(bo)dhi vu(bu)dhya vu(bu)dhyas[v]a vo(bo)-
9. dhaya cala cala calatu sarvasat[t]vānāma(nām)-
10. ma ca sa[r]vavaraṇāni(varṇāni)sa[r]vapāp[a]dhi-
11. sata(ṣṭhite)
12. **hṛm**
13. ṅgabhāṅgana sarvasyekavigave sarvadhapā (?) hṛdayavajriṇi
saṁtara saṁtara sa[r]vatathāgataguha(hya)dhāraṇimudrā vu(bu)-
14. ddhe suvu(bu)ddhe sarvatathāgatadhātu om svāhā samyādhiṣṭhite
svāhā sarvatathāgatahṛdayadhātumudre
15. svāhā prati[...] svāhā om sarvatathāgatoṣṇīṣa-
16. dhātumudre svāhā sa[r]vatathāgatadhātuvīsupitādhiṣṭhite **hṛm**
hṛm svāhā nama[h] sveyadhikā-
17. **nām sarvatathāgatānām.**⁶²

This *dhāraṇī* is popularly known as the “casket seal” (*Karaṇḍamudrādhāraṇī*) which Schopen (2005b: 306–313) first identified as extracted from a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, apparently lost in the original Sanskrit but still extant in both Tibetan and Chinese translations.⁶³ It is titled

**Āryasarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānahṛdayaguhadhātukaraṇḍamudrānāmadhāraṇīmahāyāna-*

⁶² See P.L. Gupta 1965: 132, with my emphasis and minor stylistic changes. See also Akhtar 2001: 184–185 (reproduced almost verbatim). Plates of the inscribed back frame are unfortunately not furnished in these Patna museum catalogues. A new edition of the inscription is however in preparation by Arlo Griffiths (Pers. Comm.), based on photographs supplied by John Huntington.

⁶³ The Tibetan translation was done by Vidyākaraṇḍa and Devendrarakṣita, in the late eighth or early ninth centuries (Peking Kanjur, vol. 6, no. 141, 151-3-2 to 153-5-6, and vol. 11, no. 508, 112-2-2 to 114-4-7). Two Chinese translations also exist in the *Taishō* edition, one conducted by Amoghavajra in the eighth century and extant in two versions (*Yiqie rulai xin bimi quanshen sheli baoqieyin tuoluoni jing*, T. 1022a–b), and the other by Dānapāla produced in the tenth century (*Yiqie rulai zhengfa bimi qieyin xin tuoluoni jing*, T. 1023).

sūtra. The whole title of the text from which the *dhāraṇī* is taken can be translated as something like “the Noble (*ārya*) ‘Mahāyana Discourse’ (*mahāyānasūtra*) of the ‘spell’ (*dhāraṇī*) which is the ‘symbol/seal’ (*mudrā*) of the ‘casket’ (*kaṇḍa*) of the ‘secret heart element/relic’ (*hṛdayaguhyadhātu*) which is the ‘spiritual basis’ (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of all those ‘Thus Gone’ (*tathāgata*).” A more straightforward rendering would be the “*sūtra* of the casket seal *dhāraṇī* containing the mysterious essence of the basis for all the Tathāgatas.”⁶⁴

The words *stūpa* and *sarvatathāgatadhātu*, repeated several times, seem to indicate the funerary character of the *dhāraṇī*. The text indeed advocates *stūpa* worship and the placement of the *dhāraṇī* inside the *stūpa*, possibly together with a Buddha image, through which the object becomes empowered. The proper recitation of the scripture is also a means to acquire the power of the relics of all Buddhas in the cosmos on behalf of deceased ones. However, as Schopen reminds us, “it is only if we assume a knowledge of the *sūtra* as a whole — not just of the *dhāraṇī* — that we are able to account for this association [i.e. with a *stūpa*]” (2005b: 308). In other words, without the presence of the framing *sūtra* which contains detailed instructions on how the *dhāraṇī* is to be treated,⁶⁵ we cannot determine if it played such a practical function and ritual role at Kurkihār.

Other variants of the same *dhāraṇī* have been discovered on stones inscribed in “northeastern Nāgāri characters of about the ninth century” at the Abhayagiri Vihāra in Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka (Mudiyanse 1967: 99ff; Schopen 2005b: 306ff), and, recently, at the site of Udayagiri 2 in Orissa (Kimiaki Tanaka 2014). None of these epigraphic examples are exactly alike which may indicate separate descent from the Sanskrit original source. Of interest, the Udayagiri 2 epigraph opens with the *Ye dharmā* stanza followed by several other *dhāraṇīs*. It first contains sections of the *Bodhigarbhālamkāralakṣadhāraṇī*.⁶⁶ This is immediately followed by the *Karaṇḍamudrādhāraṇī* proper, which integrates the name of a certain Śubhākaradeva, presumably a king (*mahārāja*) of the Bhaumakara dynasty. The latter dynasty established its rule over the coastal belt of Orissa between the eighth and the first half of the tenth centuries CE.⁶⁷ Perhaps the latter king was the beneficiary, or he sponsored the

⁶⁴ Peter Skilling (Pers. Comm.) proposes “The Exalted Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Mahāyāna entitled ‘Seal of the Secret Relic Casket of the Essence of the Empowerments of All Tathāgatas,’” on the basis of the Tibetan source named *’Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi byin gyi rlabs kyi snying po gsang ba ring bsrel gyi za ma tog ces bya ba’i gzungs theg pa chen po’i mdo*.

⁶⁵ For an English translation from the Chinese, see Rulu 2012.

⁶⁶ For a recent study of this *dhāraṇī*, see Strauch 2009.

⁶⁷ Several kings of the Bhaumakara dynasty are known by this name. The early Bhaumakara kings often styled themselves *paramasaugata* or *paramatathāgata* in their inscriptions, implying that they may also have professed Buddhism (Banerji 1919–20; Sircar 1949–50a). But could Śubhākaradeva be also an allusion to the

copying, of these *dhāraṇīs*. The unique addition of this local historical figure as part of the inscription seems to indicate that the scribe used a certain amount of creative license to incorporate various elements drawn from his socio-historical environment. The inscription ends with the *Vimaloṣṇīśadhāraṇī*, normally also prescribed to be copied and deposited in a *caitya* or *stūpa* and worshipped thereafter (Schopen 2005: 314ff).

Did the scribe follow a specific set of scriptures or a larger compendium of *dhāraṇīs* circulating in Orissa at the time? Kimiaki Tanaka (2014) points out that a Chinese commentary on the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* (*Foshuo zaixiang liangdu jing jie*, T. 1419) — a manual of Buddhist iconometry — mentions five *dhāraṇīs* (including the *Ye dharmā* verse) that should be placed inside a Buddha image, four of which are included in this inscription from Udayagiri 2.⁶⁸ In addition, Tibetan traditions typically associate the relics of the *dharmakāya* with the “five great *dhāraṇīs*” (Tib. *gzungs chen sde lnga*) which are to be placed in *stūpas* (Bentor 1995: 254). These are the same four as above plus the *Uṣṇīṣavijayadhāraṇī*, which is apparently missing here. It is likely the Chinese commentary, actually translated from Tibetan in the eighteenth century, reflects the earlier Tibetan tradition and the Udayagiri inscription was inspired by similar scriptures originally extant in Sanskrit.

The use of a similar script (Siddhamāṭṛkā) in the Kurkihār bronze as well as in these stone tablets may or may not point to direct cultural contacts between these regions. After all, Kurkihār, we know from dedicatory inscriptions, was often visited and sustained by monks and lay donors from various parts of “Southern India,” especially hailing from Kāñcī (Prasad 2014), but we do not know to what extent this “Buddhist network” may have also included the region of Orissa and the Sri Lankan sphere.⁶⁹ While we know that the *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānaḥṛdayaguhyasūtra* spread widely in East Asia, the possibility also exists that the embedded *dhāraṇī* circulated independently and, quite conceivably, in its initial stage, mainly through the oral transmission of initiated monks and ritual experts.

As we shall now see, a certain number of hints seem to point to this conclusion. To do this, it is necessary to gather and compare more systematically all variant readings of this *dhāraṇī*, a task I cannot achieve alone in this study. However, as a first step towards

tantric master Śubhākara[simha], a native prince of Central India by origin, or to one of his ancestors who, “because of unrest in their own country, Central India, [...] had left it and gone to reign over [the country of] Oḍra [Orissa]”? Chou (1945: 251f, n. 4) suspects that these ancestral figures might have been the predecessors of the Bhaumakara kings. I wish to thank Jeffrey Sundberg for drawing my attention to this reference.

⁶⁸ I am grateful to Rolf Giebel for his assistance with Kimiaki Tanaka’s Japanese article. On the Chinese *Pratimālakṣaṇa*, see Willemen 2007: 153ff.

⁶⁹ The “Pallava-Sinhala nexus” between Kāñcī and Anurādhapura, as evidenced from the biography of Vajrabodhi and other Indian monks, is discussed extensively in Sundberg & Giebel 2011.

obtaining a reliable version of this text, I now compare, to a limited extent, the above published transliteration of the Kurkihār inscription, together with earlier extant versions that appear today in East Asia, mainly in the Chinese Tripiṭaka, which are embedded in Volume 19 of the *Taishō* edition concerning the “Section of Esoteric Teachings” (Orzech *et al.* 2011: 137ff).⁷⁰ More precisely, the *Karaṇḍamudrādhāraṇī* is found in T. 1022a, T. 1022b, and T. 1023 in Chinese transliterations using sinographs, not in Siddhamāṭṭkā (Siddham), as one would expect. A closely related copy of this *dhāraṇī*, however, written in Siddham script, is known to have been brought to Japan from China by the scholar monk Kūkai, also known as Kōbō Daishi (776–835) and founder of the Shingon school, in the early ninth century (Giebel 2012: 218, no. 26). It is thus possible, but not absolutely certain, that it continued to circulate in this form and script in East Asia during the late Tang period onward, perhaps to help preserve the “cachet of authenticity” and the mysterious potency that these *dhāraṇī* scriptures were thought to convey.⁷¹ For the sake of further detailed comparative studies, I provide below a roman transliteration of this extant *dhāraṇī* in Siddham, based on a copy of the copy carried back by Kūkai and now only available in a modern Japanese publication:⁷²

⁷⁰ Although this collection of texts is not “tantric” per se, the religious context in which the related *dhāraṇīs* were generally employed and used in East Asia clearly indicates an “esoteric” Buddhist environment. Actually, their titles in Chinese classify these texts as ritual manuals, or *yiqie* (儀軌), the Chinese counterpart of the *sādhana*, a class of ritual texts outlining deity worship and visualization in Indian esoteric Buddhism. Such ritual texts normally prescribed for each deity a repertory of iconic representations, accoutrements and regalia, *dhāraṇīs* or *mantras*, *mudrās* and body postures, and presupposed the fairly extensive training of esoteric masters. It is also clear that, following the arrival of such Indian masters as Śubhākarasimha (637–735), Vajrabodhi (671–741), and Amoghavajra (704–774) in Tang China in the early eighth century, we see a proliferation of such esoteric texts. See Chou 1945 and Sundberg & Giebel 2011.

⁷¹ A modern Siddham version (written vertically) derived from a Japanese work called *Futsū shingonzō*, published in 1680 by a monk named Jōgon (1639–1702) is found at the end of T. 1022a. It is made available for example through the SAT Daizōkyō Text Database: <http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/ddb-bdk-sat2.php?lang=en>. I am grateful to Rolf Giebel for these clarifications and references.

⁷² See Hase 1976: 457–459. To my surprise, the Siddham script also reads in columns from top to bottom and from right to left following traditional Chinese and Japanese “vertical writing” styles, but unlike the Indian “horizontal writing format” which normally reads from left to right. The Sanskrit in this text, which is inconsistent in many ways, poses a fair number of problems, for example in indicating long vowels (e.g. *dhatu/dhātu*, *stupa/stūpa*). These discrepancies are probably due to the carelessness of generations of Chinese and Japanese scribes. Thus, it is doubtful that the text accurately reflects the original source in Sanskrit brought to China by Amoghavajra and later transmitted to Kūkai. At any rate, no systematic attempt has been made here to correct or reconstruct the likely original *dhāraṇī* text. Chinese characters at the end of the text indicate that the suggested emendations between the lines were made in red ink by a monk called Ninkai (951–1046) (Rolf Giebel, Pers. Comm.). These variants as well as a few of my own proposed readings are indicated in the footnotes. For a modern reconstruction of the Sanskrit, following the rules of *sandhi*, see for example: <http://www.visiblemantra.org/karandamudra.html>. To my knowledge, no English translation of this *dhāraṇī* has been provided to date.

1. *nama[h] striyadhvikānām*⁷³ | *sarvatathāgatānām* | *om*
2. *bhovi bhavadavari* | *vacari* | *vacāṭai*⁷⁴ | *su-*
3. *ru suru*⁷⁵ *dara*⁷⁶ *dara* | *sarvatathāgata* | *dha-*
4. *tu*⁷⁷ *ddhāri* | *padmāmbhavati*⁷⁸ | *jayavari mudri sma-*
5. *ra* | *tathāgatādharmacaka*⁷⁹ | *pravarttana vajri-*
6. *bodhivaṇa*⁸⁰ | *rumkara*⁸¹ | *rumkrite*⁸² *sarva*⁸³ *tathā-*
7. *gatādhiṣṭhite* | *bodhaya*⁸⁴ *bodhaya* | *bodhi bodhi* | *budhya budhya* |
8. *samb(o)dhani*⁸⁵ *sambodhaya* | *cala cala caramtu* | *sarva-*⁸⁶
9. *varatrane* | *sarvāpāvigāte*⁸⁷ | *huru huru*
10. *sarvaśokavigate*⁸⁸ | *sarvatathāgatā* | *hṛda-*⁸⁹
11. *ya vajraṇi* | *sambhara*⁹⁰ *sambhara* | *sarvatathāgatā* | *gu-*
12. *hyadharaṇimudri* | *buddhe subuddhe* | *sarvatathā-*
13. *gatādhiṣṭ(h)ita* | *dhatugarbhe svāhā* | *samayādhi-*
14. *ṣṭhatī svāhā* | *sarvatathāgatā* | *hṛdayadhātu*
15. *mudri svāhā* | *supraṭiṣṭhitastupe* | *tathā-*
16. *gatādhiṣṭhite* | *huru huru hūm hūm* *svāhā* |
17. *om sarvatathāgatā* | *uṣṇīśadhatu mudraṇi*
18. *sarvatathāgatam sadhatuvibhositādhiṣṭhite*
19. *hūm hūm svāhā* ||

⁷³ *nama[h] striyaddhikānām*. Read: *namas triyadhvikānām*.

⁷⁴ *vacare*.

⁷⁵ Emend: *culu culu*.

⁷⁶ *ddhara ddhara*. Read: *dhara dhara*.

⁷⁷ *ddhātu*. Read: *dhātu*.

⁷⁸ *padmāmbhavadi*.

⁷⁹ *tathāgatādharmacakara*. Read: *tathāgatādharmacakra*.

⁸⁰ *bodhistāṇa*.

⁸¹ *ramkara*.

⁸² *rumhīte*.

⁸³ *sava-*

⁸⁴ *bodya?*

⁸⁵ *samb(o)dyane(ya)?*

⁸⁶ *sava-*

⁸⁷ *sarvāpāvigaddhe*.

⁸⁸ *sarvaśokavigatre?*

⁸⁹ *krīda-?*

⁹⁰ *sabhara*.

As expected, the later Japanese edition, presumably going back to an original Sanskrit source dating from the eighth century, differs substantially from that given earlier for the Kurkihār inscription, which can be dated to around the eleventh century. Some of the linguistic discrepancies may be easily explained because the Indian modern editor of this inscription did not recognize the genre of *dhāraṇī* text he was reading. For example, the seed-syllable (*bījākṣara*) *hūṃ* has been constantly misconstrued as *hṛṃ*. The reading *culu culu dhara dhara*, however, is likely correct, whereas *suru suru dara dara* in the Japanese edition probably represent an East Asian phonetic distortion. In addition, the last line of the inscription has been misread as *nama[ḥ] sveyadhikānām sarvatathāgatānām*. The properly restored reading should be *namas tryadhvikānām sarvatathāgatānām*, i.e. “Homage to all the Tathāgatas of the Three Times.” This restored reading thus says that, more than just the entire body of the one Buddha of our era, this *dhāraṇī* scripture represents the bodies of all Buddhas, past, present, and future. However, the phrase comes first in the Japanese version — following the Chinese *Taishō* edition —, not last, replacing the *Ye dharmā* formula found at the opening of the inscription, which is absent in the Chinese and Japanese versions. The reversed order of the opening salutation and the presence or absence of certain other elements in the Kurkihār inscription most likely indicates that the person who engraved the bronze was copying this incantation from a different source (or perhaps even recalling it from imperfect memory?), which diverged somewhat from the *dhāraṇī* scriptures brought to China earlier by Amoghavajra, and then to Japan by Kūkai. Yet only more detailed comparative and philological studies of this sort, confronted with the archeological and epigraphic material, will be able to shed light on the spread and use of these *dhāraṇīs* in time and space.

In brief, the inscribed bronze frame from Kurkihār is a rare and important attestation of the *Karaṇḍamudrādhāraṇī* on the South Asian mainland; it is also the only known occurrence to date where it appears on a Buddhist image. Perhaps the engraving on the back served as *dharmā*-relic. This *dhāraṇī* indeed says it contains the relics of all the Buddhas of past, present, and future. Thus, by engraving and/or recitation, it would be as if one were already making an offering to the relics of all Buddhas. In this context, the consecrated image was either meant to be enshrined in a *stūpa* or else to contain actual relics within it. Yael Bentor (1995) observes similar Tibetan practices, called *gzungs-'bul* (offering *dhāraṇīs*) or *gzungs-gzhug* (inserting *dhāraṇīs*), of depositing sacred objects within *stūpas* and images.⁹¹ This tradition is deeply rooted in the framing *sūtra* which states, “If someone were to insert it

⁹¹ On this usage, see also Namgyal-lama 2013: 164ff.

[the *Karaṇḍamudrādhāraṇī*] into any image or *stūpa* of the Buddha, [that] image of the Tathāgata would be blessed as if it were made of the seven precious substances” (Bentor 1995: 253).

Alternatively, Hiram Woodward (1990: 26, n. 37) suggests that the *dhāraṇī* inscribed on the back of the *prabhāmaṇḍala* may have been related to the depiction of the Eight Great Events on the front so that these should be “internalized by the practitioner, perhaps by the performance of ritual hand gestures.” The sacred incantation of this very *dhāraṇī* may have perhaps equally played a crucial role in visualizing and enacting of ritual performances in which the practitioner identified with the powers of all the Tathāgatas. If such were the case, some initiation into such esoteric practices may have involved a “diadem consecration” (*mukuṭābhiṣeka*), during which the initiate monk, wearing a crown such as the one worn by the Buddhas on the bronze frame, was sprinkled with water and acceded to such powers. Some scholars have written about such metal crowns or tiaras worn by Buddhist monks to this day in Nepal and Tibet. Admittedly, the full meaning of such practices may never be known to a non-tantric practitioner, but can only be conjectured from art and archeological recoveries, such as the bronze crown excavated at Nālandā (G.C. Chandra 1936: 280, pl. CXLd; Huntington Archive # 3222), or the inlaid copper gilt officiant’s tiara from Nepal dated 1145 CE, now the property of the Musée Guimet in Paris (Béguin 1984).

Stones Images Depicting the Gift of Honey

Two independent steles of allegedly unknown origin, now kept in private collections, have been incorporated into the recent study on Kurkihār sculptures by Claudine Bautze-Picron (2014: 86, figs 63–64). They both illustrate a single event in the life of the Buddha, rarely depicted independently in Indian sculptures, that of the monkey’s offering of honey.⁹²

The two steles are not exactly alike although they share stylistic and iconographic similarities. Together they represent the Buddha who sits prominently with his legs down on the center of a throne adorned with lions as well as converging *makaras* in the case of **Fig. 5.68**. The Buddha is not preaching, but holds his bowl with his two hands on his lap so as to accept the offering made by the monkey standing to the viewer’s lower left of the

⁹² Many other examples exist where the Buddha, crowned or uncrowned, sits cross-legged (e.g. Bautze-Picron 2010a: fig. 104; Indian Museum, inv. no. 2074/A25150; Rijksmuseum, inv. no. AK-MAK-519). Two similar high-relief steles with the Buddha seated frontally in *bhadrāsana* are also found in Pagan, Myanmar, with the addition of the elephant Pārileyaka, seen on the left side of the pedestal while the monkey stands opposite (see Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pls 193b, 312b; also **Fig. 6.38**).

pedestal. *Ye dharmā* inscriptions ornament the nimbus behind each Buddha head but they are not completely legible from the published photos [Figures 5.67–68]. Bautze-Picron records that one of the sculptures [Fig. 5.68] was actually spotted *in situ* at Kurkihār by S.K. Saraswati and K.C. Sarkar during their visit the “Christmas week of 1931.” The sculpture later came into the possession of the Indian collector H.P. Poddar in Kolkata before being sold to the Musée Asiatique in Biarritz, France (Bautze-Picron 2014: 7, fig. 64). This information would secure with a reasonable amount of certainty the provenance in Kurkihār. The images can be dated approximately to the late ninth or early tenth centuries on stylistic considerations.

The narrative content of the steles is well known. According to most versions, it is about a monkey who took the Buddha’s alms bowl and climbed a tree to gather honey for him. The Buddha accepted this humble offering, but the monkey in great joy accidentally fell into a pit and died. Here is the description preserved in Sanskrit in the Gilgit manuscript of the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, the last section of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*:

buddho bhagavān nādikāyām viharati guṇjikāvasathe; tena khalu samayena sambahulāni pātrāṇy abhyavakāsa upari kṣiptāni; bhagavataś ca pātram; athānyatamo markataḥ śālavyrkṣād avatīrya yena pātrāṇi tenopasaṁkramati; bhikṣavas taṁ vārayanti, mā bhetsyati pātrāṇi iti; tatra bhagavān bhikṣūṇām āmantrayate sma: mā bhikṣavaḥ etaṁ markataṁ vārayata; tat kasya hetoḥ; naiśa bhetsyate pātrāṇi; atha sa markato yena bhagavataḥ pātram tenopasaṁkrāntaḥ; upasaṁkramya bhagavataḥ pātram ādāya taṁ śālavyrkṣam abhiruhya kṣaudrasya madhuno ’neḍakasya pūrayitvā śanair mandamandaṁ śālavyrkṣād avatīrya bhagavata upanāmayati; tasya bhagavān na pratigrhṇāti saprāṇakam iti kṛtvā; atha sa markata ekānte prakramya niṣprāṇakam kṛtvā bhagavata upanāmayati; tasya bhagavān na pratigrhṇāti akalpikam iti kṛtvā; atha sa markata ekānte prakramya śītalena vāriṇā pariśicya bhagavata upanāmayati; tasya bhagavān pratigrhṇāti kṛtakalpikam iti kṛtvā; atha sa markataḥ pratigrhṇitam me bhagavatā madhupātram iti viditvā kṣṣatatuṣṭapramuditāḥ udagraprītisaumanasyajātāḥ prāñjalīkṛtāḥ pratipuṭaka[m] pratyavasṛto [narta]mānaḥ bhagavantam namasyamānaḥ bhagavati

prasādaajāto bhagavantam nirīkṣamāṇaḥ pṛṣṭhato nāvalokayati; kūpe patitaḥ (ed. Gnoli 1978: 47–48; variants not included).

Peter Skilling has translated this passage as follows:

The Awakened One, the Blessed One, was sojourning at the Guṇjikāvasatha at Nādikā. At that time many bowls were left facing upwards in the open air, including the bowl of the Blessed One. Then a monkey came down from a *śāla* tree and approached the bowls. The monks tried to stop it, saying “Do not break the bowls!” At that the Blessed One said to the monks: “Do not stop that monkey, O monks. Why? He will not break the bowls.”

Then the monkey went to the Blessed One’s bowl. On arriving he took the Blessed One’s bowl away, climbed the *śāla* tree, filled it with pure sweet honey, gently, slowly slowly he came down from the *śāla* tree and offered it to the Blessed One. The Blessed One did not accept it because it contained living beings. Then the monkey stepped to one side, made it free of living beings, and offered it to the Blessed One. The Blessed One did not accept it because it was unsuitable. Then the monkey stepped to one side, rinsed it with cool water, and offered it to the Blessed One. The Blessed One accepted it, because it has been made suitable. Then the monkey, realizing “the Blessed One has accepted the bowl of honey from me” was elated, pleased, and delighted; overwhelmed with joy and happiness he made an *añjali*, turned in circles, dancing as he paid homage to the Blessed One. With faith in the Blessed One, gazing on the Blessed One, he did not look behind, and fell into a well and died (2007a: 1–2).

While the narrative is traditionally associated with Vaiśālī, as Skorupski writes, “there is no unanimous agreement among the available sources on the location and the actual episode about the monkey offering honey to the Buddha” (2001b: 48). The Sanskrit source quoted above says that it took place at Nādikā, the residence where the Buddha stayed on

several occasions, on his way to Vaiśālī.⁹³ But the story is also extant in *sūtra* 32 of the Chinese *Madhyamāgama* (T. 26), where it happens in the forest of Vaiśālī. However, Xuanzang, who visited India in the seventh century, surprisingly proposes Mathurā, in addition to Vaiśālī (Beal 1884: I, 182f; II, 68). In the Pali commentary on the *Dhammapada*, a related fable is located in another forest, near Kosambī (Kauśāmbī), but there the plot mainly focuses on the elephant Pārileyaka (Burlingame 1921: I, 179ff; Ohnuma 2013). Other late Tibetan and Mongolian accounts relate that the event took place at Śrāvastī (Skorupski 2001b: 49). But the common point in nearly all versions of this story is that the monkey suddenly died at the end. After his death, and through the power of his accrued merit (the gift of *madhu*), we are told in the above Sanskrit account that the monkey was immediately reborn as a Brahmin by the name of Madhuvāsiṣṭha. As it happens, perhaps the demise of the monkey made the Buddha realize his own impending departure, for which he then started to prepare his entourage by announcing publicly at Vaiśālī the time of his *mahāparinirvāṇa*.

The episode of the monkey is depicted in Indian art as early as the first century CE on the northern gate of the Great Stūpa at Sāñcī⁹⁴ and also sparingly in the art of Gandhāra and Sārnāth (Brown 2013: figs 1–3). It became visually popular in Bihar during the Pāla period with its inclusion as part of the eight scenes of the Buddha’s life. South Asian representations of the episode in narrative art, according to Robert Brown, generally “follow a close, although selective, reading of the textual stories” (2013: 43). Chiseled in stone or painted on illuminated manuscripts (see *infra*), several monkeys are sometimes represented and are an example of what Vidya Dehejia calls “continuous narrative” (1990). That is to say that the same monkey can be shown more than once and at different moments in the same panel, i.e. before and after he presents the offering to the Buddha. However, this is not what we see on the Kurkihār steles, where the narrative component is restricted to a minimum. This would seem to reinforce their iconic and devotional character. Some discussion has also taken

⁹³ Nādikā is the name of a village, also spelt Nātikā, Nātika, or Nādika (BHSD and DPPN s.vv.). The locality is situated in the Vajjī country, between Koṭigāma and Vesālī (Vaiśālī). According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha stayed several times in Nādikā and also visited the place on his last journey, while on his way to Kusinārā. His last visit is described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (D II 93ff; trans. Walshe 1995: 240ff). The Guṇjikāvasatha is known in Pali as the Giṇjakāvasatha (DPPN, s.v.), a brick hall where the Buddha stayed on various occasions during his visits to Nādikā and preached several discourses.

⁹⁴ An important factor to consider is the possible impact of art on narrative texts concerned with the life of the Buddha. For example, here at Sāñcī is a representation of a monkey making an offering of a bowl of honey to the Buddha, whose presence is suggested only by a tree and an “empty throne.” However, this episode is not found in the literary texts until centuries later. A case can thus be made that the biographical texts of the life of the Buddha were sometimes influenced by earlier works created by the sculptors in ancient India.

place that these various isolated representations of the Gift of honey may well serve a more subtle and esoteric purpose. According to Hiram Woodward, perhaps “the scene stands for some internal mental process [...]. Sense objects give rise to distraction, and this distraction should be visualized in the form of a monkey, according to a Tibetan tradition; when the meditator is on the path to successful mind control, the monkey must at one point be made to disappear” (1990: 19).

Can the monkey’s metaphoric death really stand for its visual disappearance on the steles [Fig. 5.85b]? There are no simple answers, but “mind monkey,” or “monkey-like mind,” is a frequent mainstream Buddhist simile describing the natural, chaotic state of the untrained mind. While the Buddha emphasized the benefits of cultivating mindful awareness, or mindfulness, he also described the human mind as unsettled, capricious, inconstant, confused, uncontrollable, etc. and so he used the metaphor of the mind as similar to a monkey in several places, with varying meanings.⁹⁵ In other words, as Woodward aptly put it, “the Buddhist practitioner must in certain ways identify with the monkey. The mind is like a monkey because it flits from one thing to another [...], but it is also capable of resolve, and of the thought of enlightenment” (1990: 18). No doubts these Buddhist steles served a similar practical and soteriological purpose relating to the practice of meditation.

Amethi

Amethi (also known as Amaithi) is a village in Gaya district, Bihar, about halfway between the modern city of Gaya and Rajgir, just a few kilometers north of Kurkihār. Various Buddhist remains and ancient sculptures have been noticed here since the days of Francis Buchanan Hamilton and Marc Aurel Stein who visited Bihar in the nineteenth century. Among various figures, seated or standing images of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Tāra have been recorded and are still in worship *in situ* at the local Devasthan Mandir or Devi Temple (Bautze-Picron 2014: 4, 6, figs 137, 138, 153, 191, 206).

In Bihar, Hindu cult images can be worshipped in places where most images surrounding it are Buddhist. However, a few additional fragments have not yet been documented, including an incomplete stone Buddha image in *bhadrāsana* in the preaching attitude, are currently collected in the courtyard just outside the local shrine [Figure 5.69].

⁹⁵ For references to Canonical texts identifying the mind with a monkey, see *inter alia* S II 94f, Sn, v. 791, Dh 334. The Pali term *kapicitta* — “having a monkey’s mind” — is also found in some *Jātakas* to describe the agitated, easily distracted, and incessantly moving behavior of ordinary human consciousness (e.g. Jāt nos 348 and 435).

This incomplete Buddha image is approximately 50 cm in height and presumably made of limestone. Judging by the style of the transparent robe, the sculpture appears to belong to the post-Gupta or pre-Pāla period, perhaps dated somewhere in the late sixth or early seventh centuries, just as with **Figures 5.23–24** from Nālandā. It basically represents the teaching of the Buddha, perhaps on the occasion of the First Sermon so popularly depicted at Sārnāth during the late Gupta period.

Jethian

Jethian is a small village situated at the foot of the Rajgir hills; it constitutes another major site on the ancient pilgrim trail to Nālandā. In ancient times, Jethian was known as Yaṣṭivana (Skt) or Laṭṭhivana (P.), the grove where the Buddha came after Enlightenment at Bodhgayā and delivering his First and Second Sermons at Sārnāth. The Buddha was received there by King Bimbisāra for the first time on his way to Rajgir, some 20 km to the northeast.⁹⁶

Numerous Buddhist structures as well as ancient sculptures exist in and around Jethian. Beside the road leading to the village from the south is a large mound with a tank next to it. This is believed to be the remains of the structure built over the Supraṭiṣṭhita Caitya (P. Supaṭiṭṭha Cetiya), the alleged place where the Buddha stayed when he was in Jethian. On top of the mound, a large statue of the Lord enthroned with his legs pendant [**Figure 5.70**], probably displaced from an ancient shrine located in the vicinity, is displayed. The sculpture is about 1.40 meters high and is carved in high-relief against a slab on which two kneeling devotees are on each side of the Buddha at arms level. Two additional disciples are carved near the lotus pedestal on which the Buddha's feet are fixed. A pair of small Buddha images sitting cross-legged on a blossomed lotus in a meditation posture completes the scene at the top, each flanking the head of the main Buddha decorated by a flamed nimbus. The Buddha's hands are broken but they probably originally performed the popular teaching gesture. Based on this, and since the symbols of the wheel and the pair of deer are apparently absent at the base of the throne, we may suppose that a portrayal of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī is perhaps what was intended. The date of this sculpture could range on stylistic grounds anywhere from the late ninth to the early eleventh centuries.

⁹⁶ See Vin I 35ff; also the *Buddhacarita* preserved in Chinese (Fasc. 4, Ch. 16, vv. 51ff; trans. Willemsen 2009: 117). Xuanzang also calls this place Yaṣṭivana and describes it as a grove of bamboo, giving accounts of its origin and various stories connected with it (Beal 1884: II, 145ff).

Ghosrawan

Ghosrawan is a small village situated in Giriak subdivision of Nalanda district of the state of Bihar, some 15 km in a direct line east of Nālandā archeological site. This was another monastic site said to be an extension of the famous university. The site is only 6 km south of Tetrawan and, from the records and evidence available, it was an alternative location where student-monks could go to perfect their understanding of the Dharma.

The archeological significance of Ghosrawan comes from its location on the site of a large and important ancient Buddhist monastery. The site was first discovered by Major Kittoe who, in a brief report, referred to a long inscription there. Later, Alexander Cunningham mentioned the ruins again with some additional details (1871: 38–39). One of the major Buddhist sculptures found there today is a huge statue of the Buddha, approximately three meters high. Other Buddha images that belong to the Pāla period were also found in Ghosrawan in the modern period (Broadley 1872: 266ff) and, for the most part, are now located in the Indian Museum, Kolkata (Asher 1970).

In particular, a seated figure of the Buddha surrounded by scenes from the Master's life [**Figure 5.71a**] has been identified from Ghosrawan by Frederick Asher. This figure is in the Indian Museum and perfectly matches Broadley's description (Broadley 1872: 275; Banerji 1933: pl. XXIb; Asher 1970: 123–124, pl. XX). To the lower right of the central Buddha image calling the earth to witness his Enlightenment is a small seated figure of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* with the “fasting bowl” in his lap, referring to the Gift of honey [**Figure 5.71b**]. In addition to this sculpture, two hitherto unpublished, unfortunately mutilated, steles of the Buddha performing the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, photographed *in situ* by Joachim Bautze and Claudine Bautze-Picron during their visit on 18 March 1990 (Pers. Comm.), are found there [**Figures 5.72–73**]. Of particular interest is the presence of Vajrapāṇi on the pedestals, to the right of the *nāgarājas*, brandishing his *vajra* with his right hand towards the heretics. In style and iconography, an approximately tenth-century date can be proposed for these sculptures.

Tetrawan

Tetrawan is a village situated about 12 km southeast of Nalanda district headquarters at Bihar Sharif and 6 km north of Ghosrawan. It also has a rich heritage of Buddhist archeological culture since it was probably another extension of the ancient Nālandā

University. Even today a few remains can be found all around Tetrawan. As with the neighboring site of Ghosrawan, the village's main attraction is another colossal (almost three meters tall) black stone Buddha sitting in the crossed-legged posture conquering Māra. There is controversy, however, as to whether Tetrawan or Ghosrawan represents the ancient Kapotaka or Kapotika Vihāra, the famous "Pigeon Monastery" of the Buddhist tradition, as recorded in the travel accounts of Xuanzang (Beal 1884: II, 182–183). A descriptive account of the site is found in the report written by Broadley in his long article on Buddhist ruins in Bihar (1872: 277ff).

A significant number of sculptures from Tetrawan, formerly in Broadley's collection, were later transferred to the Indian Museum. The precise provenance in Tetrawan of one of these sculptures is of interest to this study. Broadley's personal account of the Buddhist antiquities of Bihar, in which he publishes a detailed description of this sculpture, confirms the provenance. In his own words about the object is a "curious figured Buddha [...] two feet four inches [*ca* 70 cm] high, seated European fashion on a throne, the hair in tufts, [...] an attendant on either side of the feet, and a seated Buddha at each side of the head" (1872: 282). Buddha figures seated in *bhadrāsana* are found elsewhere in Bihar, but only one such figure in the Indian Museum is on a relief depicting this scene, probably of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī (Banerji 1933: pl. XXVIIIa; also Asher 1970: 111, pl. XIV). The statue can be ascribed to any time after the eighth century CE and belongs to the early Pāla school of art; it is engraved with the usual *Ye dharmā* formula in correct Sanskrit, written in the mature Siddhamātṛkā script that was established during this period [Figure 5.74]. Rajat Sanyal's reading (Pers. Comm.) is as follows:

(On the nimbus) *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathā[ga]to
hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evamvā-*

(To the left of the central Buddha) [*dī*] *mahāśramaṇaḥ*

Another so far unnoticed headless Buddha image in *bhadrāsana* was also located in Tetrawan, as demonstrated by a black and white photograph taken in the village on 18 March 1990 [Figure 5.75]. In this period, it was kept in the temple village together with nine other images of Buddhas of various sizes and in various postures, including the colossal image discussed above, and other Hindu deities (Claudine Bautze-Picron, Pers. Comm.). This Buddha image with legs down was located in a separate niche on the exterior wall of the

courtyard, but it is no longer there, according to a local informant, and has been stolen with some other images several years ago.⁹⁷ The Buddha, wearing a pleated robe, is seated on a lion throne with both feet resting on a lotus and with the wheel of law flanked by a pair of deer just below. He is preaching with both hands held at chest level in the preaching gesture and is flanked by two Bodhisattvas, a pair of *stūpas* above, and an umbrella at the center of the arched back slab. Traces of an earring and a necklace also appear slightly on the robe, in which case the Buddha was originally intended to be crowned and adorned. This sculpture recently reappeared in the international art market [Figure 5.76], confirming that we are indeed dealing with a bejeweled Buddha.⁹⁸ On the throne base a lengthy inscription of three lines can be noticed. It apparently starts with the *Ye dharmā* formula, but the resolution of the photograph does not permit an accurate and complete reading. In all likelihood, this also involves a donative inscription with the name of the patron and possibly the regnal date of a Pāla king.⁹⁹ The sculpture can be assigned to the eleventh century on stylistic and paleographic grounds.

Mustafapur

A number of modern villages presently occupy the extensive area of the ancient site of Nālandā University in South Bihar. In one of these villages, Mustafapur, located some three kilometers to the north of the famous excavated site, a Buddha image in pristine state was kept safely in the custody of the villagers for decades where it was an object of worship for potential visitors and pilgrims. In April 2010, I had the opportunity to visit the small local shrine where the image is housed and took a few photographs [Figure 5.77a].

The Buddha stele in high-relief is made of a dense black schist stone and is about 120 cm in height. His head is surrounded by a nimbus with small flame borders surmounted by a foliate tree, while the rest of his body is backed by a large mandorla. The robe covers both shoulders with folds schematized on the body and indicated vertically on the drapery. The Buddha is unattended, but performs the teaching gesture with his two hands held at chest level. He sits with his legs pendant on a lotus cushion placed on top of the square base of a

⁹⁷ Personal communication with Mr Arjun Prasad, a retired engineer and native of the village, who is also the webmaster of the site: www.tetrawan.com.

⁹⁸ See Christie's Amsterdam, sale on 18 October 2005, lot 35. The face has been recut and repasted from a previous depredation. Present whereabouts are unknown.

⁹⁹ An attempt to read the inscription from the photograph by Rajat Sanyal (Pers. Comm.) unveiled the following fragments: *deyadharmmāya---* (line 2), and *cca janmana pa---tasya sumatīḥ ||* (line 3). The script is Gauḍī; Sanyal provisionally dates it to the eleventh century.

throne with two crouching lions fronting the base. His feet rest firmly on a lotus pedestal. There seems to be an inscription on the base of the pedestal, but it could not be read or deciphered properly during my brief visit although it probably represents the *Ye dharmā* formula which, during the Pāla period, is often engraved on the upper or lower part of the moldings. The sculpture is stylistically datable to the late ninth or tenth centuries CE. It is not known if it was found *in situ* and whether it lies on the ruins of an ancient Buddhist temple that was possibly once part of the greater Nālandā complex.

Deplorably, the Buddha statue was recently vandalized in early 2014 in an unsuccessful attempt by smugglers to remove it, which led to its modern disfigurement [Figure 5.77b].¹⁰⁰ In many respects the sculpture is similar to others discovered in the region. To my knowledge, this statue has not been published or documented in any scientific literature.

Telhara

Telhara is a small village located in the Hilsa subdivision of Nalanda district in Bihar, approximately 30 km west of the ancient Nālandā University. The travelogues of Xuanzang and Yijing mention that Tilāḍaka Monastery (present day Telhara or Telhada) was one of the most prominent monasteries throughout the entire “Buddhist land” (Beal 1884: II, 102–103; Li Rongxi 2000: 154). Broadley in the early 1870s made an extensive survey of old Bihar and Patna divisions of British India. In his report, he mentioned that a few of the best sculptures in his collection came from Telhara; he was among the first to document the site’s antiquities (1872: 250ff).¹⁰¹

Ongoing excavations at Telhara, started in December 2009 under the supervision of the Directorate of Bihar State Archeology, have also revealed structural remains of a monastery built during the Gupta period and then revitalized during the Pāla period. Several fine stone sculptures of all sizes, seals, sealings, and terracotta antiquities, many bearing inscriptions, have been unearthed from the excavations (P. Biswas 2016). Among these finds, one headless Buddha image in stone seated majestically in *bhadrāsana* on an elaborate throne

¹⁰⁰ For a news report of this wanton act, see the Blog “Nalanda on the Move” at the following web address: <http://nalanda-insatiablenoffering.blogspot.com/2014/01/vandalisation-of-buddhas-statue-at.html> [Accessed on 22 May 2016].

¹⁰¹ For a more recent published account of some Buddhist sculptures from Telhara, see Leoshko 1988.

adorned with elephants, lions, *vyālas* and *makaras* has been found [Figure 5.78].¹⁰² The hands are broken but were originally joined at chest level and performed the *dharmacakra* preaching gesture. Stylistically, the sculpture of this high-relief belongs to the early Pāla period, while still showing reminiscent idioms of the late Sārnāth school with the Buddha's transparent dress and the ornamentation of the throne, perhaps dating from the late ninth, early tenth century. An inscription under its double lotus pedestal, presumably of the *Ye dharmā* stanza or a donative formula, is also present but is hard to read or confirm from the angle of this photograph.

Lakhi Sarai

Lakhi Sarai or ancient Kṛmilā was an established administrative and religious center for some portion of the Pāla period (Sircar 1971: 248ff). Situated around 90 km east of Nālandā, the region was located at the crossroads of several important religious and commercial corridors, one going north to Nepal and Tibet, and another going east toward Bengal and eventually to Myanmar via today's Bangladesh. The area of Lakhi Sarai yielded several structural Brahmanical remains from the first millennium (Asher 1986) as well as sculptures of a late Buddhist phase, often confirmed by inscriptions, spanning mainly from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries (Bautze-Picron 1992b; Kumar 2011; Chattopadhyay *et al.* 2015). However, by this period, Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana* have clearly long fallen out of fashion.

Only two stone sculptures which are part of the Eight Great Events are known to come from Lakhi Sarai or neighboring villages. They depict the secondary scenes of the Great Miracle and the Gift of honey, respectively (Bautze-Picron 1992b: 247, 256, figs 4a–b, 5). The first piece is only a fragment of a much larger back slab. This scene refers to the Great Miracle in which the Buddha is shown thrice and preaches at the same moment in various places. As is common in Pāla art, the central Buddha is seated in a cross-legged position while the two Buddha duplicates on his immediate right and left are seated with their legs down [Figure 5.79]. The striking element in this relief is that the Great Miracle is depicted just below the scene of the Birth with Māyā standing above, an unusual placement. The second sculpture from the nearby village of Rajaona represents a central bejeweled Buddha conquering Māra, of which the upper part has been broken off, and is flanked by

¹⁰² I am grateful to Tansen Sen for sharing his photographs taken during excavations in progress at the site in May 2014.

other smaller Buddhas equally adorned and crowned on his proper left [Figure 5.80]. The scene of the Buddha's acceptance of honey is seen on the bottom right, as is evident from the bowl held in his lap, even though the monkey is absent. When complete, the relief must have looked somewhat like the example from Haragaon, Patna district, now located in the Indian Museum, with the noticeable exception that the central Buddha is here seen in the preaching attitude (Asher 1970: 108, pl. VI) [Figures 5.81a–b]. Of note, a dated inscription runs in two lines below the double-lotus pedestal that belongs to the sculptural fragment found *in situ* at Rajaona. This inscription has been hastily read and published with errors of interpretation by Anil Kumar (2011: 31–33, figs 3a–e). After some corrections, it should more properly read as follows:

1. [siddham] *deyadharmmo 'yam pravaramahāyānāyāyinya*
param'opāsaka śrīyāyakasya [||] yad atra punyam tad bhavatvācāryo-
pādhyāyaḥ mātāpitypurvaṅgamaṅkṛtvā

2. *sakala satva rāser'amuttaram jñāna phalavāptaya itiḥ [||]*
śrīmad'rāmapāladeva pravarddhamānavijayarājya samvat 9 [||]

Translation:

May success attend. (This is the) pious gift of the illustrious Yāyaka, the great worshipper and the staunch follower of the *Mahāyāna* (school). Whatever merit is attained from it (i.e. the donation), the same be (allotted) for the teacher, the preceptor, the parents and all living creatures, for the attainment of the supreme knowledge. **In the prosperous and victorious ninth* ruling year of the illustrious (king) Rāmapāladeva.**¹⁰³

This is written in Sanskrit language with Gauḍī script of the eleventh–twelfth centuries CE, and speaks of a donation of a lay follower (*upāsaka*) during the long reign of

¹⁰³ See Sanyal 2011: 141, with stylistic minor changes. After his article was published it was realized that the digit should actually read 5 and not 9. Therefore the correct date ought to be: “**In the prosperous and victorious fifth* ruling year of the illustrious (king) Rāmapāladeva.**” In addition, the proposed dates for the reign of Rāmapāla are *circa* 1071–1124 (Rajat Sanyal, Pers. Comm.).

Rāmapāla, son of Vighrahapāla (III), and dedicates his merit in the usual Mahāyānistic terms to all his entourage and beyond, to all living beings (cf. *yad atra puṇyam* formula in **Chapter 4**). Of course, it is always possible that the inscribed sculpture was brought here from somewhere else, or, alternatively, that the site of the modern village of Rajaona was also within the bounds of the ancient city of Kṛmilā.

Miscellaneous (Unknown Provenance)

Steles with Life Events

Several steles made of black stone and kept in public and private collections are without secure provenance, but can be stylistically ascribed to Pāla art, *circa* the tenth century, most likely produced in Bihar. These generally depict the Eight Great Events of the life of the Buddha or one of its isolated episodes.

In most cases, Buddha Śākyamuni is seated at the center, his right hand touching the earth, triumphing over the forces of Māra. Other surrounding life scenes include the First Sermon, the Great Miracle, and the Gift of honey in which the Buddha is frequently depicted in *bhadrāsana* [**Figures 5.82–88**].¹⁰⁴ These images were often engraved in Siddhamātrkā or Gauḍī scripts with the *Ye dharmā* formula at the base of the pedestal or behind the nimbus; the name of the donor may even appear, as in the case of the stele kept in Berlin [**Figure 5.84**]:

1. *thapati devaraja putra vayasya devadharmmoyah ||*

Translation:

This [image] is the meritorious gift of Vaya, son of the architect,
Devarāja.

It is then followed by the ubiquitous stanza, read as follows by Gouriswar Bhattacharya:

¹⁰⁴ For two examples that circulated in the art market, see Sotheby's London, sale on 29 November 1982, lot 212, and Sotheby's New York, sale on 23 March 1995, lot 21.

2. *ye dharmmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ te-*
3. [ṣām] *tathāgato [hy avadat teṣām] ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī*
mahāśramano (Bautze-Picron 1998a: 28).¹⁰⁵

In a few examples, the central image of the Buddha is crowned. One such sculpture from the former Avery Brundage Collection is at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. The central image represents again the seated Buddha defeating the demon Māra by touching the earth, calling upon her to affirm his fitness for Buddhahood. The earth goddess is shown in miniature at the middle of the base beneath the lotus throne. Surrounding the Buddha are four miniature scenes associated with his life; originally three additional scenes would have encircled the central image, making up the standard set of eight. At the lower right, the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* accepts the offering from the monkey. Since the upper portion is missing, it is not known how the Great Miracle and the First Sermon would have been depicted, whether with a Buddha seated in the cross-legged or pendant-legged posture [Figure 5.86]. A similar but more complete sculpture is kept at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts [Figure 5.87]. Another stele with a standing crowned Buddha as the central icon, presently located at the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum in Varanasi, characterizes the Descent, while both the Great Miracle and the First Sermon are represented on each side with a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* [Figure 5.88]. These various reliefs of the bejeweled Buddha can be ascribed to the eleventh or twelfth centuries.¹⁰⁶

Robert Brown (1984: 84) and Gouriswar Bhattacharya (1990: 32) briefly discussed a Pāla relief of the Great Miracle once held in the private collection of Claude de Marteau in Brussels. Here the Buddha at the center is shown seated on a blooming lotus in the cross-legged position preaching under a mango tree. The multiplication miracle of the Buddha is visually evoked because the central icon is immediately flanked by two doubles in three-quarter views, robed as before, and in the teaching posture, but this time seated in *bhadrāsana*. A miniature figure with folded hands in *añjali*, perhaps of King Prasenajit, as well as another of a defeated heretic, is shown just below the lotus pedestal. According to

¹⁰⁵ There are reasons to believe that what G. Bhattacharya has baptized the “Buddhist creed in corrupt Sanskrit” may reflect another occurrence of “sanskritized Prakrit” belonging to the *avaca* group and not necessarily the *hy avadat* category (see also *supra*). This could simply be a conscious attempt to write the stanza in a different fashion from the “correct Sanskrit.” Claudine Bautze-Picron (*ibid.*) suggests a provenance from Nālandā for this stele.

¹⁰⁶ For more examples, see Coomaraswamy 1923: 75ff, pl. XXXIV; Bautze-Picron 2010a: figs 103–107, 109, 111–114, 117.

G. Bhattacharya, this sculpture was the gift of a certain *rāṇaka*, that is, a royal official or king's vassal, whose name is difficult to read in the published photograph [Figure 5.89].¹⁰⁷ The script appears to be eleventh century. The manner in which the episode of the Great Miracle is depicted in this relief with a triad centered on a Buddha seated cross-legged and immediately flanked by two Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* was very popular during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Bihar and beyond.¹⁰⁸

Another triad probably displaying the Great Miracle is peculiar inasmuch as the central Buddha sits with his legs down, an unusual feature in Pāla art, but this time he is bejeweled, whereas the two flanking Buddhas are not [Figure 5.90]. Alternatively, the triad could perhaps represent the Buddhas of the Three Ages, i.e. Past, Present, and Future. A series of five miniature Buddhas sitting cross-legged, performing different hand gestures are seen at the top of the back slab and undoubtedly represent the five Jinās of esoteric Buddhism.¹⁰⁹

Bejeweled Buddhas

In addition to the image from Tetrawan (see *supra*), only two other bejeweled Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana* as a main icon are known to me from Bihar. The first sculpture is at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for whom it was purchased in India through the good services of Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1921 [Figure 5.91]. In his catalogue of Indian sculptures, Coomaraswamy (1923: 77–78) describes the image as:

The Bodhisattva (Maitreya?) teaching, seated in European fashion (*pralambapāda āsana*) on a lion throne (*simhāsana*), the hands in *dharma-cakra-mudrā*, wearing crown, earrings, and necklace. Surmounted by umbrella (*chaltra* [sic]), and with four *stūpas* at the sides. On the pedestal, two deer affronted, with the Wheel of the Law. [...] Without the crown, etc., this would appear to be a representation

¹⁰⁷ Rajat Sanyal proposes to read *rāṇakaśrīvāpa---sya* (Pers. Comm.). The script is Gauḍī, *circa* eleventh century.

¹⁰⁸ Several examples are known in sculptures and mural paintings at Pagan, Myanmar, since the late eleventh century [Figs 6.37a–b]. In addition, a peculiar Pāla stele of this type, bearing the *Ye dharmā* inscription, as well as a late Burmese inscription dated 1839 CE, was also found at Galle in Sri Lanka (Frasch 2013).

¹⁰⁹ Bautze-Picron (2010a: 90–91, fig. 84) proposes Bengal as a possible provenance. The whereabouts of this sculpture are unknown. See also Sotheby's New York, sale on 24 September 2004, lot 44.

of the Buddha's First Sermon in the Deer-park at Benares. The sculpture is evidently provincial and the symbolism confused.

Obviously, what Coomaraswamy took to be an adorned Bodhisattva is in reality another representation of the bejeweled Buddha, a concept that was barely understood to art historians at the time of his publication, hence the too facile proposed identification with the Bodhisattva Maitreya.¹¹⁰ Coomaraswamy ascribes this image to the twelfth century and also gave Orissa as a suggested provenance. This is doubtful given that no other examples of this kind have been discovered there. A much better provenance would be Bihar (Bodhgayā?) where other bejeweled Buddhas have been found wearing a similar three-pointed crown as early as the late tenth century and more prevalently in the eleventh century.

The next image from this corpus is located at the Patna Museum and is much damaged. While the head is lost, we can surmise that it also belongs to the bejeweled type because the Buddha wears a necklace as in previous examples. A fragmentary inscription appears on the pedestal, below the double lotus, but it is incomplete and hardly legible in the picture [Figure 5.92].

Clay Sealings from Bodhgayā?

A small number of clay sealings or tablets, baked or sun-dried, and made with a mold were found at Bodhgayā or nearby in Bihar and are today spread out in different museum collections. I describe below those few tablets which depict the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* as the main icon.

In this type of tablet, the central Buddha figure is depicted seated with the legs pendant on a lotus throne with hands held in front of his chest in the gesture of delivering a Sermon. The Buddha is framed by the *śikhara* (superstructure) of a temple looking very much like the Mahābodhi, but on top of which there are no traces of the *bodhi*-tree branches. The enthroned Buddha is surrounded by approximately twenty symmetrically arranged *stūpas* of varying sizes. His feet rest on a footstool with two rows of lotus petals and flanked by faint traces of a deer, referring to the Deer Park, and a wheel just below which is usually barely visible. This iconographic type surely refers to the First Sermon at Sārnāth. Robert Brown interprets the *śikhara*-tower like as an appropriate place “to house the Buddha in life scenes

¹¹⁰ The authoritative study by Paul Mus on “le Buddha paré” was published only a few years later (1928: 153ff). More recently, see Bautze-Picron 2010a.

other than enlightenment” (1988b: 118). At the base of the tablets, we see the ubiquitous *Ye dharmā* stanza impressed in the clay in the Nāgarī script of northeastern India. The text constantly fills the lower area and is written across the base, but it is not always well impressed or legible. The first tablet, or rather a fragment of this type, was collected at Bodhgayā and published by Cunningham (1892: pl. 24c; Lawson 1982: 159f), before its donation to the British Museum [Figure 5.93]. The inscription has been deciphered by Lawson as follows:

1. *ye dhamā hetupabha(vā) teṣāṃ he(tuṃ) ta[thā]-*
2. *[gato] hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha [e]-*
3. *(vaṃ vā)dī mahasama(naḥ)*

The inscription on the second tablet, also from the British Museum collection [Figure 5.94] and studied by Lawson (1982: 170), reads quite clearly:

1. *ye dhammā hetupabhavā teṣāṃ hetuṃ tathā-*
2. *gato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca*
3. *yo nirodha*
4. *evaṃ vādī ma-*
5. *hasamaṇaḥ*

Another related terracotta tablet is found at the Ashmolean Museum [Figure 5.95]. According to Lawson (1982: 147f), the impressed formula is as follows:

1. *ye dhamā hetupabhavā [te]ṣ(āṃ) he(tuṃ) tathā-*
2. *gato [hy avadat] teṣ(āṃ) ca*
3. *(yo nirodha) evaṃ vādī*
4. *(mahā)[samaṇa]*

My tentative reading of the eroded inscription found on a fourth nearly identical tablet kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art¹¹¹ [Figure 5.96] is:

¹¹¹ This tablet is succinctly discussed in Behrendt 2014: 14–15, fig. 10, but the reading of the inscription is not included.

1. (ye dhar)mā he(tu)p(r)abhavā [teṣām hetum] tathā-
2. gato [hy avadat te](ṣām ca)
3. (yo nirodha)
4. evaṃ vādī ma-
5. (hāsa)maṇa

These tablets have more or less the same format and are all in the shape of a *bodhi*-leaf, sometimes set within a high rim with a flat base [Figs 5.94, 96].¹¹² At first sight, save for a few minor stylistic differences, they are so similar that one would expect they might have been made from the same mold or matrice. Each verse inscription, however, is unique: they are in neither pure Sanskrit nor pure Pali and each inscription is distributed differently over three, four, or five lines. These differences provide evidence that the tablets on which they were impressed were molded with slightly different molds circulating in Bihar and beyond. Indeed similar tablets were found at the site of Mīrpur Khās in Sindh, today’s Pakistan (**Chapter 2**); in Myanmar, most notably at Pagan;¹¹³ and in central and peninsular Thailand at various ancient sites such as Nakhon Pathom, Khu Bua or Phong Tuek [**Table 1, no. 18**]. This raises the important but convoluted concern of their place of manufacture, since it is often not possible to establish where a tablet, or rather the mold from which it was stamped, was actually made. The best discussion on this problem to date is that by Simon Lawson (1982: 141–197) who studied a large corpus of tablets kept in British museums originally found both in India and Myanmar. Suffice to say that the tablet type discussed above was probably known and produced at Bodhgayā to some unknown extent, and that such tablets should almost certainly have been made where they were found and have not been brought by foreign pilgrims. In the same vein, as Lawson tells us, “plaques were made at a shrine in order to gain religious merit and later they were placed in the shrine. They were not made to be taken away” (1982: 190). On stylistic and paleographic grounds, this type of tablet is usually dated to *circa* the tenth or eleventh centuries in India, with some possible later extension and elaboration in the thirteenth century in Myanmar and Thailand.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Another unpublished example is at the British Museum, inv. no. 1901.10-15.1.

¹¹³ For a bronze mold of this kind found in Myinkaba, Pagan, with only two lines of Nāgarī script, see Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pl. 51a–b.

¹¹⁴ Let us recall that the attempt at dating these tablets corresponds to the date when the molds which produced them in great quantity were first circulated. Each mold was used to imprint similar tablets for several decades, or even centuries, after its introduction. Unfortunately, no absolute dating is available for tablets or molds found in South and Southeast Asia. Even those marked by inscriptions are subject to far from precise paleographic analysis.

Two Tablets of Possible Burmese Origin from the Indian Museum

A related sub-type of tablet, somewhat smaller and more elongated with a square base, is kept at the Indian Museum in Kolkata. In this rimless tablet, fewer *stūpas* surrounding the main preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana* or its overarching architectural structure are found [Figure 5.97]. No other similar examples have been found in India to my knowledge; it is fairly well known, however, in Myanmar (Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pl. 52).¹¹⁵ This kind of tablet can be dated somewhat later than the previous type, after the late eleventh century. A few letters in ancient Mon script are found at the bottom but nothing can be made of them. Even if this tablet were found in India, there is sufficient evidence to assert that it was produced by, or at least for, a person of Mon/Burmese origin.

A second rimmed tablet, also on display at the Indian Museum,¹¹⁶ depicts the Eight Great Events where the Buddha seated in profile with the legs down is seen as a secondary figure at the lower left side of the composition [Figure 5.98]. The miniature scene sees the addition of a crouching elephant below the Buddha to the classical offering of honey by the standing monkey. Incidentally, a short gloss of two lines can be seen on the right of the scene which seems to read: *grahika vānarā*, i.e. “domesticated denizens of the forest.” This clearly refers to an episode drawn from the *Dhammapada* commentary in Pali, which substitutes the hitherto known scene of the Gift of honey at Vaiśālī by the Pārileyyaka retreat near Kauśāmbī. The latter scene is unknown in India, but gained new iconographic significance in Pagan and the rest of mainland Southeast Asia [Figs 6.38–42]. Other identical tablets of this type bearing the same inscriptions have been found in Myanmar dated as early as the late eleventh century (e.g. Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pl. 71a–b).¹¹⁷ The ubiquitous Buddhist formula stamped below the image is written in Sanskrit in the classical Nagārī script over two

¹¹⁵ See also Anderson (1883: 187) who describes similar clay tablets reportedly found at Tagaung or Pagan, in northern Myanmar, and given to the Indian Museum.

¹¹⁶ Without any further references, J. Huntington (1987b: 66–67, fig. 21) localizes the find-spot of this tablet at Bhītā, in Bihar. This is assuredly an oversight since Bhītā is located near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh and yielded almost exclusively pre-Gupta material (Marshall 1915). See also Luce & Ba Shin (1969–70: pl. 71c) who classify its origin as Burmese.

¹¹⁷ See also Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. EAX 415 (Harle & Topsfield 1987: 41–42, cat. no. 50), British Museum inv. no. 1886.06-18.6 (unpublished), and 1899.10-16.1 (Zwalf 1985: 223). One such tablet was once in the memorial collection of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab at the National Library of Thailand and photographed by Hiram Woodward in November 1970 (Pers. Comm.). Two variants bearing different Pali inscriptions in Mon script are known to me. One is in the possession of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (inv. no. 1976.62) and the other at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (inv. no. 25.257).

lines. However, it ends quite exceptionally with the name of the person whose pious gift it was, in this case a leading figure named Mahāsālīni:

1. *(ye dhammā hetuprabhavā hetum teṣāṃ tathāgato) hy avadat
teṣāṃ ca yo*
2. *(niro)dha eva(m)vādi mahāsramaṇaḥ | dānapati śrī mahāsā(līni)*

Ordinarily the donor is not named in such tablets. Dedicatory inscriptions, where they occur, are generally found on the reverse, written in a vernacular language. Although the use of the Nāgarī script here tends to support an Indian origin for this tablet, the uniqueness of the Pārileyyaka retreat, a Burmese innovation, as well as the little upturned eaves of the central enshrined Buddha's tower, which are also unmistakably Burmese, runs in favor of a foreign origin, probably from Pagan.

Andagu Plaques

A series of plaques made of pyrophyllite, that is, a soft fine-grained and distinctive yellow colored stone generally known as “andagu,” is also often thought to originate mainly from Myanmar (e.g. Brown 1988b: 113ff, figs 11–12). These small plaques commonly depict the Buddha in the gesture of conquering Māra as the central figure, surrounded by scenes describing the seven other great events of the Buddha's life. The current scholarship regarding these plaques, however, suggests that some of these works may have originated in the northeastern states of India, around Bodhgayā or the Bay of Bengal (Woodward 1998; Bautze-Picron 1999).¹¹⁸

Undoubtedly, the following example conforms stylistically with the Pāla tradition of Bihar, more specifically that of Nālandā [**Figure 5.99**].¹¹⁹ In this unique sculpture, the central Buddha is surrounded on the right and left by figures representing his human great life events, notably the First Sermon which mirrors the Great Miracle, in both of which the Master is seated in *bhadrāsana*. Other similar plaques where the Buddha has a large forehead and short neck and sometimes with the presence of additional details, such as the seven

¹¹⁸ For an example kept in the Potala collection at Lhasa, Tibet, see Schroeder 2008: pl. 19.

¹¹⁹ See Bautze-Picron 1999: Appendix 46; also Menzies 2001: cat. no. 34. Present whereabouts are unknown. The image is inscribed on the back. See also Sotheby's New York, sale on 20 March 1997, lot 28.

stations after the Enlightenment, are more common and widely distributed.¹²⁰ Yet, while the origins of many of these plaques remain unclear, such pieces often inscribed on the back in a variety of languages (Tibetan, Chinese, Newari, etc.), provide remarkable evidence of the deep and complex connections between northeastern India and other foreign countries during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries.

Buddhist Painted Manuscripts

Most illuminated Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. “Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines,” made of palm leaves in northeastern India or Nepal during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, contain the Eight Great Events from the Buddha’s life. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* is a philosophical text expounding the Mahāyāna concept of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, which enjoyed a central role in the Buddhist cult of the book, particularly in Pāla and Newar Buddhism (Kinnard 1996a; J. Kim 2006). The painted miniatures generally occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the entire manuscript, but the images have no relation to the text whatsoever. However, Jinah Kim argues that “understood as a collective unit, these illustrations play an important role in explaining the book cult expounded in the text and make the book even more worthy of veneration” (2008: 85).

In many cases, the scenes of the Great Miracle and of the Gift of honey present some Buddha figures seated with legs pendant [**Figures 5.100–104**].¹²¹ It is not clear, however, whether this posture carried any specific iconographic meaning other than efficiently conveying the narrative context of the incident. It appears striking, however, that in miniature

¹²⁰ Plaques similar in arrangement, symbolism, size, and material in North American museum collections include Cleveland Museum of Art (inv. no. 1965.27); Asia Society Museum (John D. Rockefeller, 3rd Collection (inv. no. 1979.090); Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard Art Museums (inv. no. 1979.328); Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (inv. no. 1991.224, and 2010.330); and Brooklyn Museum (inv. no. 82.78). For the case of Myanmar, see Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pls 400–405. A couple of comparable plaques have also been found in Sri Lanka, (Mudiyanse 1967: figs 7 and 9; Prematilleke 1972). In one instance, however, the presence of the tiny pachyderm in the lower right corner of the composition, below the monkey, must be a reference to the elephant which fed the Buddha in the Pārileyyaka forest (Vogel 1915: pl. XX). A similar stone fragment which incorporates the depiction of the weeks following the Enlightenment was excavated at Sārnāth in 1904–05 (Oertel 1908: 83–85, fig. 8).

¹²¹ Other illuminated manuscripts with similar scenes are in the custody of the Asia Society in New York City (acc. no. 1987.001), the Sackler Gallery in Washington DC (acc. no. F1930.87), and the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum in Varanasi (acc. no. 4779-4793; Huntington Archive # 55997). For a more detailed discussion of these manuscripts, see J. Kim 2006 and 2008.

scenes with the monkey, the Buddha is always seated in profile.¹²² In one instance, the depiction of the offering of the monkey at Vaiśālī is combined with that of the green Tārā, simply labeled “Tārā of Vaiśālī” [Fig. 5.104]. It appears that this life scene was used in the painting primarily as a symbol for the location of an enshrined Tārā image (Foucher 1900: 134, pl. VII.1). Other miniatures depict the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* who is flanked by a Bodhisattva and Tārā [Figures 5.105–106]. Buddhist triads composed of a similar Bodhisattva and Tārā were known in sculptural forms as we have seen [Fig. 5.23] and could perhaps represent symbolically the three refuges (*triśaraṇas*), that is, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha (Foucher 1900: 89). Incidentally, one of the above painted miniatures [Fig. 5.105] bears a label which has been read as *puṇḍavaraddhane triśaraṇa buddha bhāṭṭārakah* (Foucher 1900: 190; Paul 1995: 99), i.e. “the Lord Buddha of the three refuges in Puṇḍravardhana.”¹²³ At other times, it is the green Tārā or Avalokiteśvara Lokanātha, “Protector of the World,” who is seated alone in the same “auspicious pose” in three-quarter view [Figures 5.107–109].

Other Buddhist Deities from Bihar

Bodhisattva Images

Only a few Bodhisattva images in stone or bronze, seated in *bhadrāsana* and preaching the law with their two hands, are known to me from Bihar. By far the most interesting sculpture is that in stone which is now kept at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, previously held in Berlin, but thought to originally come from the region of Nālandā or Ghosrawan/Tetrawan (Bautze-Picron 1998: cat. no. 49).

The Bodhisattva is easily recognizable as Avalokiteśvara by the tiny Buddha effigy in his headdress and his attribute of the lotus [Figure 5.110]. Claudine Bautze-Picron identifies the two female attendants as the green Tārā on his proper left and the four-armed Bhṛkuṭī on his right, as well as the wrathful Hayagrīva shown seated below the pedestal, facing a male devotee carrying a garland (*ibid.*). Such images of Avalokiteśvara seated in *bhadrāsana* are rare but not totally unusual, for we have already encountered a few examples in the western

¹²² Similar depictions with Buddhas represented in profile are seen in Tibetan *thangkas* (Allinger 2010b: figs 4–5) and on clay tablets from Myanmar [Fig. 5.98]. For a discussion about the nature of Burmese sculpture and its connections with palm-leaf manuscript illustrations from northeastern India, see Woodward 1981.

¹²³ The city of Puṇḍravardhana is a sacred site identified in North Bengal since at least the late Gupta period (Griffiths 2015).

Indian caves [Figs 4.126, 4.165a–b]. This depiction may well represent the Bodhisattva dwelling in majesty on top of Mount Potalaka, not only in the capacity of a Cakravartin, but also with special emphasis on his role as a great teacher.¹²⁴ An inscription in Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit, written in Gauḍī script of the tenth–eleventh century, runs in three lines on the pedestal. It is divided into two parts, viz. the famous Buddhist formula engraved in the middle and a donative inscription surrounding it. According to Gouriswar Bhattacharya, these read as follows:

(On the middle of the pedestal)

1. *ye dharmmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy a-*
2. *vada[t] teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśravaṇa[h]*

1. [siddham] *deyadharmmoyaḥ upā-*(left side) [sa]ka bhogarikasya
jad atra (right side)
2. *Pu[nna] tad bhavatu ācāryo-*(left side)
3. *pādhyāya mātāpitṛpū-*(middle)
4. --- *maṃ kṛtvā sakasatvarāse ||* (right side)

Translation:

This is the meritorious (gift) of the lay worshipper Bhogarika. Whatever merit is in this (gift) let that be ... by all sentient beings keeping in front of (his) teacher, preceptor (and) parents.¹²⁵

The combined use of *hy avadat* and particularly *mahāśravaṇaḥ* is interesting in the above *Ye dharmā* formula inscribed on this image, for it falls in the “Northwestern group” recently classified by Oskar von Hinüber (2015: 6ff). It also adds to the rare occurrences of a blending of the two formulas (i.e. *Ye dharmā* and *deyadharmā*) used to introduce a donation, equally engraved on another Avalokiteśvara image from Ladakh, dated to approximately the eleventh century (*ibid.*).

¹²⁴ For example, in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, Avalokiteśvara’s role is that of a teacher and not of the almighty savior, as in other *mahāyānasūtras*. Accordingly, he teaches the method of great compassion, the aim of which is to free all sentient beings from any kind of fear in order to lead them into supreme perfect Enlightenment. See Läänemets 2006.

¹²⁵ Cited in Bautze-Picron 1998a: 33–34, with minor stylistic changes.

A second stone sculpture of uncertain origin, which sees the appearance of a rocky landscape all around the Bodhisattva, is kept in storage at the Indian Museum, Kolkata [Figure 5.111].¹²⁶ This feature clearly refers to the mythical Mount Potalaka on which Avalokiteśvara is believed to abide (Mallmann 1948: 300–303).¹²⁷ Lastly, a miniature example of a Bhadrāsana Bodhisattva in bronze, assigned to approximately the tenth century, is in the possession of the Nālandā Museum [Figure 5.112]. Its attributes are not very legible and the identity is therefore uncertain, although Avalokiteśvara or Mañjuśrī are the most natural contenders.¹²⁸ Preaching forms of Mañjuśrī in *bhadrāsana* are also known in Orissa (see *infra*) and at the Salban Vihāra, Mainamati, in today’s Bangladesh (Alam 1975: pl. VIb; Asher 1980: pl. 249).

Images of Jambhala

I finish this review of Buddhist deities sometimes depicted in *bhadrāsana* with Jambhala who is often confused with Kubera, the god known as the “Regent of the North” (*uttaradikpāla*), “Protector of the world” (*lokapāla*), “Lord of wealth” (*dhanādhipati*), and “Giver of wealth” (*dhanada*).¹²⁹ He is sometimes also equated with Pañcika whose wife Hārītī is the symbol of abundance and is also known by the Buddhists as Vaiśravaṇa (Mallmann 1975: 195ff, 224–225; Astier 2014: 103ff, 633ff). The early iconography of Jambhala, Kubera, Pañcika, or Vaiśravaṇa is so similar that in certain cases, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between them. In such instances, and with no inscriptions, only the religious atmosphere and archeological context can aid in identification. For example, several sculptures of Jambhala found in Bihar at such Buddhist sites as Nālandā, Bodhgayā, and Kurkihār, show him

¹²⁶ Anderson confesses, “The history of this elaborate but somewhat rough sculpture is unknown, but it is in all likelihood from Buddha Gayā” (1883: 47). See also Bautze-Picron 1998a: n. 89. Could it actually be from Orissa? Compare with another similar image kept at the University Museum at Balasore (Donaldson 2001: 191, fig. 223; see also *infra*).

¹²⁷ For a late example of Avalokiteśvara in *bhadrāsana* from the Potala collection in Tibet, see Schroeder 2008: 112–113, pl. 32A.

¹²⁸ Saraswati (1977: XVII, fig. 6) identifies the Bodhisattva image as Maitreya because a *caitya* or *stūpa* may be observable on the matted crest. However, this view is far certain. At any rate, the *caitya* is definitely not a “sure mark” of Maitreya alone since other Bodhisattvas may also carry it on their headdresses (cf. **Chapter 4, nn. 201, 216**).

¹²⁹ In Epic mythology, Kubera also enjoys the title “King of kings” (*rājarāja*). His epithets are sometimes related to his subjects, viz. “King of Yakṣas (*yakṣarāja*), “Lord of Rākṣasas” (*rākṣasādhipati*), “Lord of Guhyakas” (*guhyakādhipa*), “King of Kinnaras” (*kinṇararāja*), “King of men” (*nararāja*), and so on. See Hopkins 1915: 142–149; also Astier 2014: 23ff.

portrayed alone as pot-bellied and seated in a squatting position [Figures 5.113–119].¹³⁰ In this context, the sculptures were more likely related to the Buddhist Jambhala rather than the Hindu Kubera. Over time, there evolved, especially in Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa, a specific esoteric cult of Jambhala centered on the construction of *maṇḍalas* in stone with nine deities (Mitra 1961; Leoshko 1996; Misra 1998: III, 86–87, F. 110, F. 113). The diagram is generally composed of eight miniature images of companion Yakṣas, as enjoined by certain tantric Buddhist texts (B. Bhattacharyya 1968: 237–238; Mallmann 1975: 459–460),¹³¹ surrounding or even flanking the central seated Jambhala. Another fine and hitherto unnoticed example can be observed in a unique stone pedestal from Bihar kept today in the Poddar collection in Kolkata [Figure 5.120].

2.3 Buddhist Sculptures from Bengal

Clay Tablets

An extensive monastic complex datable between the sixth and the twelfth centuries was discovered at the village of Moghalmari in the district of West Medinipur in West Bengal. It was initially excavated recently by the Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta (Datta 2008).

Numerous circular clay tablets were recovered and can be divided into three physical types of which only one is relevant for this study. In this one type, the upper part of the tablet is occupied by the representation of a central shrine flanked by four smaller structures, two on either side. Within the central shrine the figure of Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* performing the teaching gesture is depicted. In the smaller contiguous temples, standing figures of Bodhisattvas whose exact identity cannot be revealed are located. Just below, an inscription recording the *Ye dharmā* stanza is written in relief [Figures 5.121a–b].

¹³⁰ Five overturned jars on the pedestal, a characteristic of Jambhala, leave no doubt as to the identity of the headless sculpture from Kurkihār [Fig. 5.119]. For additional examples, several of which are inscribed on the back, photos and references, see *inter alia* Chandra & Dikshit 1936: 118, pl. LVa–b; Misra 1998: II, 138, F. 78; III, 83–86, F. 105–106, F. 109; Donaldson 2001: 331, fig. 391; Astier 2014: figs 5.VI.2, 31, 37, 62–63; Chattopadhyay *et al.* 2015: 220; also Museum of Oriental Art, Moscou, inv. no. 4255 II; AIIS # 6748, and Huntington Archive # 3663–64, 3815, 3991, 4011, 4016, 4017, 4018, 5262.

¹³¹ To be sure, there are instances where Jambhala and his Buddhist rituals were adopted and adapted into some Hindu *tantras*. On this appropriation, see Bühnemann 1999: 309ff.

According to Rajat Sanyal (Pers. Comm.), one of the excavating team's members, the inscribed letters show a stage of evolution between mature late Brāhmī and the fully developed form of early Siddhamāṭṛkā of *circa* the seventh century. Apart from paleographic characters, the stratigraphic location of the tablets within the structural complex, datable on archeological grounds to the sixth century, is also a fair marker of their early chronology. Sixth–seventh centuries is equally possible on stylistic grounds, although similar tablets found in peninsular Southeast Asia (Piriya 2012: 84–85, fig. 1.73) are generally dated later, to the eighth–ninth centuries. It is quite possible that molds of this kind were available and circulated far and wide for centuries. Given the present state of our knowledge, we cannot thus affirm that these sealings were unique or site specific.

A Stone Buddha Icon

A small headless image of the Buddha, seated in *bhadrāsana* showing the preaching gesture, was found lying in the village of Maheshpur in the district of South 24-Parganas, West Bengal, in 2005 (Mondal 2010). As of 2016, the image was still lying at the site *in situ* [Figure 5.122]. The *Ye dharmā* stanza is engraved on the small back slab in a semi-circular alignment starting from the level of the right elbow of the central figure. Only the initial and concluding portions of the inscription remain, as the medial portion of the slab, along with the head of the Buddha, has been broken off and is lost. According to Rajat Sanyal (Pers. Comm.), the extant fragments of the inscription read: [*siddham*] *ye dharmmā hetu prabhavā* on the left side, and *evamvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ* || on the right. The paleography represents the typical mature version of Siddhamāṭṛkā prevalent in northeastern India. The sculpture is quite close to other early Pāla images from Bihar produced around the eight–ninth centuries.

A Sri Lankan Bronze Imported from Bengal?

A rare bronze image of the preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana* has been spotted at the temple museum of Ambalantota on the southern coast of Sri Lanka [Figure 5.123]. It has been discussed briefly by Mudiyanse in his book *Mahāyāna Monuments in Ceylon* (1967: 30–31). This small bronze from Ambalantota can be ascribed to the eighth or ninth centuries and is stylistically reminiscent of those produced in northeastern India.

More precisely, Claudine Bautze-Picron (Pers. Comm.) considers the likely origin of this bronze to be from the region of Maināmatī in the Comilla district of today's Bangladesh which has yielded many ancient Buddhist settlements and numerous bronze sculptures dating to between the eighth and twelfth centuries CE. The specifics of this bronze, which may confirm its Bengalese origin, are particularly visible with the composition of the base with a round lotus stem supporting the seat, the large circular flamed halo behind the Buddha, and the umbrella above a strong node developed with several superimposed rows of ribbons. It should be remembered, moreover, that, with the notable exception of the stone triad recently discovered at the Abhayagiri compound [Fig. 4.26], likely an import from western India, no other single Bhadrāsana Buddha images have been found in Sri Lanka.

Stone Images with Life Events

A series of stone steles from the region of southern Bengal, today mainly Bangladesh, depict various and additional life events of the Buddha in an unusual fashion.¹³² On these occasions, the Buddha is always seated in profile in *bhadrāsana* while receiving the offering of honey from the monkey [Figures 5.124a–b]. We have seen that he is also seated in this manner on illuminated manuscripts and also on some clay sealings (see *supra*). This observation betrays the existence of close ties between these artistic idioms and iconographic traditions observed in Bihar, Bengal, and also in Pagan, Myanmar. These sculptures are usually attributed to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries on stylistic grounds (Bautze-Picron 1992c).

A Crowned Buddha

A fragmented image of a bejeweled Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, with both hands in the gesture of teaching, was collected from the village of Kankandighi in the lower Bengal Delta where cultivators unearthed it during ploughing [Figure 5.125]. The specimen is currently preserved at the Sundarban Pratna-Gabeshana Kendra (Sundarban Archaeological Research Centre), a private museum located in Kashinagar, also in the district of South 24-Parganas, West Bengal, and is the property of Mr Debi Sankar Middy's collection, which houses a large number of stone metal and ivory sculptures of the early medieval period, as well as

¹³² Images under consideration are from Betagi, the Buddhist Monastery in Dakha, the Rammala Library, in Comilla, and the Indian Museum in Kolkata (inv. no. A22349). The stone relief from the Rammala Library appeared on the art market recently (Christie's New York, sale on 20 March 2009, lot 1286).

other artefacts from different archeological sites distributed in this region (Rajat Sanyal, Pers. Comm.). Crowned Buddha images such as this one are rather common in Bihar and Bengal, but precise dating is difficult on stylistic grounds alone. It could however be roughly estimated to date anywhere between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

A Bronze Triad

A bronze discovered at Jhewari, in the vicinity of Chittagong, today's Bangladesh, is now held at the Indian Museum in Kolkata (inv. no. 8172). It depicts a triad of Buddhas in a single composition (Mitra 1982: 70–71, fig. 46). The central, larger figure is seated in meditation in the cross-legged position, while the two flanking Buddhas are both in the preaching attitude and pendant-legged pose. This composition, stylistically datable to around the tenth century, surely refers to the multiplication miracle at Śrāvastī. The Buddhas rest on three fully-blossomed lotuses supported by wavy stalks; behind them is a common back frame or *prabhāmaṇḍala* bordered by a series of flames and surmounted by an umbrella decorated with ribbons and garlands [Figure 5.126a].

On the back side of the frame is an inscribed disc with a miniature *stūpa* or *caitya* in its center. The worn inscription appears to be that of a *dhāraṇī* or the *Ye dharmā* formula, which occurs on the back of many sculptures from this period. Unfortunately there are no readable characters in the impression, just roughly impressed lines simulating an inscription [Figure 5.126b].

2.4 Buddhist Sculptures from Orissa

Two stone images (in khondalite?) of the preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana* sculpted in high-relief were discovered at the site of Udayagiri 2, one of the largest Buddhist complexes in Orissa (Odisha), active between approximately the seventh and the twelfth centuries. In both sculptures, the Buddha wears a diaphanous robe and a plain nimbus is carved behind his neck and shoulders. Flying celestials bearing garlands are seen on the top corners of the first image. In this more complete case, the Buddha sits on the pericarp of a large double lotus and the feet equally rest on a lotus pedestal below which a wheel flanked by a pair of recumbent deer appears [Figure 5.127]. A short inscription in early Nāgarī has been noticed on the back slab, but it is unfortunately illegible in the published photograph (Trivedi & Khamari 2009:

324). Stylistically, the image can be assigned to the post-Gupta or early Pāla periods, anywhere between the seventh and ninth centuries. The second, unfortunately more damaged, Buddha image is seated on a rectangular lion throne supported by lion-paws (Trivedi 2012: 156, 160–161, pl. 86). His feet rest on a projected plain pedestal [Figure 5.128]. It is also tentatively dated to the eighth or ninth centuries.

In addition to these rare images of Bhadrāsana Buddhas from Orissa, three stone images of a Bodhisattva have been reported from Ratnagiri and may date from the same period (Donaldson 2001: 166, fig. 174). The Bodhisattvas wear jewels, some earrings, bracelets, and a tiger-tooth necklace, and are seated on a lion throne. These images, including in one case a relief on a miniature monolithic *caitya*, are categorized as a peculiar teaching form of Mañjuśrī, known as Mañjuvara who is sometimes presented seated in *bhadrāsana* in medieval Indian art, i.e. after the eighth century (Bautze-Picron 1993: 149–151). A blue waterlily passes by his left arm and supports his attribute, the book [Figures 5.129–130]. Epigraphic references to Mañjuvara are extremely rare in India. However this form is mentioned in verse 11 of a twelfth-century inscription from Nālandā (N.G. Majumdar 1931–32: 101). Finally, a large stone image of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, also adorned, preaching, and enthroned with legs pendant, is kept at the University Museum at Balasore. Its exact provenance is unknown but it has been assigned to the eleventh century by Donaldson (2001: 191, fig. 223).

2.5 Buddhist Sculptures from the Himalayas

The corpus of Buddha images depicted in *bhadrāsana* for the Himalayan regions produced during the late first millennium and early second millennium is limited mainly to Kashmir and Nepal. I have no early examples for Tibet, except for imported images. Later images from the western Himalayas seem to be almost exclusively limited to Maitreya, the future Buddha.

First–Millennium Images from Kashmir (600–1000 CE)

As we have seen earlier (cf. *supra*; also Siudmak 2013: pls 56, 61, 70, 72, 75a, 77), several gods and goddesses originating from the region of “Kashmir”¹³³ are present, seated in the auspicious pose. Similarly, Bhadrāsana Buddhas — sometimes crowned and ornamented — were fairly popular and many images, mainly in bronze or rather brass, are known to me and are located today in various North American or European collections, public or private. Many fine Kashmiri Buddhist brasses have also been imported and preserved in major Tibet monasteries. They all perform the *dharmacakra* preaching gesture with the hands raised to chest level and are enthroned on a lion seat. A peculiar feature of most of these brasses is that two small lotuses, instead of only a single large one, support the Buddha’s feet. This is a characteristic that often occurs in East Asia as well [Figs 6.18, 6.25]. These Buddhas have been ascribed by different authors to as early as the seventh–eighth, and as late as the tenth–eleventh, centuries CE on the basis of style and paleography, at a time of particularly heavy trade and travel on the prosperous Silk Road.

A Unique Ivory Panel

A fine ivory panel deserves attention as it depicts episodes of the life of the Buddha carved in minute detail following the open-work (*ajour*) technique. The central scene shows the emaciated Buddha, surrounded by a hoard of celestial figures, meditating cross-legged and practicing austerities prior to his Enlightenment, a topic quite popular in Gandhāran art [Figure 5.131]. He is flanked by two other subsidiary Buddhas which, according to the principle of “continuous narrative,” represent the Master on later occasions following his Enlightenment. The one seated in three-quarter view on the right is presented in a more contentful condition with his legs down while he welcomes in his begging bowl the offering of milk-rice by Sujātā or Nandabalā, observed next to him, thus marking the break of his long fast as well as the start of the actual Enlightenment process. The scene below with a cow probably depicts the village girls who, along with Sujātā/Nandabalā, prepared fresh milk and other victuals for the Master. We have observed that this episode was also depicted in early

¹³³ “Kashmir” here denotes the large cultural area that includes today the Indian-administered territory of Jammu and Kashmir (subdivided into Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh divisions), the Pakistan-administered territories of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, and the Chinese-administered territories of Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract.

narrative art from Andhra Pradesh [Fig. 3.10]. This panel has been dated to the eighth century on style and it is possible that it was once enclosed in a wooden frame as a portable shrine (Czuma 1989: 69–72, figs 19–20; Pal 2003: 114, cat. no. 69).

Brass Images

Basically, we can classify brass images into two categories, those Buddha figures with and without crowns. The first Buddha image that belongs to the corpus of uncrowned figures is on display at LACMA. The Buddha is conventionally shown, unadorned, wearing monastic dress with its symmetrical folds, in the open mode, that is, with one shoulder exposed [Figure 5.132]. On the left side of the pedestal, a diminutive kneeling female figure probably represents the donor of the image (Pal 1975: cat. no. 33; Pal 1988a: cat. no. 13). The placement of such miniature figures as donors is a conspicuous regional feature of the so-called Gilgit group of bronzes or brasses (Twist 2008: 53–54, 116; Siudmak 2013: 306ff). Her dress is similar to that seen in other Kashmiri pieces such as Figure 5.133, so much so that they could belong to the same period, ascribed to around the seventh–eighth, or perhaps later, ninth centuries.¹³⁴ Another brass formerly kept in a private collection is of nearly the same type as Fig. 5.133 with the addition of a large flamed aureole and nimbus appearing on the back, but lacking donor figures [Figure 5.134]. Another brass image is now on a long-term loan from the Nyingjei Lam collection to the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City (Weldon & Singer 1991: pl. 4). In this image, the clothing covers both shoulders of the Buddha who is seated on a throne decorated with blossoms. Its back-rest is topped by an umbrella, a symbol of royalty [Figure 5.135]. It compares well with another image, said to be from western Tibet, and now at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (Rhie & Thurman 1991: cat. no. 10). This needs not surprise us since early Tibetan chronicles often refer to “Kha che” (Kashmir?) from where many *paṇḍitas*, master craftsmen, artisans, merchants, and ideas were imported. Many such documented objects, Kashmiri bronzes or brasses in particular, thus found their way into the belongings of the royal family of western Tibet, especially during the late tenth and eleventh centuries (e.g. Laurent 2013).¹³⁵

There are also several bejeweled and preaching Buddha images seated in *bhadrāsana* from Kashmir. The interpretation of their identities as “crowned Buddhas” is again difficult

¹³⁴ Fig. 5.132 was previously and conservatively dated to the eighth–ninth centuries (Pal 1975: cat. no. 33), but Fussman (1993: 49, pl. 33) prefers to date it to *circa* 650, while Twist also assigns it to the seventh century (2008: 117). On the problems pertaining to the chronology of the Paṭola-Śāhis, see below.

¹³⁵ In the same category, see HAR # 57106.

to understand and has been the subject of considerable speculations in recent years as nicely summarized by Claudine Bautze-Picron (2010a: 50ff) and perhaps first articulated by Pratapaditya Pal (1975: 24):

Scholars are divided in their opinion whether such enthroned and crowned [*sic*] figures represent the Buddha Śākyamuni or the future Buddha Maitreya.

In this vein, Rebecca Twist (2008: 181ff), following the line of thinking of her mentor John Huntington, identifies these Buddhas unanimously as Maitreya, the future Buddha manifested on earth, or even as a dual form of Maitreya-Vairocana, a concept I find tenuous and even tendentious, as already discussed on several occasions in **Chapter 4**. To be sure, Vairocana preaching the universal truth on top of Mount Meru, as with Maitreya governing the future realm of Ketumatī on earth, can be iconographically identical to Śākyamuni in the scene of the First Sermon at Sārnāth. That is to say, early representations of Maitreya or Vairocana may not have departed greatly from those of the historical Buddha. After all, any Buddha remains a Buddha, conveying the ideals of his special characteristics, no matter whether he is a figure of the past, present, or future, “historical,” or “transcendental.” However, while we know that an iconographical conflation based on emerging tantric literature and socio-cultural norms may have existed between the historical Buddha (Śākyamuni) and his transcendent form (Vairocana), there seem to be as yet no textual sources that speak of the conflation between Vairocana and the future Buddha Maitreya. In other words, unless attested by inscriptions,¹³⁶ these conflations are nearly impossible to detect. Naturally, the identity of such crowned Buddhas could have been understood in different terms by various people of different social, historical, and geographic origins. Yet, since the simplest explanation is usually the correct one, I would prefer to see Buddha Śākyamuni in these crowned figures, albeit manifested in all his glory and power and, more accurately, at the moment of his teaching delivered to the gods on Mount Meru or Sumeru. Bautze-Picron surmises that it is “precisely because of this teaching function [on Mount

¹³⁶ To my knowledge and to date, no epigraphs from South and Southeast Asia clearly identify a Buddha as Maitreya or Vairocana. In contrast, a few label inscriptions for Buddha Gautama/Śākyamuni, or other past Buddhas, do exist. For example, thanks to a dedicatory inscription dated possibly 723–724 or 823–824 (Hinüber 2007: 40–41, pls 4–5), a bronze from Gilgit depicting a Buddha holding his hands in the preaching gesture and seated cross-legged on a lion throne is nominally identified as “Lord Viśvabhū,” who came into being as Buddha 31 eons ago. It is now in a private collection.

Meru] that the Buddha is enthroned and crowned” (2010a: 65; also **Chapter 4**). Whatever the case may be, as Pal continues (*ibid.*: 24):

Unless the context is quite clear, there seems no way to resolve the issue. But regardless of the identity of the figure, that the image symbolizes the idea of spiritual kingship is evident from the crown which adorns some of the figures.

In the following, I present, first, the only inscribed and dated image of this category, which also happens to be the earliest attested image of this type. As this brass is the only crowned Buddha image in *bhadrāsana* hitherto known that carries a first-millennium date, it can furnish a fairly safe basis for further investigations into this iconographic development in the Northwest and beyond, such as in Tibet.

The Brass Inscribed Sculpture from the Pritzker Collection and Other Crowned Buddhas

The magnificent brass Buddha image with a dated inscription from the Pritzker collection in Chicago has only been recently noticed, studied, and published (Hinüber 2003 and 2004: 40–42, 156–158, fig. 7; Pal 2003: cat. no. 64 and 2008: fig. 44; Twist 2008: 59ff; Siudmak 2013: pl. 146). This majestic Buddha has a beaded necklace, ear ornaments, and a distinctive tiara with silk ribbons falling to the shoulders on which a solar symbol is placed inside a crescent moon [**Figure 5.138a**]. The Master, however, wears monastic garments to specify that he is a Buddha. The Buddha also wears a large flower garland draped through his arms that falls below his knees. He is flanked by two smaller Bodhisattvas standing on lotuses. They both wear long *dhotis*, jewelry, elaborate crowns, and large flower garlands falling almost to their ankles. These have been generally identified as Maitreya, on the left, and Avalokiteśvara, on the right, on the basis of their typical attributes. Is it possible, however, that they may refer to a completely different pair of Bodhisattvas, Bhaiṣajyasena and Sarvaśūra, the interlocutors of the Buddha in the *Samghāṭasūtra*, a popular Central Asian Mahāyāna text composed in Buddhist Sanskrit which has been found among the Gilgit manuscripts?¹³⁷

The central Buddha sits upon an elaborate cushion inlaid with copper and silver, recalling Sasanian metal pieces. The lion throne is supported by a large lotus pedestal and is

¹³⁷ One of the Bodhisattvas carries a small flask in his left hand; this suits very well the description of Bhaiṣajyasena as given in this text, i.e. *paśyāma haste karakam* (verse 154). See Hinüber 1983: 40ff.

shaped as a pyramid to represent a kind of “rocky landscape,” recessed in horizontal steps, which may or may not represent Mount Meru, thereby giving it more cosmic force. At the front of the base, two atlante-dwarves flank a wheel, with additional deer turning their head on each side. A donative inscription on the front base of the pedestal is inscribed in Sanskrit in so-called proto-Śāradā script which was used after the Brāhmī round script in Kashmir [Figure 5.138b]. It is of great historical importance since it includes a date and a direct reference to the Paṭola/Palola-Śāhi dynasty, providing the name of the donor king and other royal members. According to Oskar von Hinüber, it reads as follows, two lines each on the left and right, and three in the middle of the base:

1. (Left side) [*siddham*] *bhagadattānvayavyomaravir arcām*
(Middle) *muner imām cakāra (tya)patiś śrīmān*
āryānā(tyā)guṇodadhiḥ śrīmac chyāmaprabhādevyā
(Right side) *<sā>rdham mūrṇenduvavaktrayā samāyām ekanavatau*
2. (Left side) *paurṇamāsyatithau m(a) v(ā)* [i.e. *maṅgalavāre*] ☉||
(Middle) *saṁvatsare ekanavati 91 devaddharmo yaṁ rājādhiraj(ā)*
parameśvara paloladeva śahi śrī ā-
(Right side) *rya nanda[sic]vikramādityadevasya śrī samādevī*
3. (Middle) *namovuddhāya || kalyā[ṇa]mitra vikhyātarakṣitaḥ ||*

Translation:

[Symbol] The sun on the sky of the Bhagadatta family made this image of the Muni [i.e. Buddha Śākyamuni?], the king, the auspicious noble ocean of endless virtues, together with the auspicious queen of dark lustre, who has a face like the full moon, in the year ninety-one on the full moon day, a Tuesday.

In the year ninety-one (91). This is the pious gift of the “King of Kings,” the Supreme Lord, **Palola Śāhi, Śrī Ārya**

Nandivikramādityadeva, [and] Śrī Śamādevī [Queen]
Namov[=b]uddhāya. The spiritual friend [is] Vikhyātarakṣita.¹³⁸

The two dots followed by vertical strokes (◌:◌!) at the end of line two on the left side are easily distinguished and end the first part of the verse inscription, arranged as a metrical Sanskrit text which requires four times eight syllables. The verses compare, in metaphorical terms, the Sun to the King, and the Moon to the Queen. The second part of the donative inscription is written in prose and dates from year 91, referring not to the sovereign years during that time in this region of Kashmir, but to the current era, also known as the Laukika era or Saptarṣi era, according to which, as each century was completed, it was left out of calculation. To convert a year when using the Laukika era system to the Common Era, twenty-four or twenty-five years must be added to the date. The next difficulty is to assign the correct century, since this dating system is not absolute and can leave room for error of 100 years later or earlier. Often scholars try several sets of dates. Thus, year 91 can be reckoned as either 615–616, 715–716 or 815–816 CE. Hinüber (2003 and 2004) suggests that it may preferably correspond to 715–716 on the basis of paleography.¹³⁹ Moreover, from the details given about the full-moon, the date can possibly be narrowed down to Tuesday, April 23, 715, an auspicious day which falls in the lunar month of Vaiśākha. This festival is known as “Buddha Purnima” and celebrates the day when the Buddha was born, enlightened, and attained *mahāparinirvāṇa*.

From the inscription, it is clear that the sculpture was a pious gift by the king named Nandivikramādityanandi of the Paṭola-Śāhi dynasty.¹⁴⁰ It is likely, therefore, that the male devotee shown standing in royal garb depicted to the Buddha’s proper right is this king, the primary donor. The donor’s official dress, consisting of crown, jewels, breastplate with a cross piece, cloak, high boots, and sword hanging from his belt are Iranian in appearance. His royal attire and his Iranian ethno-cultural traits support the hypothesis that the Paṭola-Śāhi

¹³⁸ The Sanskrit transliteration, with minor stylistic modifications, is from Hinüber 2003: 37 and 2004: 40. The translation is drawn from Hinüber 2003: 39, and Pal 2003: 285.

¹³⁹ I am not totally convinced by this paleographic argument since the so-called proto-Śāradā script did not change much over a long period and was probably still used in the ninth century or even later. See for example the inscribed image of Avalokiteśvara from the Hemis monastery in Ladakh (Hinüber 2015b: 3, fig. 2).

¹⁴⁰ According to Jettmar (1993: 78f), the word “Paṭola” (sometimes also read as *palola*) appears to derive from the name of “a tribe or the territory of a tribe,” perhaps of Turkish or Iranian origins, using the Kuṣāṇa system of royal titles, such as “Śāhi,” who ruled the region a few centuries before. For a comprehensive monograph on the Paṭola-Śāhis of Gilgit, see Hinüber 2004. For a study of their patronage, particularly inscribed sculptures, see Twist 2008.

king is represented here. The latter equally wears a large flower garland and carried what might be an incense burner in his left hand.¹⁴¹ Behind the king, the smaller crowned female figure, kneeling and performing the *añjali* gesture, is most likely his consort, Śamādevī Namobuddhāya. It is a common characteristic that the patrons, in this case the pairing of a man and woman as the donor couple, include themselves within the composition of their artwork. On the proper left of the Buddha, the third donor, identified in the inscription as the “spiritual friend” or advisor (*kalyāṇamitra*), Vikhyātarakṣita, is represented as a bearded kneeling figure wearing a turban-like hat as well as a large flower garland.

According to Hinüber (2004: 98–99; also Fussman 1993: 39ff), King Nandivikramādityanandi briefly ruled the kingdom of Bolōr (Gilgit-Baltistan)¹⁴² around the turn of the eighth century (*ca* 710–715 CE), in which case his reign would have preceded the conquest of the area by the expanding Tibetan Empire some time between 722 and 745. However, despite what the latter authors say, a dating of a century later is not to be totally excluded. On the basis of contemporary Chinese sources, another Paṭola-Śāhi, King Navasurendrādityanandi, whose name is mentioned in the Hatun inscription and could no doubt be shortened to Surendrādityanandi, Surendrāditya, or even just Surendra, is related to “Sulintuoyi zhi si,” with “zhi si” corresponding to “~’s son” (i.e. *Surendrāditya’s son?), who was conferred the title of king of Bolōr by the Chinese emissary in 720 CE (Chavannes 1903: 149ff, and 1904: 44, n. 1; Prakash 1970: 21; Jettmar 1993: 86).¹⁴³ The latter king also sent a mission to the Tang court some time before 741 CE (Postel 1985: 254). It should be born in mind, moreover, that even Hinüber — on whom the relative chronology of the Paṭola-Śāhis in the seventh–early eighth centuries generally relies,¹⁴⁴ and to which dynasty the production of these various inscribed or uninscribed brass sculptures have been *de facto* assigned — initially confessed that his sequence of events was only tentative, not absolute, and that a later date in the ninth century for such inscribed images could not always be ruled

¹⁴¹ The incense burner is part of a larger set of ritual implements used for the purpose of venerating a Buddha image. Several early metal examples are known from the Northwest, on which see Hinüber 2010.

¹⁴² The geographical delimitation of the kingdom has been subject to much discussion (Denwood 2008: 13–15). The name can be spelled in several different ways (e.g., Palur, Palūr, Po-lü, Belur, Balur, or Balūr; Tib. *Bru zha*).

¹⁴³ I am grateful to Rolf Giebel for his assistance in transliterating the Chinese name in Pinyin (previously given as “Sou-lin-t’o-i-tche” in Chavannes 1903: 150). The Hatun inscription is ambiguously dated in the “year 47” of the Laukika era, generally assigned to the seventh century (671–672 CE). See for example Fussman 1993: 4–19. But a date in the eighth century (771–772 CE) is certainly tenable if Navasurendrādityanandi, alias “Sulintuoyi zhi si,” had a long reign of over fifty years (*ca* 720 to 771). See also the uncertainties expressed on the correct identities and dates of these Paṭola-Śāhis by Harimoto (2011: 99, esp. nn. 24–25).

¹⁴⁴ Another primary source for the Paṭola-Śāhi inscriptional evidence is found in the colophons of the so-called Gilgit manuscripts. However, no coins of this dynasty seem to have survived (Hinüber 1987: 221ff).

out.¹⁴⁵ He also acknowledged, should his assumptions be accepted, that we are faced with a “dilemma,” since the date of 715–716 CE in the present case is significantly earlier than the one originally assumed by art historians for the development of Buddhist art in Kashmir, such as for example with the appearance of crowned Buddhas (e.g. Pal 1975: cat. nos 35–36).

Certainly noteworthy, indeed, is the king’s choice of a crowned Buddha. As Twist aptly observes, “the large number of crowned Buddhas marks the significant role this type of figure played in the Paṭola Śāhis [*sic*]’ patronage” (2008: 55). In summary, the appearance of bejeweled Buddhas in the Gilgit region under the Paṭola-Śāhis probably establishes a worldview in which kingship and Buddhahood are intricately interconnected. Additionally, these kings possibly commissioned crowned Buddha images in order to legitimate their rule over Bolōr and even perhaps to dissolve the distinctions between themselves and Buddhas. In this new paradigm, as Ronald Davidson demonstrated, “the Buddha was depicted as a king with his crown, clothed in all the ornaments of royalty” (2002: 168), and he could now extend his benevolent and mighty power over his specific celestial dominion and earthly kingdom. In this process, it appears clear that Gilgit-Kashmir assumed the function of a laboratory for such new iconographical forms. The production of bejeweled Buddhas may well have been an aesthetic response catering to the needs of a regional élite and the specific demands of foreign nobility.

Since this brass sculpture from the Pritzker collection is only one among a few hitherto known and early dated images of the crowned type from Gilgit,¹⁴⁶ the resolution of its date proves crucial for the correct dating of the rest of the corpus, usually deemed later, of similar images of crowned Buddhas found in neighboring Tibet and further beyond in northeast India, especially in Bihar.¹⁴⁷ To this group of Gilgit brasses, probably produced in

¹⁴⁵ New art historical studies on the patronage of the Paṭola-Śāhis (e.g. Twist 2008; Siudmak 2013) seem to take nearly at face value this “relative chronology.” This proposes that all bronze/brass images from Gilgit-Kashmir (included those later imported and kept today in various Tibetan collections) should be likewise assigned to the seventh or the early eighth centuries. But Hinüber himself admits that at least another inscribed image from Gilgit, only recently published, may well have been produced later in the ninth century (2007: 40, pls 4–5). Only future research and lucky discoveries in this area may shed further light on the chronology. At any rate, we still have room for surprises.

¹⁴⁶ King Nandivikramādityanandi and his wife are named in another inscribed brass image of the crowned Buddha, seated cross-legged, now in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Postel 1985: 86, 252ff, fig. 103; Twist 2008: 56–59, 349, fig. A1; Siudmak 2013: pl. 144). Another important crowned image seated in the cross-legged pose, probably coming from the same royal workshop as the Pritzker Buddha, is that in the Rockefeller collection of the Asia Society in New York City (Pal 2003: cat. no. 63; Siudmak 2013: pl. 145).

¹⁴⁷ A similar problem of chronology occurs with a “Pāla style” Buddha image of the crowned type located in the Potala collection at Lhasa (Deeg 2010). Stylistically, it is thought to be dated from the tenth or the eleventh centuries, but an enigmatic Chinese inscription on the back mentions the name of the Korean pilgrim Huichao

the same local workshops around this time or slightly later, we can also include **Figures 5.136–137, 139–142** which closely correspond iconographically and stylistically.¹⁴⁸ Finally, a brass mandorla (*prabhāmaṇḍala*) kept in a private collection, depicting eleven miniature scenes of the life of the Buddha inside medaillons, was also designed to fit as a frame around a central Buddha image, now lost, but probably seated in *bhadrāsana* as is **Fig. 5.140** and originally belonging to the same stylistic group as above (Pal 2003: cat. no.71; Bautze-Picron 2010a: 65f, figs 61a–b).¹⁴⁹

Sculptures from Nepal: Late Licchavi and Transitional Period (700–1200 CE)

Several small unadorned Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* have also been found in Nepal and may have been produced as early as the late seventh or early eighth centuries CE, during the late Licchavi period, which saw an “efflorescence of Nepali sculpture,” as well as strong connections with earlier Indian Gupta traditions (Pal 1974: 6–7). However, because of the artistic conservatism of this isolated region, the so-called Gupta inheritance of these images can still be apparent many centuries later. Sometimes late Buddha figures may imitate earlier images with great fidelity. As Pratapaditya Pal reminds us, “The task of dating a sculpture [from Nepal] precisely is thus extremely difficult, and, yet, unless a work can be dated with reasonable certainty, it is impossible to appreciate its creative ambiance” (*ibid.*: 15). In other words, with no inscriptions at hand, or without any archeological context, the firm dating of these images, now out of context in public or private collections, is difficult to suggest and can only be tentative.

To illustrate this point, I review here a few images that are today located in western public collections known to me.¹⁵⁰ The first image, made of solid cast bronze and gilded, is currently in the possession of the British Museum and has been published several times (Pal 1974: 113f, fig. 185; Schroeder 1981: cat. no. 76A; Zwalf 1985: cat. no. 161; Blurton 1997: cat. no. 262). The Buddha is represented preaching and wearing a monastic robe with stylized

who travelled to Nālandā, in India, in the eighth century. Thus a new conundrum faces epigraphists and art historians.

¹⁴⁸ For a detailed study of these images, see Schroeder 2008: 48–49; Twist 2008: 81ff, 114ff, A.9, A.25 and A. 26; Siudmak 2013: 327ff, 361, pl. 149. Concerning **Figs 5.136–137**, Pal finds more parallels with Central Asian prototypes than with Kashmiri models, especially in the shape and design of the crown (1975: cat. nos 35–36; 2008: fig. 90).

¹⁴⁹ The scenes of the life of the Buddha represented here do not seem to follow entirely the lists of twelve acts or good deeds of the Buddha as recounted in several Mahāyāna texts and treatises, on which see Skorupski 2001a.

¹⁵⁰ For other examples from private collections, see Pal 2003: cat. no. 4; also the gilt copper image from the Asia Society, inv. no. 1983.001.

folds covering both shoulders [Figure 5.143]. This feature, added to the figure's serene expression and the depiction of its volume beneath the drapery, suggests earlier post-Gupta or pre-Pāla traditions of the seventh and early eighth centuries. However, it has been variously attributed to the ninth, tenth, or eleventh centuries, in the so-called Thākūrī period, that is, the transitional period between the reign of the Licchavis (300–800 CE) and the Mallas (1200–1750 CE). Another similar gilt copper image, with faint traces of painting, is also kept in London at the Victoria & Albert Museum and is likewise only approximately dated to the seventh–eighth centuries or later [Figure 5.144]. Again, the treatment of the transparent robe, this time without garment folds, as well as the bodily proportions, recall the classical style of Buddha images from the late Sārnāth school (Chapter 4). Unfortunately, crucial elements of throne decoration, which were casted separately, are lacking for both images and cannot be of any assistance to narrow down a date on a stylistic basis.

Another interesting image is now in the custody of the Cleveland Museum of Art since 1963, when it was donated by Mr and Mrs Ralph King. This copper image, however, formerly belonged to James H.W. Thompson (better known as Jim Thompson), a private collector in Bangkok, in the late 1950s before it reached the United States. Despite its clear South Asian origins, more precisely from the region of Bihar (Nālandā?) or Nepal during the post-Gupta or pre-Pāla period, the image was first published as “origin unknown” in an illustrated guidebook privately produced in Bangkok (Thompson & Niphon 1959). Yet it was not subsequently reproduced in the second and revised edition of the same volume (1962), by which time the Buddha image may have already left the Jim Thompson collection. Unfortunately how it found its way first to Bangkok and then from Bangkok into the collection of Ralph King, before finally entering the collection of the Cleveland Museum, is unknown. Scholars assign this image, with good reason, to the seventh–eighth centuries as reflected in the art of the late Licchavi period in Nepal (Kramrisch 1964: cat. nos 6, 128–129; Schroeder 1981: cat. no. 75B). The rectangular throne base and particularly the footstool, is decorated with peculiar lotus scrolls which are reminiscent of late Gupta style [Figure 5.145]. A protruding node from the image's back indicates that the Buddha was once probably surmounted by an umbrella.

Finally, I end this brief treatment of Nepalese sculptures with a rare gilt wood image from the Cleveland Museum with faint traces of polychromy. It has been assigned by the Museum curators to the late twelfth or the early thirteenth centuries, but the rationale behind this dating escape me. It could as well date from a much later period and only a closer scrutiny involving technical analyses will shed more light on its production. To be sure,

Nepalese artists were renowned not only for the high quality of their metal-workmanship, but also for their skill in woodcarving. As a consequence, these woodworkers were probably often invited to work in wealthy Tibetan monasteries and palaces and were thus possibly important transmitters of styles and iconographies (Heller 2004).¹⁵¹ The Buddha image sits here with his legs pendant on a tiered pedestal [Figure 5.146a]. However, the small *stūpa* or *caitya* located in the headdress of this image is iconographically most significant [Figure 5.146b]. This detail may indicate that this is the next historical Buddha Maitreya who will achieve Enlightenment and spread Buddhist teachings in a future time when the current historical Buddha's teachings have been forgotten. In later traditions, the identification of a seated and preaching Maitreya in Buddha form is only clear when he has a *stūpa* in his headdress or on a flanking lotus held in his left hand. Mid-to-late-second millennium images of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* wearing these attributes have often been recognized as the future Maitreya, as we shall see below with multiple examples from Ladakh and Tibet.

Late Buddha Images from the Western Himalayas (1300–1800 CE)

Hardly any dated images of the Bhadrāsana type come from Tibet and Ladakh. Several pre-modern monasteries and temples founded in the second millennium CE, such as Gyantse or Wutun on the Tibetan Plateau, or Basgo Gompa, Diskit and Thikse Gompa, Likir Gompa, and the Namgyal Tsemo Gompa, perched high in the hills of “Little Tibet,” between the western Himalaya and Karakoram mountain ranges in northern India, contain huge enthroned statues of Champa or the future Buddha Maitreya (Tib. Byams pa) in, or near, their own precincts [Figures 5.147–148].¹⁵² It is quite unlikely, however, that most of these colossal images belong to the period of their original foundation, and that they always were meant to represent Maitreya.¹⁵³ In fact, several huge statues are only of very recent manufacture, although they follow older iconographic conventions.

¹⁵¹ For a Nepalese wooden work datable to the Licchavi period (*ca* seventh century), depicting a Bhadrāsana Buddha, found at the entrance to the “Amitābha chapel” of the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, Tibet, see Schroeder 2001: I, 413, pl. 132C.

¹⁵² See *inter alia* WHAV # VZ11 1000,1559; also Getty images # 157455048, # 157455049, # 179661496, # 529789758, # 533783276, # 561917075, available online: <http://www.gettyimages.com/>.

¹⁵³ Several Buddhas are seated in *bhadrāsana* on the first storey of the Kumbum at Gyantse, viz. Amitābha (or Amitāyus) in the western temple, Dīpamkara on the northern side, and Maitreya in the eastern shrine. See Ricca & Lo Bue 1993: 231, 236, 241; also WHAV # VZ09 1000,11548. Furthermore, on the ground floor of the main inner chapel (Tsangkhang), still at Gyantse, two colossal preaching Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* are reckoned

The most ancient of all is perhaps the unadorned image, made of clay, housed in the western niche of the so-called Maitreya chapel at the Tabo Gomba, in the western Himalayan valley of Spiti on the Tibetan border, now in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh [Figure 5.149].¹⁵⁴ According to Christian Luczanits (Pers. Comm.), this may also be the earliest example in the region of this type of Buddha that can be safely attributed to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries. In contrast, Laxman Thakur (2001: 127) dates it to the second revival of Buddhist activity at Tabo in the fifteenth century or a little later. The date of the sculpture, however, can be assumed from paintings still extant on its throne-base, which on the basis of their style may date to around 1300 CE (Ham 2015: 288–291). The *bhadrā-*pose may well be perceived to be exclusive to Maitreya nowadays in Himalayan art and in modern scholarship,¹⁵⁵ but it is hard to prove for this ancient period since no textual or primary sources seem to associate this sitting posture specifically with the future Buddha. The formal identification given to this Bhadrāsana image at Tabo, as well as similar images found at other places in western Tibet, is rather made deductively through the name given to the “Maitreya chapel” (Byams pa lha khang) that contains it (Thakur 2001: 67, 126–127). Admittedly, as far as Tabo is concerned, the name of this chapel is only speculation and guesswork, mainly based on some Tibetan inscriptions written in pre-modern characters and preserved in the neighboring dKyil khan or “Maṇḍala hall.” But at least the Buddha image is still *in situ* and interpretation can perhaps draw on circumstantial argument. Conversely, many other bronze or brass miniature images of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana* of alleged Tibetan origins, crowned or uncrowned, do not have accompanying inscriptions, and lack any

as “Jowo” or Lord and their identification is given as Dīpaṃkara (uncrowned) and Maitreya (crowned), the Buddhas of the Past, and of the Future respectively. See WHAV # VZ09 1000,10989, # PM09 1001,13055, and # PM09 1000,11000; also Lo Bue & Ricca 1990: 67, 100–102. The term Jowo is indeed used for many types of images, including Buddha Śākyamuni and, more rarely, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. For the importance of the legend of the “Jowo Buddha” in Tibet, as the first proxy body of “Lord” Śākyamuni, see Warner 2008. For the appropriation of this legend in Chinese and Mongolian cultures, see Terentyev 2010, and Charleux 2011, 2013, and 2015. To the crucial question “Did the Jowo Śākyamuni originally wear a crown or not?” and research into the history of the Tibetan controversy surrounding Tsongkhapa’s decision in 1409 to put a crown on the Jowo, see Warner 2011. For other versions of this popular pan-Asian story, including references from Southeast Asia, see **Appendix B**.

¹⁵⁴ For other views, see also WHAV # HTXX 30,2–5. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Christian Luczanits and Swati Chemburkar who sent me several photos and references on Tabo.

¹⁵⁵ See for example E. Schlagintweit (1863: 210–211) who writes: “The European fashion of sitting should be given to Maitreya, for this mode is called after him Chanzhug, sitting like Champa (Maitreya).” Something similar is found in the nineteenth-century writing of Tibetan scholar Jamgön Kongtrül (2012: 216): “When both legs extend down from the [teaching] throne, with the toes pointing outwards, this is the auspicious seated posture [of Maitreya] (*bhadrāpada*, *bzang po’i stabs*).” See also Terentyev (2004: 47) who dubbed this pose *maitreyāsana*, i.e. “Maitreya’s posture.” However, these assertions are now clearly contradicted by the Gyantse images of Buddha Amitābha and Dīpaṃkara, both seated in *bhadrāsana* (see note 153 *supra*).

attributes or archeological context [Figure 5.150].¹⁵⁶ Understandably, they still defy proper identification.

We are perhaps more grounded with a molded plaque (*tsha tsha*), possibly fashioned somewhere between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, made of unburnt dried clay, on which yellow and red color pigments can still be noticed. This was found in Ladakh and recently published (Ham 2011: 14). The plaque is said to have been “unearthed” from a *stūpa* (Tib. *mchod rten*) before coming to Europe and entering the collection of the Ethnographic Museum (Völkerkundemuseum) in Herrnhut, Germany, in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵⁷ Such ancient *tsha tsha* with the preaching Buddha depicted in *bhadrāsana* are not frequently found in the Himalayas.¹⁵⁸ Here the Buddha peculiarly holds with his left hand the stem of a lotus flower blossoming at the shoulder, supporting an object characterized as a water flask (*kalaśa* or *kamaṇḍalu*), in which case a representation of Buddha Maitreya might have been originally intended [Figure 5.151].¹⁵⁹ Other brass or wood images of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, generally crowned and produced from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries onwards, display a similar attribute and have also been tentatively identified with Maitreya.¹⁶⁰ We know that Maitreya also serves as the source of several lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. In particular, the rise of the Gelugpa (“Yellow Hat school”) hegemony in the fifteenth century, the youngest Tibetan lineage with their strong devotion to Maitreya, would

¹⁵⁶ See amongst others, Pal 2003: cat. no. 92; Schroeder 2001: II, 1030–1031, 1036, pls 255D, 258A; Schroeder 2009: pl. 11C; HAR # 57249, # 57253, # 59536, # 65456, # 70671, # 71788, # 71798; also Sotheby’s New York, sale on 25 March 1999, lot 124, and Sotheby’s New York, sale on 23 March 2000, lot 81. These images are variously dated from the second millennium and many are kept in private collections. See also a peculiar miniature *caitya* in bronze of Tibetan origin with figure of a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* on one side (HAR # 71736; Huntington Archive # 6723).

¹⁵⁷ Ham (*ibid.*) writes that it was A.H. Francke (1870–1930) who collected the object. Francke was a Moravian missionary in Ladakh between 1896 and 1909 who later became a famed Tibetologist. He indeed mentioned a similar tablet reported from Ladakh preserved at the Pratap Singh Museum in Srinagar (Francke 1914: 115, no. 12). However, according to the internal records of the Völkerkundemuseum in Herrnhut, established in 1878, the *tsha tsha* apparently entered its collection in 1894, and was actually brought back by Julius Weber, another missionary of the Moravian Church, who was sent before Francke into the area of Lahaul, Spiti, and Ladakh. I am thankful to Mr Stephan Augustin of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden for checking the museum record for information on provenance and for sending a photograph of this object.

¹⁵⁸ Other identical *tsha tsha* have been found in the ancient kingdom of Guge, in western Tibet, see Namgyal-lama 2013: cat. nos 523–527. Although such tablets could be of recent date, the mold from which they were cast must be decidedly older. Similar recent re-moldings and burned *tsha tsha* with a Buddha in *bhadrāsana* are found at the Rubin Museum of Art. See HAR # 65516.

¹⁵⁹ Some tablets of the same type are inscribed with the *mantra* of Maitreya, i.e. *om mai tri maṃ svā hā*, but the inscription seems a later addition. See Namgyal-lama 2013: 404, 453, fig. 16, cat. no. 526.

¹⁶⁰ See for example, Schroeder 2001: II, 1062, pl. 271A; Schroeder 2009: pls 11E–F; HAR # 57270, # 77539; Huntington Archive # 50966; Patan Museum, inv. no. 458-1 and 458-2; WHAV # KS98 54,1; Sotheby’s New York, sale on 25 March 1999, lot 124; Christie’s Paris, sale on 11 December 2013, lot 314.

have probably fueled an increase of this imagery in later centuries.¹⁶¹ In this connection, the Gyantse style *thangka* at the Rubin Museum of Art, which can be assigned to the early fifteenth century, is interesting, for it precisely depicts Maitreya's paradise (Skt, Tuṣita; Tib. Ganden), with the Bodhisattva in *bhadrāsana* crowned and adorned and carrying the flask [Figure 5.152].¹⁶² Along both sides, lamas wearing monastic robes and performing various *mudrās*, some wearing yellow hats, are seated. On the back of the painting, there is a long and poetic dedication which expresses the profound feelings of the devotee towards the "Invincible Lord of the aspiring," presumably the Buddha-to-be Maitreya, and which has been translated as follows:

I bow to that **crowned Lord of Peace, who sits with legs extended on a taintless moon seat in the center of the brilliant lotus throne**, one faced and two-armed, dazzling like the rays of the sun! I bow to him who wears the silken robes of a youthful prince, who ever dances atop the erect pistil of the utpala lotus filled with medicine, gently soothing with rays of healing colors! I bow to him who bursts with beauty, whose body's golden energy expands like dawn to stir the chirping of the host of mountain birds, moving the leaves and petals of the foliage banner! I bow to that **Invincible Lord of the aspiring**, his right hand granting refuge, removing all obstructions, his left hand pouring forth blessings in the center of the lotus, unstintingly bestowing extensive good fruits! Virtue to all! (Rhie & Thurman 1999: 196).

In another case, a crowned image in brass displays a somewhat distinctive iconography with the presence of two meditating lamas seated atop the two lotuses, instead of more common attributes [Figure 5.153]. A dedicatory inscription on the pedestal, however, clearly identifies this icon with Champa/Byams pa, i.e. Maitreya, expressing the wish that a

¹⁶¹ According to some later developments, the Buddhist masters may rise, in the state of *samādhi*, to Tuṣita heaven to receive from Maitreya the teachings necessary to overcome their difficulties and doubts. This is a concept forecasting the "revelations," typical of tantric Buddhism, which gave rise to the attribution of many works (especially of the Yogācāra school) to a historically non-existent Maitreyanātha. On devotees who go to Tuṣita heaven to meet Maitreya, see Demiéville 1951: 376ff.

¹⁶² See Rhie & Thurman 1999: cat. no. 32; also HAR # 664. The paradise of Maitreya also inspired many painted scenes on the walls of the eastern temple on the first floor of the Kumbum at Gyantse (Ricca & Lo Bue 1993: 74, 105ff, pls 37, 93–97).

certain follower would meet him in his next life. A tentative transliteration and translation into Tibetan and English is as follows:

1. *rje zhal snga nas tshon 'grus rgya mtsho (rtson gyis?)* || (left side)
rje zhal snga nas tshon 'grus rgya mtsho---(right side)
2. *(rgyal?) ba byams pa'i zhabs drung [du?] 'zal par shog* (left side)
(rgyal?) ba byams pa'i zhabs drung [du?] 'zal par shog (right side)

Translation:

As, earlier, rtshon 'grus rgya mtsho worked in the presence of the revered one [Jina Maitreya?]. As, earlier, rtshon 'grus rgya mtsho worked in the presence of the revered one [Jina Maitreya?]....

Let him meet the presence of the revered (Jina) **Maitreya** [again]!

Let him meet the presence of the revered (Jina) **Maitreya** [again]!¹⁶³

In closing this brief discussion on Maitreya images in *bhadrāsana* from the Himalayas, I would like to add a word of caution by saying that this iconographic concept appears rather late and is not prevalent in the rest of South and Southeast Asia. It is also difficult to understand its origins and resolve completely the “Maitreya conundrum” in Himalayan art without consulting ancient Tibetan, Mongolian, Newari, as well as Chinese primary sources, something that is a desideratum for future research but which is beyond the scope of my expertise and research area. All too often, secondary sources confuse the issue. It is not fruitful, except as concise background historiography, to compare what modern art historians have said about this or that, when they do not use primary sources and react mainly to fragmentary information. For example, the study of mural paintings and Tibetan *thangkas*

¹⁶³ The reading of the inscription was kindly provided by Prof. Andrey Terentyev, with the assistance of Geshe Nawang Thugje. According to them, some words may or may not relate to the Drukpa Kagyu lineage of the “Red Hat school.” It is also possible that this was a special sculpture, made when the beneficiary named rtshon 'drus rgya mtsho passed away, hence the double wish by his followers, that he would meet Buddha/Jina Maitreya in his next life. Instead of the usual attributes of Maitreya, two images of a lama are placed on the lotus flowers, possibly as rtshon 'drus rgya mtsho's future incarnations in Maitreya's retinue. On paleographic grounds, Kunsang Namgyal-lama (Pers. Comm.) suspects that the persons (several hands?) responsible for the inscription were not Tibetans, or were not literate, and that it was engraved later. Many sculptures found in Tibet were actually made by Nepalese craftsmen (cf. “Tibetan Book of Proportions,” **Figs 1.12a–b**).

(rolled paintings on cloth) can often only be properly understood in their original contexts and monastic environments. Some *thangkas* depict a preaching Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* on his throne, but most surviving examples date to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries [Figure 5.154].¹⁶⁴ Yet again, out of context and with no label inscriptions at hand, I feel that no identification can be made in absolute terms. Whether the enthroned and crowned central figure represents Maitreya as a Bodhisattva waiting in the Tuṣita heaven for his final rebirth on earth, or more simply Śākyamuni, the Buddha-to-be of our age, is not easily determined, unless we have a clear knowledge and understanding of the *thangka*'s initial position and function.

3. Summary and Discussion: From Enthroned to Crowned Buddhas?

My contention throughout this dissertation has been that the enthroned Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* invoke solar symbolism and royal authority, affirming the primacy of *the* or *a* Buddha, whichever it might be (see also **Appendix A**). We have seen, in various examples of narrative art from Gandhāra and Andhra Pradesh how his posture is the one which best fits princes and kings alike because it marks their preeminence over their subjects.¹⁶⁵ We have also seen that this mode of sitting was already fairly common from the time of the Kuṣāṇas and that it became very popular during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period. It was not only allotted to kings, but also to Bodhisattvas and other divinities as well, perhaps echoing earlier northwestern traditions (**Chapters 2–4**).

The present chapter, which dealt with later imagery in Indian art, *circa* the eighth century onwards, comes to the anticipated conclusion that Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* preceded the fashion to represent actual crowned and bejeweled Buddha images. Did *Bhadrāsana* Buddhas then fill the gap after a so-called early “aniconic phase” with the “empty throne,” symbol *par excellence* of the Buddha's presence as a spiritual or earthly king? The

¹⁶⁴ For more examples, see also HAR # 59696, # 61249, # 75004, # 91036. Earlier paintings on banners exist from Dunhuang and Khara-Khoto in China and Inner Mongolia. See for example Sasaguchi 1973, and Samosyuk 2006: 124. The long scroll from Dali, southern China, also provides a relevant early example where both Bhaiṣajyaguru and Maitreya appears seated in *bhadrāsana*, and performing variants of the teaching gesture (Chapin & Soper 1970: 292, 297–299, pls 29, 32).

¹⁶⁵ Note that Lucien Fournereau, one of the first Europeans to have been to ancient Nakhon Pathom in Thailand and seen a fragmentary relief of the First Sermon of the Buddha, here headless, did not recognize the Buddha Śākyamuni as such and could not identify the scene properly; he simply labeled the scene as “a king seated on a throne [and] speaking to an audience” (1895: 121).

underlying idea remains that the Buddhas are made king in this world through the symbolism of the throne, especially the lion throne or the special throne of Indra — the Lord of gods on Mount Meru —, also known as the *bhadrāsana* in several sources (**Chapter 1**). In this respect, the Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* reigns from the world axis or Sumeru throne. This symbolism becomes particularly evident in some late fifth or sixth century CE reliefs from the western caves in Maharashtra (**Chapter 4**), and later in Bihar and Bengal art, as well as in the Himalayan regions. Moreover, it seems that the iconography of Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* declines precisely at the time when the tradition of bejeweled Buddhas starts to emerge in Indian art. Indeed, crowned and adorned Buddha images materialize relatively late in the first millennium during the Pāla-Sena period (eighth to twelfth centuries CE). But certain Pāla images, as well as outstanding models from Kashmir, seem to overlap these two traditions; here the Buddhas sit enthroned with legs pendant and at the same time are decorated with crowns. This tradition can still be found today, such as in the modern iconography of Buddha Maitreya in the Himalayas.

It is clear that a strong royal and even cosmic symbolism pervades this important iconography. The difficulties scholars seem to face in identifying individual Buddha images in *bhadrāsana*, for example, reinforce the notion that a real identity binds all the Buddhas together, be it Śākyamuni, Maitreya, or Vairocana. This common identity, I believe, is fundamentally that of royalty. Therefore, and for the sake of precision, it is best to discard the obsolete use of “European posture” when addressing this iconography in future writings. While the term *pralambapādāsana* may be conventionally used in purely descriptive matters, it should be kept in mind that this is a neo Sanskrit term found only in later art historical and secondary sources and has no intrinsic meaning. Ancient primary sources and Buddhist iconographic treatises refer only to the term *bhadrāsana* both as a throne and a posture; thus its use seems more justified and preferable (**Chapter 1**). In addition, the term *bhadra* also appears to reflect the component of auspiciousness — an essential element in royal ideology.

CHAPTER 6: EPILEGOMENA – “OUT OF INDIA”

This dissertation has shown that the iconographic type of Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* does not appear in the early Buddhist, especially narrative art of Gandhāra and Andhra Pradesh, before approximately the third–fourth century CE. However, some fine examples are found in the standard iconic presentations at Sārnāth in the mid-to-late fifth century CE. This posture for the Buddha also became a hallmark of the rock-cut caves of Ajañṭā, Auruṅgābād, Ellorā, and many other western Deccan sites in Maharashtra from the turn of the sixth century onwards. It was then also adopted at Nālandā and other Pāla sites of Bihar and Bengal, as well as in the Himalayan regions where it is still found today in Ladakh and Tibet (**Chapters 2–5**).

Additionally, Bhadrāsana Buddhas are frequently found nearly all over the remainder of Buddhist Asia, beyond South Asia, as of the second half of the first millennium CE. In Southeast Asia, these Buddha images are chiefly combined with two types of hand gestures, the teaching gesture with the right raised hand (i.e. *vitarka*), or a variant gesture of “Turning the Wheel of the Law” (i.e. *dharmacakra* or *dharmacakrapravartana*) holding both hands at chest level. The spread of such Buddha images with one or another teaching gesture is uneven in Buddhist Asia. While the combination of this sitting posture with the *vitarka* hand gesture is found in mainland and maritime Southeast Asia as well as in Central and East Asia, it is exceptional on the Indian subcontinent.¹ Conversely, the combination that includes the *dharmacakra* hand gesture occurs extensively in South Asia, particularly in northern and western India, as well as in maritime Southeast Asia, almost exclusively in Java. The combination is generally not found in mainland Southeast or East Asia.² This naturally implies direct or indirect interactions between mainland Southeast and East Asia, on the one hand, and South and maritime Southeast Asia on the other.

The aim of this concluding chapter is therefore twofold.³ The primary objective is to focus on Bhadrāsana Buddhas with the single raised hand in *vitarka* and to tentatively connect its origin to a certain important Buddha icon. While investigating the different areas

¹ Two bronze exceptions are known from Tamil Nadu, but these are late productions of the second millennium and cannot have served as models [**Figs 3.22–23**].

² With the exception of one panel from the Selagiri *stūpa* in Rakhine (Arakan), Myanmar (Gutman 1998: 106, fig. 3).

³ This chapter largely draws from my previous published or yet unpublished articles, especially Revire 2012b and forthcoming b.

outside South Asia in which this iconography is found, I explore the possibility of Central and East Asian models playing an important part in transmitting it to Southeast Asia during the influential Tang period (618–907 CE). By the seventh and eighth centuries, local Southeast Asian styles had not asserted themselves to any great extent, at least not enough to resist incoming foreign models. Therefore, one might search in Tang China and along the overland Silk Road for a possible Bhadrāsana Buddha “prototype” or, more accurately, a “missing link” to explain subsequent developments in Southeast Asian imagery.

The secondary objective is to trace the origins of this iconographic type combined with the preaching gesture in *dharmacakra* with both hands held at chest level in South Asia and to give an outline of its chronological development and regional spread in maritime Southeast Asia, especially Central Java. Particular attention is given to triads, where the central Buddha is flanked by two Bodhisattvas. An explanation of the triadic arrangements that can be observed *in situ* in most western Deccan caves has already been proposed in **Chapter 4**. Several iconographic parallels and stylistic similarities with Maharashtra cave sites lead me to suggest that this triadic arrangement, probably based on certain Buddhist texts, was later exported to Java from this specific region.

1. A Widespread Iconography in East and Southeast Asia

Possibly one of the earliest Southeast Asian images of the Buddha in *bhadrāsana*, generally dated to the sixth–seventh century, is the sculpture said to be from the village of Son Tho, Tra Vinh province, in southern Vietnam (Malleret 1963: IV, 178–179, pl. 34; Tingley 2009a: 148–149; Guy 2014a: cat. no. 108) **[Figure 6.1]**. This small stone Buddha image shows some affinities in both style and iconography to those found in Central Thailand (Dupont 1959: 279; Revire 2012a). Although the right hand is now broken, it would have been raised to display either the single “teaching” (*vitarka*) gesture or the “assurance” (*abhaya*) hand gesture. Contrarily, the left hand, in a lower position, rests on the thigh and seems to hold the final part of the robe. Pierre Dupont has remarked that this unusual hand gesture “does not conform to the Indian tradition” (1959: 279). But where else could this combination have existed to provide the inspiration for this piece?

Nancy Tingley notes that the Chinese monk Xuanzang, after returning to Chang’an (Xi’an) in 645 from his travels to India, produced a large number of terracotta tablets of different motifs, “one of which was a Buddha with legs pendant.” She then suggests that this particular posture, viz. *bhadrāsana*, may have been inspired by a “revered image” that

Xuanzang had seen in India, or may indicate “a particular time in the life of the Buddha” (2009a: 148). This tentative connection with China and Xuanzang is intriguing and I will return to it later. Unfortunately, in the Mekong Delta, very few other extant complete statues sculpted in the round, of secure provenance, exist with which to compare the Son Tho Buddha image.⁴

Comparably, the singular Pre-Angkorian Buddha image discovered by French archeologist Robert Dalet at Wat Tralaeng Kaeng, Longvek, Cambodia, in the early twentieth century should be noted [Figure 6.2]. It was also observed *in situ* by Madeleine Giteau in 1970, but in a dilapidated state [Figure 6.3]. After the Cambodian-Vietnamese War (1977–1991), western observers reported the statue lost or stolen. However, on a recent field trip to Longvek in July 2014, I rediscovered the Buddha image residing in a separate shrine located on the platform of Wat Tralaeng Kaeng. The statue is now in the guise of a powerful Neak Ta, i.e., a so-called land spirit or guardian deity of folk Khmer religion. The local population has given the statue in this incarnation the title Lok Ta Thommareacha, namely “the ancestor, King of Dharma” (i.e. Dhammarāja) [Figure 6.4]. This case is a rare, perhaps unique, illustration of how a Pre-Angkorian Buddhist statue has been appropriated, transformed, possibly displaced, and later enshrined as a Neak Ta in a Post-Angkorian site (Revire 2016).

Yet, pendant-legged Buddhas are more frequently found in several ancient sites from Central Thailand, i.e. Dvāravatī, and in differing materials such as bronze [Figure 6.5], terracotta, stucco, or stone in high- or low-relief (Revire 2008, 2011, 2012a; Baptiste & Zéphir 2009: 115, 212, 228, 230; Guy 2014a: cat. nos 23, 109–110; also Table 1). Probably the most outstanding examples in stone are the four or five colossal statues reported from Wat Phra Men in Nakhon Pathom (Revire 2010, 2014b; Baptiste & Zéphir 2009: 214, 221, figs 1 and 5). All of these Buddha images show the teaching gesture with the right hand raised [Figure 6.6], except for one now located at Wat Na Phra Men in Ayutthaya, where the two hands rest on the knees.⁵ In any case, both hand gestures are rather unusual or even

⁴ A fragment belonging to a similar seated Buddha from southern Laos, near the site of Wat Phu, has recently been published (Lorrillard 2008: 121, fig. 13). In addition, similar pieces have disappeared in the course of the twentieth century. Dupont, for instance, describes a pendant-legged Buddha image from Phnom Da in Cambodia, but reported missing (1955: 190–191). Peter Skilling speaks of a smaller size model (21 cm) with a *Ye dharmā* inscription on the back apparently found in the province of Quang Nam [Vietnam] in the early twentieth century, unfortunately never photographed and now untraceable (2003: 285, n. 33). In a recent North American exhibition, an unusual Bhadrāsana Buddha in stone appeared, but its exact place of origin is unknown (Tingley 2009b: 114, pl. 38). Additionally, another little stone image kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is alleged to come from Vietnam or Cambodia (inv. no. 1994.564).

⁵ These fine Buddha images were heavily restored by the Thai Fine Arts Department in the 1960s, or even perhaps earlier in the nineteenth century by local inhabitants. For the whereabouts of these restored images, see

totally missing in Indian art. As I will show below, however, these gestures are more common in East Asia, especially during the Tang period in China or during the Hakuho and Nara periods (645–794 CE) in Japan.⁶

As regards the Dvāravatī low-reliefs produced around the seventh–eighth century, the majority are narratives associated with the teaching of the Buddha to the worlds of men or gods. In this regard, the Wat Suthat stone slab is interesting. It is divided into two registers: the lower depicts the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī while the upper shows the Buddha seated on Indra’s throne preaching to his mother and deities after his ascent to Trāyastriṃśa heaven [Figure 6.7].⁷ With this marked division set in the stone, observers are left to guess as to what happens between the two episodes. I will return to this event later, but note for now that the two depictions of the preaching Buddha in the narrative are both seated in the same pendant-legged posture and with the right hand performing the same teaching gesture (*vitarka*).

In first-millennium Myanmar, only a handful of surviving metal images, somewhat reminiscent of Dvāravatī bronzes, depict the iconography of the Bhadrāsana Buddha with the right hand raised [Figure 6.8].⁸ However, perhaps the most interesting image to compare with Dvāravatī imagery is a small bronze sculpture said to have been found near Simikhon, north of Myingyan, by a farmer in the early 1990s, now located in a private collection in Germany (Mahlo 2012: pl. 10a). This bronze shows striking similarities with another image found in Nakhon Pathom (Dupont 1959: fig. 502) and now on display in the National Museum Bangkok [Figure 6.9].

Although the patina of both images is damaged, one can imagine their original appearances by comparing them to a third fine little sculpture in bronze also on display in Bangkok [Figure 6.10]. Dupont hesitated to assign a Mon origin to this last example because of the unusual head features of the Buddha (1959: 278). The almost transparent drapery is rendered differently from the “Dvāravatī-Mon type,” leaving the Buddha’s right shoulder

Dhanit Yupho (1967); none of the hands are original today. Based on other iconographic examples from the region, however, it is almost certain that the teaching gesture was intended with the right hand.

⁶ See *inter alia* Sirén (1925: pls 38b, 254, 272, 290–291, 393a, 397, 380–381, 461, 486, 490, 493, 499, 514, 529a), Shirai 2006: 57ff, and Wong (2008: 144, fig. 5.13 and pls 13, 16, 17). A few examples from the “Unified Silla” period (668–935 CE) are also known in the Korean Peninsula (e.g. Han 2009).

⁷ Although I use Sanskrit terminology, some details in this narrative of the Great Miracle, such as the appearance of the mango tree, are peculiar to the Pali Canon. According to the Theravāda tradition, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was preached in Tāvatiṃsa by the Buddha. The other Buddhist traditions evoke indistinctly the teaching of the Dharma (Skilling 2008a). Quaritch Wales (1969: 42) wrongly identified the scene of the upper register with the First Sermon.

⁸ See also Luce 1985: II, fig. 76b, and Moore 2007: 20–21, 164, 222.

bare and completely covering the left and right thighs, slanting toward the left hip instead of describing a curve between the legs. The extended legs are slightly apart with the knees a little wider than the feet. But especially striking is the highly stylized and adorned throne back with prancing lions and *makaras*. This compares well with the upper part of a bronze figurine kept in the Radya Pustaka Museum in Solo, Central Java (Indonesia), which itself may have been modeled after a South Indian “prototype” (Fontein 1980: 18–19, figs 17–18).

Incidentally, another bronze found long ago in Central Java resembles the above sculpture very closely, except for its back slab. Unfortunately, this latter piece was heavily damaged in a fire at the Dutch pavilion of the Paris colonial exhibition in 1931 and is now lost [Figure 6.11]. Following Dupont, it seems that most of this imagery of Bhadrāsana Buddhas, found in various places in ancient Myanmar and Thailand, is of neither Mon nor Pyu origin but clearly shows some Southeast Asian “regional” features. As we will see below, the same can be said about a certain type of molded clay tablet found in both regions and beyond.

In ancient Indonesia, the archeological material applicable to the second half of the first millennium is more abundant and diverse as regards the style and iconography of Bhadrāsana Buddhas. Roughly speaking, there are two major groups. The first group relates to those Buddhas making the teaching gesture with the right hand raised (*vitarka*). Some fairly well-known examples in bronze [Figure 6.12],⁹ and at least one stone image from Central Java of this type [Figure 6.13] have been found. The second group consists of Buddhas displaying the gesture of “Turning the Wheel of the Law” (*dharmacakra*) with both hands which I will study further below (see also Table 2).¹⁰

In terms of chronology, I am inclined to date the images belonging to the first group earlier than those of the second group. My argument is based on the divergent hand gestures displayed by the Bhadrāsana Buddhas as well as on the occurrence of certain throne motifs. These latter patterns can help narrow the date. Hiram Woodward convincingly suggested that similar works, such as the bronze Buddha image found in Palembang and now in the

⁹ See also Lunsingh Scheurleer & Klokke 1988: 64, 109, figs 12, 57; Fontein *et al.* 1990: cat. nos 38, 39); and Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna (inv. no. VO 68791). Other pieces hidden in private collections or circulating in the art market also exist. See for example Nies 2008: 16–17 (bronze stolen from the Radya Pustaka Museum in Solo, inv. no. 511; see Markel 1991: fig. 10). Another lost bronze was previously located at the Gemeente Museum in Palembang, inv. no. A37, and photographed in the 1980s by Pierre-Yves Manguin (Pers. Comm.). The Musi river in Palembang recently yielded another similar bronze (Agustijanto Indrajaya, Pers. Comm.).

¹⁰ One large stone fragmentary Buddha, headless and armless — but seemingly in a similar preaching gesture where the two hands are reunited at chest level — was found in Summersari, in the region of Yogyakarta in Central Java. Unfortunately, its archeological context is unknown (Véronique Degroot, Pers. Comm.).

Tropenmuseum collection in Amsterdam [Fig. 6.12], dates toward the end of the seventh or the first half of the eighth century. Woodward also raised intriguing questions about the impacts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims such as Yijing and others travelling the southern seas in the seventh century on the formative period of Buddhist iconography in Southeast Asia (1988: 82, fig. 12). As discussed later in this chapter, my own comparative analysis with Chinese material tends to support his view and dating.¹¹

Perhaps reflecting the complexity of interchanges in Southeast Asia during the seventh–eighth centuries, a unique type of molded clay tablet, fired or unfired, displaying a Bhadrāsana Buddha with the right hand raised is found in equal numbers in central and peninsular Thailand,¹² Myanmar,¹³ western Java,¹⁴ and Campā¹⁵ [Figures 6.14–16]. These tablets seem to belong to a Southeast Asian “regional type” (Skilling 2009b: 111–112). Hence, it is not possible to affirm that they relate to a more specific “Mon,” “Pyu,” “Malay,” “Javanese,” or “Cham” type. Again it is important to observe that some small terracotta plaques from Tang China and Japan, *circa* the late seventh century, show a similar iconography for the central enthroned Buddha.¹⁶ The wide distribution of these molded tablets may provide clear evidence of an artistic continuum and various contacts between neighboring regions of Southeast Asia by way of land or sea routes.

2. The Tang Ascendancy and Maritime Interactions with Southeast Asia

The archeological evidence presented above from Southeast Asia and its apparent connection with some East Asian material raise fascinating questions as to how this iconographic idiom — Bhadrāsana Buddhas with right hand in the teaching gesture — may have spread to

¹¹ While there are no securely dated images from Southeast Asia in the first millennium, many images are firmly dated by inscriptions in China and can surely offer alternative guidelines for dating similar Buddhist imagery in Southeast Asia.

¹² See *inter alia* Nitipun 1981, and Pattaratorn 1997: 22–23, fig. 7. Other similar clay tablets, albeit slightly larger (*ca* 12 cm high), have been found very recently at Khao Nui in Trang province, and bear on the back an abbreviated inscription of the Four Truths in Sanskrit (Revire 2015a: 301–303, figs 26.4–26.6).

¹³ An identical tablet was found in the Kawgun cave, near Moulmein, and others in Śrīkṣetra, that is in both Mon and Pyu territories. See Luce 1965: 17; also Mya 1961: II, pls 53–54. More recently, a chance find was made in Winka, in Mon country near Thaton (Moore 2007: 198–199), and recent excavations from Thaton yielded several similar terracotta tablets (Khin Ma Ma 2016).

¹⁴ See Manguin & Indrajaya 2006: 249–250, fig. 23.6; also Manguin 2010: 174, fig. 4.

¹⁵ See Baptiste & Zéphir 2005: 69, fig. 4.

¹⁶ In this light, see Woodward 1988: fig. 9; also the work on *senbutsu* by Shirai (2006: 111; 2011: figs 2–3, 5, 7–8, 10).

Southeast Asia and why it was so popular, particularly in Dvāravatī and Java around the seventh and eighth centuries. Bearing in mind the international context of Buddhism in Asia and the impact and prestige of the Tang dynasty in China during this period, I tend to think that it was part of a “cosmopolitan Buddhist art style,” in the wake of the traffic and trade of the Silk Roads — both mainland and maritime. Dorothy Wong wrote:

Throughout the seventh century, Tang China rapidly developed into a powerful international empire, reaching its zenith by the first half of the eighth century. The defeat of the Western Turks during Emperor Taizong’s 太宗 reign (626–649) secured Chinese dominance over the land routes to the West, which promoted commercial and cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. Most notable was the sixteen-year journey to India undertaken by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), the celebrated Chinese pilgrim and translator whose relatively smooth journey back to China in 645 signaled a new phase of internationalism in Tang history. [...] The images, copies and sketches of images and monuments brought back by Xuanzang and Wang Xuance,^[17] among others, provided new visual sources and stimuli, creating what some scholars call an “Indian boom” in the Tang capitals. The impact of these new influences is apparent in the international and Indianizing character of the plastic arts in Chang’an and Luoyang. [...] In addition, the presence of foreign artists in the capitals contributed to this international trend. Artists of Indian or Central Asian descent had long been present in China, and they continued to enliven the Tang court (2008: 132–133).

Is it conceivable that a few “Kunlun”¹⁸ were also residents in the Tang capitals? No official records of “artists” from Southeast Asia who made the journey to China exist. In the early years of the Tang dynasty, however, as many as twenty Southeast Asian polities sent

¹⁷ Wang Xuance is presented as a Chinese diplomat sent to India three or four times, opening a new route between China and India by way of Tibet and Nepal. Inscriptions related to Wang Xuance were found in Tibet and in a Longmen cave-chapel site, near Luoyang, where he also dedicated images (McNair 2007: 94–99; Wong 2008: 132).

¹⁸ In this period, “Kunlun” (昆侖) was a generic Chinese term for Southeast Asians, often portrayed as “frizzy” or “woolly-haired” natives with black skin. See for example Chavannes 1894: 63–64, n. 7, Takakusu 1896: 11–12, or Pelliot 1904: 231, nn. 3–4.

tribute missions to China. Ralph Smith suggests that “the interests and renown of Tang China reached far into the hinterland of mainland South East Asia” (1979: 445). Among the various “countries” mentioned by the Tang annals in the first half of the seventh century, Dvāravatī sent three “embassies” in 638, 640 and 649 before falling into historical oblivion (Yamamoto 1979: 1147; Woodward 2003: 51ff). These official envoys were most likely followed by traveling merchants or traders of various sorts and perhaps craftsmen and monks. Basing their assumptions on the *Nihongi*, viz. “Japanese Chronicles,” compiled in the early eighth century, some Japanese scholars even speculate that a few “Dvāravatī people” or “Kunlun” went so far as to visit ancient Japan in the mid-seventh century.¹⁹ From approximately 650 to 750, tributes were continuously sent to China from Southeast Asia (e.g. Zhenla, Wendan, and Śrīvijaya) and from South Asia (R.B. Smith 1979: 444–445); this was the peak of the Tang dynasty.

This period also shows a flourishing and renewed interest of Chinese monks in Indian Buddhism. Consequently, the importance of Southeast Asia as a destination or as a stopover along the maritime trade route was significantly enhanced. After the celebrated return of Xuanzang to China in 645, other monks and pilgrims imitated him and undertook the journey to India. The overland Silk Road taken by Xuanzang and often favored by his predecessors centuries before him such as Faxian (Deeg 2005; Lévy 1995: 83–119)²⁰ or Song Yun (Lévy, *ibid.*: 121–136), however, was now closed because the Tibet’s rise in power and the political turmoil in Central Asia caused by the emerging threat of the Arabs in Bactrian (Grousset 1929: 200–201; Sen 2003: 25–26). The maritime Silk Road, therefore, became important for the circulation of religious ideas, objects, and men between India and China as of the second half of the seventh century.²¹

The most famous Chinese monk who embarked upon a journey to India using the southern sea route was Yijing (635–713). He boarded a merchant ship departing from Guangzhou in 671 and subsequently resided several years in insular Southeast Asia, possibly

¹⁹ This claim is based on the tentative identification of the people from “Tukhāra” (Tokara) as “Dvāravatī.” See Yamamoto 1979: 1147–48; also Itō 1996. Tukhāra, however, is more likely associated with a Central Asian polity of the Tokharians or Sogdian people (La Vaissière 2005). For a study about the possible role of Sogdian traders between India and China via the maritime route, see Grenet 1996, and Bourdonneau 2005: 297ff. Portraits of such Sogdian merchants is apparent in some terracotta reliefs from Khu Bua, in stucco remains from U Thong, Central Thailand (Baptiste & Zéphir 2009: 184, fig. 79; 204–205, figs 99–100), as well as in brick monuments from Sambor Prei Kuk, Cambodia.

²⁰ Faxian arrived overland in India in 399 and returned to China in 413–414 by the sea route.

²¹ To be sure, the maritime route as it was recorded in the late eighth century during the later Tang period has been translated by Pelliot, who annotated the text. He gives a detailed itinerary of the sea journey (1904: 215–363, 372–373).

in Palembang, South Sumatra (Li Rongxi 2000). According to Yijing’s biographies of the “Eminent Monks who sought the Law in the Western Regions during the Great Tang Dynasty,” thirty-seven other pilgrim-monks, who preceded or accompanied him, travelled by sea on merchant ships and passed through the region or even spent some time there between monsoons.²² Additional material and textual records indicate that a few Chinese monks ventured “off the beaten track” and went into the Southeast Asian hinterland. Yijing refers to the monk Da Cheng Deng (i.e. “Mahāyāna Pradīpa”) who, in his childhood, travelled to Dvāravatī by sea with his parents before, later going on to India, never to be seen again (Chavannes 1894: 68–73). The name of another isolated Chinese monk, wandering even further north in the mainland, is found on the reverse of two terracotta tablets said to be from Si Thep, today’s Thailand (Prapod 2010: 48, n. 29).²³ The four-character Chinese inscription, *biqu wen xiang* 比丘文相, can be rendered as “monk [whose name is] Wenxiang” (Brown 1996: 36–37, figs 52a–b). Woodward dates these tablets on stylistic grounds to the eighth century; the inscriptions are contemporaneous (2010a: 156–157, fig. 76).

Going in the opposite direction, a number of Indian monks and Buddhist masters are also known to have travelled to China by sea. Śubhākarasimha (637–735), Vajrabodhi (671–741), and Amoghavajra (704–774) must be counted among the most influential “western” monks responsible for the spread of esoteric texts in Tang China (Orzech *et al.* 2011: 339ff, 345ff); they all travelled via the southern seas to Guangzhou. Preceding them, the monk Puṇyodaya (whose exact dates are uncertain) travelled extensively in Zhenla and China in the second half of the seventh century (Li-Kouang 1935). There is also the famous case of the South Indian priest Bodhisena, who officiated at the “opening the eyes” ceremony of the Great Tōdai-ji Buddha at Nara in 752, having arrived in Japan in 736 in the company of a Cham monk whom he met during his sea travel (Holcombe 1999: 288).²⁴

²² These regions are mainly in, or in the vicinity of, “Shilifoshi,” that is, Śrīvijaya, and “Heling” (also known as Ho-ling); see Chavannes 1894: 36, 42, 53, 60, 62, 64, 77, 100, 126, 136, 144, 158–159, 189–190. The exact nature and location of these polities has been a topic of much scholarly debate; see for example Damais 1964, Meulen 1977 or, for a more recent approach, Jordaan & Colless 2009. Yijing’s accounts allude also to the existence of a circum-peninsular route in which travelers would lay-over in the city-states of “Langyaxiu” or Langkasuka (present day Yarang) and “Jiecha” (probably Kedah). However, Michel Jacq-Hergoualc’h stated that none of these monks “seemed to have given any thought to crossing the Malay Peninsula” (2002: 53–54).

²³ It occurs to me that this monk could, only perhaps, have travelled on one of the many secondary interior lines of communication, departing from the Vietnamese coast, crossing through Campā and eventually reaching “Wendan” or “Land Zhenla” (Pelliot 1904: 211–215, 372). Some scholars have attempted to locate Wendan somewhere in Northeast Thailand (e.g. Woodward 2010b).

²⁴ Similarly, the adventurous journey of the monk Ganjin or Jianzhen (688–763) from China to Japan and his arrival there in 754, after five unsuccessful attempts to cross the sea, is seen as an important milestone in the history of the transmission of Buddhism to Japan. On his fifth attempt, among the disciples that went along with

Given the possibility of extensive interaction of Buddhist monks between India and East Asia by sea, with the concurrent extensive break-journeys in Southeast Asia in the seventh–eighth centuries, it seems reasonable to assume that these pilgrims would carry along with them some miniature icons or ritual utensils,²⁵ cloth paintings, sketchbooks, printed texts, and so on.²⁶ Unfortunately, the latter have not yet been discovered in Southeast Asia; they could hardly have resisted the ravages of time. Molded clay tablets, small bronzes, wooden artifacts, embroideries or paintings on silk,²⁷ or palm leaves, could have easily travelled and have been regarded as fine media for spreading new iconographic idioms.²⁸ Yet with no surviving Southeast Asian paintings or embroideries from the first millennium, the mode of this iconographic transfer can only be the subject of hypotheses.

Nevertheless, at least one attempt has been made to interpret some Dvāravatī reliefs in the light of the archeological evidence found in East Asia. The well-known *dharmacakra* carved socle in stone from Nakhon Pathom, for instance, shows in low-relief a Buddha seated in *bhadrāsana* with his right hand raised in *vitarka* and his left hand in his lap, preaching to an assembly of disciples in the foreground [Figure 6.17]. Woodward wonders whether this relief could have been “inspired by a Chinese painting or that a Chinese pilgrim passed through Southeast Asia with an irrecoverable Indian model.” He thus sees “some Chinese role in its genesis in the years around 700” as he attempts to associate this particular relief with various other reliefs from the Baoqingsi temple in Chang’an [Figure 6.18], with Chinese and Japanese plaques, or with the well-known Japanese National Treasure embroidered textile depicting a similar Bhadrāsana Buddha (2003: 73–74).²⁹ In this silk

Ganjin and other Japanese was a certain Junfali from the “country of Kunlun,” most likely Southeast Asia. See Bingenheimer 2004: 161, n. 50.

²⁵ A bronze finial of a *khakkhara* or “monk’s rattling staff” has been found in Nakhon Pathom; many other similar items from the first millennium are preserved from Java (Revire 2009, 2015b). Could this be partial evidence for the circulation of pilgrim-monks in the region?

²⁶ Woodblock printing as well as the practice of stamping images onto paper or silk was already known in China during the seventh century. Yijing also makes reference to “paper” in India and gives testimony of such a form of printing (T. Barrett 2005: 2–3, 6).

²⁷ Possible motifs of a Chinese silk fabric are depicted on the walls of Candi Sewu, Candi Plaosan, and Prambanan in Central Java (Woodward 1977).

²⁸ Angela Howard posits the importance of the maritime route for introducing Indian aesthetics and Buddhist models into coastal China as early as the fifth and sixth centuries, emphasizing the role of Oc Eo as the early hub of the Southeast Asian maritime trade at the time. She mentions the sending of a Funanese envoy bearing the gift of an “auspicious Indian sandalwood image” (2008: 76–77) in 519 to the Liang court. Concerning the portability and mobility of these objects, see Skilling (2006: 234).

²⁹ This embroidered Buddha is from Kajū-ji, Kyoto and is now in the Nara National Museum. It is thought to date to the late seventh or early eighth century and was possibly brought to Japan from Tang China. The style is also quite close to the Hōryū-ji murals (Wong 2008: 144, 153, fig. 5.13). Generally speaking, dated images in a

embroidery, the Buddha is similarly shown preaching with his right hand and seated on a throne apparently supported by two lions. On each side, two larger haloed deities seem to be holding slightly different flowers. They may well form a triad, with an additional six smaller haloed deities on each side [Figure 6.19]. Above them, celestial beings fly on swirling billows, which may echo the pattern of clouds over the disciples on the Nakhon Pathom relief.³⁰ The traditional interpretation of the embroidered scene is given as “Buddha Śākyamuni preaching” or “Shaka Nyorai.”³¹ Conversely, the Nakhon Pathom relief is widely accepted as a representation of the First Sermon of the Buddha (Brown 1996: 31–32; Woodward 2003: 71–72; Baptiste & Zéphir 2009: 139, 219, fig. 3).

While the iconographic resemblance of these depictions from Nakhon Pathom and Nara is noteworthy, some doubts can naturally be cast upon the facile scenario of Buddha images directly transiting from Tang China or Nara Japan to Dvāravatī or neighboring areas.³² It may be more accurate to imagine that common or similar Buddhist texts, legends, or treatises simultaneously inspired a related imagery widespread in these regions. A good claimant among the various Buddhist legends, and widely popular in Central and East Asia during the first millennium, is the story of the King Udayana Buddha image.

3. An Ideal Model? The “King Udayana” Images of Longmen

An unusual group of Buddha images distributed in several small caves and niches around Longmen, Henan province, China, shows striking similarities with Southeast Asian material. Inscriptions in Chinese term these statues the “King Udayana image” (Ch. *Youtianwang xiang*, 優填王像). The earliest dated figure is inscribed thus:

Monk ... [two illegible characters], for his late parents, reverently had made one **King Udayana image**. May the Dharma realm all share in

similar posture from China support this date and allow us, by comparison, to also date material from Southeast Asia.

³⁰ Hiram Woodward (Pers. Comm.) feels that the “cloud divider” in the First Sermon socle, meant as a design that divides, would not necessarily be recognizable as a “cloud” by the Dvāravatī sculptor, assuming that he was basing his design on a Chinese painting. He would thus make the clouds more abstract.

³¹ Some identifications include or “Śākyamuni preaching” on Vulture Peak as in the *Lotus Sūtra* or even perhaps in Trāyastriṃśa (Inamoto 1997: 409–411).

³² Clear evidence of Chinese miniature figurines in bronze, however, has been found in the Mekong Delta, southern Vietnam (Malleret 1960: II, figs 433–434), and most recently in Kampong Cham province, Cambodia (Cort & Jett 2010: figs 16–17, 38–39).

this blessed deed. Fifteenth day of the tenth month of the sixth year of the Yonghui era [November 18, 655].³³

In the latest account, Amy McNair reports that there are about 100 such “Udayana” images at Longmen, each about one meter high, all firmly dating between 655–680 CE (2007: 99–102).³⁴ Not convincingly Chinese, the Longmen figures show a strong Indian feeling, so much so that finding a prototype in an Indian region seems plausible.

All the Buddha images of this Longmen group are seated in *bhadrāsana*, with the right hand raised, while the left hand rests on the thigh [Figures 6.20–22]. Each image is clothed in a clinging robe showing no drapery folds and leaving the right shoulder bare — reminiscent of the Sārnāth type of the Gupta period, except for the hand gestures (Chapter 4).³⁵ The head style, however, with the long, full face and the very low *uṣṇīṣa*, is more distinctly related to a South Indian type. Presumably, this peculiar iconography would thus ultimately mirror a mix of northern and southern Indian traditions from the sixth–seventh centuries. As yet though, the most plausible Indian regional source for the style of the Longmen group has not yet been determined. Be that as it may, the identical nature of these figures suggests that they were copies of a specific statue.

These images are also fascinating because they are termed “King Udayana,” thus referring to the legend of the “First” sandalwood image of the living Buddha, executed by the order of a pious king,³⁶ a copy of which was said to be brought later to China (Appendix B). Persistent ancient tradition relates that the Udayana Buddha image eventually reached China. Xuanzang himself reports that he brought seven images back with him, all copies of famous icons in India, upon his return to Chang’an in 645. The third of these images was said to be a copy of the sandalwood image and executed at the order of King Udayana (Wong 2008: 132, n. 3). The cult of the Udayana statue must have been popular by then in the Luoyang region

³³ See McNair 2007: 175 (inscr. no. 5J). For other epigraphic examples, see Mizuno & Nagahiro 1941: 248–249, 252 (inscr. nos 9, 58), and McNair 2007: 102ff (inscr. no. 5K). For a rubbing, see Fig. 6.21.

³⁴ A visual count *in situ* (April 2011) reveals that the number does not actually exceed fifty. In addition, most of the images are removed from their original niches or are severely mutilated. At least one similar image with a dated inscription of *circa* 660 is also reported from the nearby Gongxian caves, Henan province, China (Kyeongmi Joo, Pers. Comm.).

³⁵ Most “Udayana” statues from Longmen have their arms and hands broken. In Cave 440, however, the statue clearly performs the *vitarka* gesture with the right hand while the left hand holds the hem of the upper garment and rests on the left leg (Inamoto 1997: 360, fig. 4; Hamada 2006: pl. 4) [Fig. 6.22]. In spite of this significant detail, we should be cautious of later restorations.

³⁶ Diverse competing traditions and texts recount that King Udayana was either converted to Buddhism, Jainism, or Hinduism (Adaval 1970).

and patrons at Longmen were certainly also familiar with the legend. On these grounds, several Chinese and Japanese scholars have entertained the possibility that the Longmen images could simply be copies of this first sandalwood statue of the Buddha brought back by Xuanzang (Hida 1986; Inamoto 1997; Hamada 2006).³⁷ A valid aspect of this argument is the short gap in time between the return of the great monk (645 CE) and the making of the first statues of “King Udayana Buddha” in the Longmen caves (655 CE). Drawing from various inscribed dedications at Longmen, McNair concluded that “a small group of related people donated most of these King Udayana Buddha figures” and these “people may have been especially interested in this figure because they had direct contact with its model.” She suggested that these people might even be Xuanzang’s friends, relatives, or monastic associates from Jingtū monastery, in Luoyang, where the great monk was ordained (2007: 102–103).

Another introduced “Udayana type,” exemplified by the famous wooden standing statue from Seiryō-ji in Kyoto, Japan, is completely different in iconography (Henderson & Hurvitz 1956: pl. I).³⁸ In the Longmen images, however, the transmission of an important tradition embodied in a famous Buddhist image is clearly determined. Hypothesizing an origin in a northern South Asian model for the Udayana Buddha images at Longmen is certainly acceptable. However, we should also balance this with the role of Central Asian models.³⁹ For example, some mural paintings from the Kizil caves, Xinjiang province in western China, seem to share the pattern (Le Coq & Waldschmidt 1928: II, pl. 14).⁴⁰ Several examples of miniature Bhadrāsana Buddhas in wood from the land Silk Road also exist, one of which is said to be from Kizil Cave 76, now in storage at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin [**Figure 6.23**], another from Khotan, now in the British Museum [**Figure 6.24**].⁴¹ In

³⁷ The various hypotheses for and against such a connection with Xuanzang and the Longmen group of images have been recently reviewed by K.J. Lee 2010.

³⁸ The Seiryō-ji image, made in 985 by the Japanese monk Chonen, was copied from a southern Chinese model, which, in turn, possibly copied an earlier “King Udayana” image said to have been brought to China by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century (Rhie 2002: 432–445). To the question how and why two such different iconographic types of the “King Udayana image” could exist at the same time, see Choi 2015: 381–382, esp. n. 108, figs 21–22. For more on the concept of *zhenrong* (眞容), i.e. “true visage,” and its shift to the notion of *ruixiang* (瑞像), i.e. “auspicious/miraculous image” of the Buddha in medieval Chinese art, see Choi 2012.

³⁹ The ultimate origin of this pendant-legged posture seems to go back to the Kuṣāṇa period, when portraits of kings and god Sūrya were shown in this “auspicious pose” (**Chapter 2**).

⁴⁰ In Le Coq’s publication, the central enthroned figure with legs pendant is identified as Mahākāśyapa, not the Buddha, preaching to disciples during the First Council after the demise of Śākyamuni.

⁴¹ See C. Bhattacharya 1977: 57–58, fig. 26; Härtel & Yaldiz 1982: 118–119, fig. 52; Rhie 2002: 86, 694–695, figs 1.5b, 4.69b. Rhie mentions another example from Kucha, presently in the collection of the Musée Guimet in Paris (*ibid.*: 610f, fig. 4.10a).

these wooden figures, the Buddha's proper right hand, now ruined, would have been raised in *abhaya* or *vitarka*; the right shoulder is also bare. While many other wooden images of this kind may have once existed, these are likely to be provincial expressions of this specific iconography. This interesting question must, however, be left for further research.⁴²

I shall now ask whether these images from Longmen may have served as a model for the transmission into Southeast Asia of seated Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* with right hand raised, left hand resting on the thigh. The Udayana images at Longmen are, with any doubt, related to a “foreign type.”⁴³ Marilyn Rhie (1988: 42) suggested they imitate Southeast Asian sculpture more than Indian figures when she wrote, “though the source of the style of these Buddhas may ultimately be the Sarnath school, the particular details seem to be closer to the special interpretation of that school in the sculptures of Southeast Asia dating from ca. 6th–7th century.” Undeniably, the stone image from Son Tho, southern Vietnam [Fig. 6.1] and other little bronzes from Central Thailand such as the one said to come from the region of U Thong [Fig. 6.5]⁴⁴ share some remarkably close affinities. This seems especially the case when considering the hand gestures or the pleats of the monastic garb. On this stylistic and iconographic basis, I suggest that the Bhadrāsana Buddha image from Son Tho ought to be dated, like the Udayana images, rather closer to the second half of the seventh century, thus significantly later than had previously been thought or written about (see *supra*).

Furthermore, some Longmen images sit on a throne with a high back slab, incised lightly into the wall surface. This kind of throne, showing a “scalloped edged top part,” became common for other Tang Buddha images, usually seated with legs pendant (Rhie 1988: 43). The same kind of chair is found in the embroidered Buddha from Nara (see *supra*) and in the murals of the Sui Cave 405 at Dunhuang (Inamoto 1997: 372, 410, figs 17, 24–25) [Figure 6.25]. The Sui example, however, would be late sixth, early seventh centuries,

⁴² For a good discussion of the “lost-wood theory” in Southeast Asian art, as opposed to Bénisti’s “moveable-objects theory,” see Brown (1996: 190–192). According to Brown, “the lost-wood theory is particularly attractive for several reasons. It allows for parallel artistic developments that began from shared artistic models, in India and South East Asia. The early wooden models shared in both traditions are lost, and we have only the later, but separate, developments in durable materials that echo one another. This explains why we have shared ‘categories’ but detailed differences” (1996: 191).

⁴³ Often designated as a “*yi* image” (Ch. *yixiang*; Jap. *izō* 倚像) which ordinarily means “to depend on” or to “lean on” a chair. In later Chinese Buddhist terminology, a “*yi* seated” (*yizuo* 倚坐) image is always identified as seated in *bhadrāsana* (Soper 1959: 2; Carter 1990: 2; Rhie 2002: 85–86).

⁴⁴ This bronze comes from a private collection in Thailand (Thanpong 1965: pl. 3); see also Pal 1978: cat. no. 76, and Rhie 1988: fig. 66. It then came up in the international art market (Sotheby’s London, sale on 14 November 1988, lot 66; Sotheby’s New York, sale on 21 March 2012, lot 242), and is now in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Guy 2014a: cat. no. 23).

significantly earlier than the Longmen group. One might assume, therefore, that the source for this throne decoration might come from the overland Silk Road rather than the sea route. Yet, a similar “lobed throneback,” as Woodward calls it, is also on some seventh–eighth centuries Southeast Asian images such as the little bronze Buddha, already referred above [Fig. 6.12], said to be from Palembang, as well as on other images found in Sambas, Borneo (1988: 82–88, figs 10, 12). This almost simultaneous trend surely reveals how artistic styles and particular motifs could travel relatively rapidly from one extremity of the Silk Road to the other.

4. Initial Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas in Southeast Asia (ca 650–750 CE)

By way of concluding this chapter, and the dissertation, I now offer a tentative chronology and geography of the distribution of Buddhas seated in *bhadrāsana* beyond its homeland in India and Greater Gandhāra. In tentatively mapping their spread in Southeast Asia, I have focused primarily on less-studied areas of interactions, especially between East and Southeast Asia. The present research demonstrates that this new iconographic type appears in early Southeast Asia *circa* the mid-seventh and early eighth centuries and is most reasonably related to some early Tang models or, at least, to a similar Indian source, transmitted separately and almost simultaneously to Southeast Asia and China.⁴⁵

In this regard, possible “prototypes” or models for slightly later developments in Southeast Asia are the mysterious and short-lived “King Udayana” statues at the Longmen caves, dated by inscriptions to *circa* 655–680. The question remains as to how this exceptional seated form of the Udayana image was able to exert its strong influence on the Southeast Asian Bhadrāsana Buddha image type, particularly in Dvāravatī. Clearly, the style of this Longmen group represents a non-Chinese tradition, perhaps a more or less conscious rendering of an Indian model. It is quite conceivable, therefore, that the “ideal model” might have been one of the images brought back from India by Xuanzang in 645. One statue from this group is reputed to be a copy of the original sandalwood figure commissioned by King Udayana in Kauśāmbī, the most famous Buddha image of all. The great monk Xuanzang

⁴⁵ This result may be contrary to previous assertions which see a close relationship between Indian and Dvāravatī images but does not take into account the Chinese evidence (e.g. Chotima 2009). On the contrary, Kwi Jeong Lee (2010) finds that the formative elements of the Udayana images in Longmen are not directly derived from “original” Indian Buddha images, although she observes a strong connection between the Longmen group of Udayana images and Bhadrāsana Buddhas from Dvāravatī. See also Okada 1993.

could well thus be one of the chief transmitters into China for this tradition of famous Indian Buddha statues. Furthermore, in the light of the renewed interest for the maritime route to and from India, other Buddhist monks and pilgrims could have subsequently played major roles in conveying this iconographic convention in both China and Southeast Asia.

From this cross-cultural and interregional perspective, one can definitely infer that East Asian Buddha images offer invaluable resources for comparison with those in Southeast Asia. They may vividly record the course of transregional religious and artistic transmissions. If we accept the above scenario, the Udayana Buddha images from Longmen, for instance, could indicate an interesting intermediary model between South and Southeast Asia. Alternatively, although in previous chapters I have not been able to trace the ultimate Indian roots of this type of Bhadrāsana Buddha image with the right hand held in *vitarka*, both the Southeast Asian and Longmen group of images could nonetheless reflect something that was going on in India at the time, *circa* the mid-seventh century. Fortunately, we are more grounded as regards the sources and the later diffusion of Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* performing the *dharmacakra* hand gesture in maritime Southeast Asia.

5. Later Spread of Bhadrāsana Buddhas in Southeast Asia (ca 750 CE–Onwards)

By the eighth–ninth centuries, an artistic dialogue between maritime Southeast Asia (Java and Sumatra in particular) and the Pāla homeland in Bihar certainly took place. This dialogue has often been recognized by scholars, not least because a Śailendra king erected a Buddhist monastery at Nālandā in the ninth century (**Chapter 5**).⁴⁶ I do not contest this Pāla influence in Indonesian metal art, but, to my knowledge, little comparative work has been conducted with the western Deccan, which might also explain some of the peculiarities that we observe in early Javanese sculpture, especially in stone.⁴⁷

I believe that some iconographic and stylistic features that we observe in the rock-cut art of the western Deccan caves contributed to the development of early Javanese Buddhist sculpture and imagery dateable to approximately the late eighth through ninth centuries.

⁴⁶ For the inscriptional evidence, see Sastri 1924, Jordaan 2000; for discussions and references related to the artistic evidence, see Bernet Kempers 1933: 1–88, and S. Huntington 1994.

⁴⁷ Bautze-Picron made a similar observation: “C’est bien à la tradition instaurée à Ajanṭā et Ellorā que se rattache l’iconographie du Candi Mendut qui abrite la triade généralisée dans ce site indien, à savoir le Buddha assis en *pralambāsana* et accomplissant la *dharmacakramudrā*, entourée de deux Bodhisatva, en l’occurrence Padmapāṇi ou Avalokiteśvara et Vajrapāṇi” (1997: 29). For a rare attempt to trace the origins of these Javanese Buddha bronze images in *bhadrāsana* to Indian Gupta rather than Pāla art, see T.K. Biswas 1991.

Many Javanese sculptures share the same iconography,⁴⁸ one important case is the enthroned Buddha type in *bhadrāsana* — performing the *dharmacakra* hand gesture — and attended by two Bodhisattvas.⁴⁹ The most famous example is no doubt the central triad carved in stone enshrined at Candi Mendut, near Borobudur. In my opinion, the latter sculptures draw their artistic inspiration almost directly from the post-Vākāṭaka model of Ellorā. Consequently, the often proclaimed assertion of a direct connection between Javanese art and Nālandā or other Pāla-period sites in Bihar, particularly in the casting of bronzes, needs reconsideration in the case of Bhadrāsana Buddhas.

The triad found in the interior hall of Candi Mendut is the most prominent example exhibiting Indian stylistic features possibly connecting western Deccan art to Pāla art. Whereas the *ūrṇā* or circular spot placed between the eyebrows of the Mendut Buddha may indicate Pāla influence, the robe worn in the “open mode” (leaving the right shoulder and breast uncovered) denotes connections to Ajaṅṭā and Ellorā. Indeed, both shoulders are nearly always covered in Gupta and Pāla art. Further artistic similarities between these regions concern the thrones with their zoomorphic decoration. At Candi Mendut, the Buddha’s throne has greater stylistic ties to those carved in the western Deccan caves than with Pāla ones. The type found in the central *cella* of Candi Mendut (or Candi Kalasan for that matter)⁵⁰ has an elaborate throne back flanked by a symmetrical heraldic arrangement of crouching elephants, surmounted by prancing lions (*vyālakas*) and two *makaras* turning outward. The combination of the *makaras*, lions, and elephants adorning the back of the throne is a common type found

⁴⁸ A similar observation has been made at a more general level concerning the major impact of Cālukyan art and architectural ornamentation of the western Deccan on early Southeast Asia from approximately the sixth to the eighth centuries. For the case of Campā, see Guy 2005: 148; for Cālukyan decorative motifs found on Pre-Angkorian jewelry and early Khmer lintels, see Bautze-Picron 2010b, and 2011.

⁴⁹ Along the same line, some interesting parallels between the Buddhist caves of the Maharashtra region and (Pen)insular Southeast Asia have been recently observed with images of the ascetic form of Avalokiteśvara, possibly dating back to approximately the mid-to-late seventh century. See Sundstrom 2015: 227–256, also 2016. Furthermore, standing figures in terracotta from Site 40 at Khu Bua, western Thailand, are identifiable as either door guardians or attendant Bodhisattvas and bear strong resemblances to the Buddhist carvings at Ajaṅṭā and Ellorā. See Guy 2014a: cat. nos 146–147. Woodward suggests that the possible artistic links between the Buddhist caves of western India and western Thailand must have been mediated “by activities at other monastic centers, probably including Kanchipuram on India’s southeast coast, where unfortunately almost no traces of the flourishing seventh-century Buddhist monasteries remain” (2014: 127). Interestingly, enthroned preaching Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* were also found at Khu Bua, although these are depicted with the *vitarka* hand gesture (Guy 2014a: cat. no. 110).

⁵⁰ It has been suggested with good reasons that the original icon in the main chamber of Candi Kalasan, now empty, was a seated statue in *bhadrāsana* and about twice the size of that of Candi Mendut. The question remains whether the lost cult image was a colossal bronze Buddha or a peculiar form of Tārā. For references, see Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: 9, n. 15.

in Maharashtra during the late fifth through the eighth centuries and is nearly always found in association with a preaching Buddha in *bhadrāsana* (Auboyer 1949: 114; also **Chapter 4**).

In addition, the rim of the Buddha's robe between the pendant legs that we observe at Candi Mendut [**Figure 6.26**] and in all early Javanese sculpture of this type is, to my knowledge, never observed in northern Indian imagery, but is clearly related to some late Buddhist images at Ellorā. Dating to the early eighth century, the Bhadrāsana Buddha images carved along the side walls of the third floor of multi-storeyed Cave 12 clearly exhibit these features [**Figs 4.186–189**]. However, while the characteristics of the robes and the thrones are nearly identical, the Buddha at Candi Mendut displays a local variant of the *dharmacakra* hand gesture in which the ring fingers, rather than the index fingers, are bent. This variant is consistent with other known Javanese icons of its kind in stone. This is hardly ever found outside Java and may serve as a strong indicator of local production from the Central Javanese-Early East Javanese period (eighth–tenth centuries). Similar conclusions have been reached for the study of metal images [**Figure 6.27**], which tend to show that the Javanese seemingly incorporated foreign Indian models but also modified and interpreted them freely.⁵¹ Moreover, Ellorā's Buddha images are surrounded by a host of standing Bodhisattvas,⁵² unlike those seated in *lalitāsana* at Candi Mendut, that is, in the pose where only one foot is on top of the other thigh, with the other foot pendant. This is one of the popular postures used in Bodhisattva imagery in Pāla art which becomes prominent in Central Javanese art as well. For example, a rare Javanese bronze triad, whose exact origin is unknown, depicts a central Bhadrāsana Buddha flanked by the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, seated and holding a lotus and a *vajra* respectively [**Figure 6.28**].⁵³

In terms of iconography, we have seen in **Chapter 4** that the triad consisting of a Bhadrāsana Buddha, Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi, and Vajrapāṇi was first gradually introduced in western Indian caves. Thereafter, the triad became popular in Central Javanese art, first and foremost at Candi Mendut. To be fair, the iconographic program and the identification of the triad sheltered in the Mendut *cella* has been a topic of considerable discussion over the years, each scholar reaching different conclusions, none of them totally

⁵¹ See Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: 6–10; also S. Huntington 1994.

⁵² We find a similar triad — with the only difference that the Buddha is with the right raised hand — depicted on a series of Southeast Asian molded tablets, generally assigned to the seventh–eighth centuries. See Revire 2012a: 109–114, figs 10–14; also **Figs 6.14–16**.

⁵³ This triad was sold in auction and I do not know where it is today. See Sotheby's New York, sale on 23 March 2000, lot 111.

satisfactory.⁵⁴ Lokesh Chandra (1980: 316), for example, initially saw a connection to the iconography of the *durgatipariśodhanamaṇḍala* based on his observation that the Buddha in monastic garb at Mendut is in the *dharmacakra* preaching gesture, similar to the Mahavairocana appearance in that *maṇḍala*. However, this Buddha is only one element of the triad. Indeed, the relatively late *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*, from which the above mentioned *maṇḍala* is drawn, highlights a five-Buddha system, in total contrast to the overwhelming presence of triads that can be observed *in situ* in Java and the western Indian caves. In addition to the colossal stone triad at Candi Mendut, a few preserved bronze miniature triads with a central *bhadrāsana* Buddha are known from Java and kept in public or private collections (Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: figs 3, 8, 21; also **Table 2, nos 14, 18–19**).

Arlo Griffiths, Rajat Sanyal, and myself (2013: 17ff) recently conducted a philological effort to explain this triadic arrangement that was likely exported from India to Central Java and maritime Southeast Asia. The results of this investigation lead us to reject several late textual associations and conclude that these triadic arrangements were probably based on earlier Buddhist tantric texts such as the **Susiddhikarasūtra* and the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (i.e. *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*), later classified in the Tibetan tradition as *kriyatantras*, that circulated in maritime Southeast Asia possibly as early as the eighth century.⁵⁵ In such texts, the promulgation of *mantras* and *sūtras* is often attributed to Śākyamuni, who presides over the Buddha family, but not yet to Vairocana, who starts to figure in this role only in subsequent strata of Buddhist tantric literature. In the same earlier tantric texts, Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi preside, respectively, over the family of the lotus (*padmakula*) and the family of the thunderbolt (*vajrakula*).⁵⁶

The above brief stylistic and iconographic comparisons signify a dynamic movement of artists, objects, and ritual specialists across South Asia and beyond. That the style and iconography of Ellorā's late Buddhist caves may have circuitously exerted a certain amount of influence extending as far east as Java has important implications for the future study of

⁵⁴ For discussion and references, see Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: 12–14.

⁵⁵ A foil inscription excavated near Borobudur in 1974 includes phrases that have tentatively been tied to the **Susiddhikarasūtra*, lost in Sanskrit but known in a Chinese translation from 726 CE. See Kandahjaya 2009: 2–3, Table 1; also Griffiths 2014b.

⁵⁶ Besides this textual evidence, there is also epigraphic evidence from peninsular Thailand, nearly contemporary with Candi Mendut, showing that this triad was indeed well known in this part of Buddhist Asia. See Griffiths, Revire & Sanyal 2013: 22–23.

interactions between South and Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ Interestingly, an inscription from Candi Plaosan in Central Java describes the worship of a Buddha-temple (*jinamandira*) by people (*gurus*, merchants, or pilgrims?) constantly arriving from the Gurjara country (Gujarat?). As Johannes de Casparis emphasized, “this passage leaves no doubt of there having been some regular contact, at least during some years, between Java and Gurjaradeça.”⁵⁸

In summary, the images of enthroned Buddha in *bhadrāsana* from Java belonging to the above group could be approximately dated to the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century. Apparently, by the tenth century, this iconography was already out of fashion in ancient Indonesia and the production of these images declined in the rest of Southeast Asia as well. A rather late but marginal occurrence of such imagery at the twilight of the first millennium can be seen in the sanctuary of Dong Duong, central Vietnam, built during the late ninth, early tenth centuries (Dhar 2014). The large stone Bhadrāsana Buddha found there [Figures 6.29–30],⁵⁹ now displayed in the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Da Nang, is unique in that the two hands are placed palm-downwards on the knees. This statue again shows remarkable signs of Chinese artistic influence attributable to the Tang period, especially evidenced in the drapery (Dupont 1951: 271–272, pl. 51). A cursory survey of the Chinese visual evidence from this period significantly reveals that Bhadrāsana Buddhas of gigantic

⁵⁷ Although this subject is beyond the scope of the present study, it is remarkable that Hārītī and Pañcika at the entrance of Candi Mendut are both associated with blessing people who entered the *cella* with boons. Incidentally, Hārītī and Pañcika shrines form part of the Buddhist cave temple complexes at Ajañtā and Ellorā in western India as well as the Buddhist monastery of Ratnagiri in eastern India. See Cohen 1998: 380–393, figs 5–10; also Malandra 1997: 76, 104, 106, 115–116. The eight Bodhisattvas are also depicted at Candi Mendut on the outside walls and quite closely resemble stone reliefs from Ellorā Caves 11 and 12, albeit with minor local stylistic variations. See Bautze-Picron 1997: 29, Diagram 11. Malandra (*ibid.*: 98) similarly notes that the presence of a four-armed Cundā holding a book at Candi Mendut “is actually closer iconographically to the Ellorā images than are those from Ratnagiri”.

⁵⁸ See de Casparis 1956: 188–189, 195, 202–203 (stanza 14). The Karangtengah/Kayumwungan inscription also refers to the compound *jinamandira*, which is said to be similar to the famous Venuvaṇa, i.e., “temple of the bamboo forest.” See de Casparis 1950: 39, 147, 184–185 (stanza 13). While de Casparis argued that it must refer to Candi Mendut, Kandahjaya prefers to see Borobudur in it. See Kandahjaya 2004: 113ff, 156, and 2009. However, certain problems exist for identifying the Kayumwungan charter with Borobudur and/or Candi Mendut. According to another interpretation, the Kayumwungan inscription pertains to a temple constructed on top of Gunung Pertapan, to the east of Mount Sindoro, to the north of the town of Parakan. See Long 2014: 167ff.

⁵⁹ The torso with a detached head was found by Parmentier and his team in 1902 in the central tower of the first enclosure, while the legs were found later during excavations in the third enclosure, situated about 100 m to the east. The head, now in the Museum of Vietnamese History in Hanoi and seen in earlier photos, does not belong to this sculpture nor does the other colossal head kept at the Musée Guimet in Paris (Baptiste & Zéphir 2005: cat. no. 19). The current head is a molded copy made after the model from Hanoi (Pierre Baptiste, Pers. Comm.). For a recent review of these discoveries and a discussion of the original placements of Buddha fragments found at Dong Duong, see Dhar 2014: 117ff, figs 6.4–6.7. The identity of this Buddha is as yet unresolved. It is usually reckoned as Śākyamuni, but Woodward proposes to see Bhaiṣajyaguru (2011: 39).

proportions (Dafo 大佛), sometimes performing the same hand gesture, can be observed in great numbers carved on cliffs along the overland Silk Road in the provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, with the largest ever stone seated images located in Sichuan [Figures 6.31–36].

This iconographic type will finally re-emerge in a different manner in the late eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, first in Myanmar, following the Pāla idiom and artistic trends of Bihar and Bengal (e.g. Luce & Ba Shin 1969–70: pls 74c, 193b, 312b; Bautze-Picron 2003a: 60–63, figs 64–65) [Figures 6.37–39] and, later, in Thai art [Figures 6.40–42].⁶⁰ Most of these representations are attached to a narrative episode linked to either the Great miracle or to offerings made by an elephant and a monkey to the Buddha in the Pārileyyaka forest (Skilling & Pakdeekham 2010: fig. 5; Brown 2013b: 47ff, figs 5–6). In sum, the varieties and types of artistic similarities examined briefly in this chapter prompt us to look for more evidence that further demonstrates dynamic interactions between different regions of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Future comparative work across these territories will hopefully shed more light on how Buddhist art and devotion travelled within the region.

⁶⁰ There is a dated epigraphic reference (1334 *śakarāja* = 1412 CE) from Sukhothai which mentions a dedication of an “image of the **Buddha with his feet down**” (Griswold & Prasert 1992: 29, 32).

APPENDIX A: Solar Symbolism in Early Buddhist Literature

Sun worship is assuredly very old in India (V.C. Srivastava 1960). Āditya or Sūrya, the Sun as the Orb seen in the sky, was also imagined as the god of light. In fact, the productivity and fecundating capacity of the Sun derived precisely from his light-giving aspect. In the Vedic and Purāṇic traditions, the Sun is also a symbol of the ruling principle or law and metaphorically represents the monarch as personification of law within the kingdom since the Sun was perceived as a model for a *kṣatriya*'s rise to power. Likewise, in Buddhist terms, the splendor of the Sun could often be used as an allegory for the most resplendent Buddha and the embodiment of the eternal Dharma. As I noted on several occasions throughout this dissertation, Buddha and the Sun god were obviously interchangeable in early Indian Buddhism and Buddhist art.¹ In the following, I present a few textual examples to define precisely how the Buddha is said to relate to the Sun, in one aspect or another.

On almost every page, early biographies of the Buddha are replete with references to sun and light symbolism. In the *Buddhacarita*, the author Aśvaghoṣa (probably second century CE) repeatedly identified the Buddha with the Sun (and the Moon) through different similes. To give just one example, upon predicting that the infant Siddhārtha would become a Buddha, the seer Asita utters the following verse:²

vihāya rājyaṃ viṣayeṣv anāsthastīvrāḥ prayatnair adhigamya tattvam |
jagaty ayaṃ mohatamo nihantuṃ jvalisyati jñānamayo hi sūryaḥ ||
(Buddhac 1.69)

For quitting his realm, detached from pleasures, realizing the truth through arduous efforts, **this sun of knowledge** will blaze forth in this world to dispel the darkness of delusion (ed. & trans. Olivelle 2008: 24–25).

¹ See in particular **Chapter 2**; also Rowland 1938 and Revire forthcoming a. For a thorough study of light symbolism in Gandhāran and Central Asian Buddhist art, see Soper 1949 and 1950; for the case of Southeast Asia, see Brown 2013.

² Other verses from the *Buddhacarita* that invite direct comparisons between the Buddha-to-be and the Sun are 1.12f, 2.20, 5.43, 5.79, 7.8, 8.5, 9.8, 9.81, 10.15, 10.23, 11.70, 12.117, 13.59 (ed. & trans. Olivelle 2008: 4–7, 140f, 154f, 188f, 210f, 246f, 272f, 282f, 2.86f, 322f, 366f, 392f).

Similarly, the father of Siddhārtha is described in the Epic-classical fashion of luminous ascetics:

*sthitvā pathi prāthamakalpikānām rāja rṣabhānām yaśas'ānvitānām |
śuklāny amuktv'āpi tapāmsy atapta yajñaiś ca himṣārahitair ayaṣṭa ||*

*ajājvaliṣṭ'ātha sa puṇyakarmā nṛpaśriyā c'āiva tapaśriyā ca |
kulena vṛttena dhiyā ca dīptas tejaḥ sahasr'āṁśur iv'ōtsisṛkṣuḥ ||*

(Buddhac 2.49f)

Following the path of the early kings, those mighty bulls among kings, of wide fame, he performed ascetic toil without casting off his white clothes, he offered sacrifices without injuring living beings.

Then, that man of good deeds brightly blazed forth with the luster of king and ascetic, shining by reason of virtue, wisdom and family, as if wishing to radiate light like the thousand-rayed sun (ed. & trans. Olivelle 2008: 52f).³

In the *Lalitavistara*,⁴ while the Bodhisattva still waited in Tuṣita heaven for his birth as Śākyamuni, he was described,

As the sun of great beings, light rays of knowledge radiated from the orb of his liberation and concentration, dispelling the light of the swarms of non-Buddhists, who are like fireflies, and eliminating the darkness and obscuring film of ignorance. Indeed, with brilliant strength and diligence, the radiant majesty of his merit shone brightly among gods and humans (Lal 9; trans. DTC 2013: 7).

³ Edholm demonstrates (2014: 77–78) that the concept of “royal *śrī*” and “ascetic *śrī*” attributed to the king is present here and in many other passages of the *Buddhacarita*, clearly not as just a quality of “fertility,” “prosperity,” or “beauty,” but also as a form of splendor or lustre connected to other terms for radiance (*tejas*) and heat (*tapas*).

⁴ For other examples preserved in the Tibetan translation, see Lal 224, 354, 374, 394, 424, 427 (trans. DTC 2013: 167, 267, 286, 305, 327, 329–330).

Naturally, the recurrent conflict between sunlight and darkness was best epitomized in the ensuing battle between the Buddha with Māra, the night before the Buddha reached final Enlightenment (Bautze-Picron 1998b). The primary function of a Buddha, as with the Sun, was to drive away darkness and demons and to illuminate the whole earth with his teachings.⁵

This is most eloquently invoked when the newly Enlightened One uttered the following “exclamatory verse” (*udānagātha*) as he sat under the *bodhi*-tree for seven days:

yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa |
vidhūpayam tiṭṭhati Mārasenam sūriyo’va obhāsayaṃ antalikkhan
ti || (Ud 3)

When, for sure, things appear to the ardent, meditating brahmin, **he remains dispersing Māra’s army, (like) the sun when still lighting up the sky** (trans. Masefield 1994: 3).⁶

As the narrative goes according to the *Lalitavistara*, the two merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika later approached the Buddha during the seventh week after his Awakening:

When they arrived, they saw **the Thus-Gone One blazing like the god of fire**, well adorned with the thirty-two marks of a great being, **shining with splendor, like the sun just after dawn** (Lal 382; trans. DTC 2013: 293).

That Śākyamuni and his teachings were often compared to the Sun and divine light is again clear from another passage from the *Divyāvadāna*, where the Tathāgata, upon performing his magical powers, and literally outshining his opponents at Śrāvastī, recited the following stanza:

⁵ Indeed, this precept holds true for any Buddha, as an early inscription in Sanskrit from Nepal shows, by venerating “**Amitābha, the Sun-like Jina**, in the world of Sukhāvātī, who has destroyed the darkness of the great illusion of existence with the light of great wisdom” (*mahāprajñālokakṣatābhavamahāmohatimiram sukhāvātīyām vande satatam amitābhañ jinaravim*). See Acharya 2008: 41, 43.

⁶ See also at Vin I 2. Of note, this verse is found inscribed on a pillar fragment originally upholding a *cakra*, another solar symbol, from Sap Champa, Lop Buri province, Thailand. For a discussion on the significance of this verse and for further references, see Woodward 2003: 69; also Revire 2014a: 254–255, Table 3: inscr. no. LB 17.

tāvad avabhāsate kṛimir yāvan nodayate divākaraḥ |
vīrocana udgate tu vairavyārto bhavati na cāvabhāsate ||
tāvad avabhāṣitam āsa tārkkikair yāvan noditavāms tathāgataḥ |
sambuddhāvabhāṣite tu loke na tārkkiko bhāṣate na cāsyā śrāvakaḥ ||
(ed. Cowell & Neil 1886: 163)

The insects shine so long as the sun does not rise. **Once the sun rises, the insects become confused and cease to shine.**

Similarly, these dialecticians (*tārkkika*) shone while the Tathāgata remained silent. However, **once the perfect Buddha has shone in the world, the dialecticians and their śrāvakas keep silent** (trans. Skorupski 2001b: 44).

In the *Mahāvastu* (ed. Senart 1882–1997), believed to have been compiled between the second century BCE and the fourth century CE and considered a primary source for the notion of a transcendent (*lokottara*) Buddha,⁷ we find the following eulogy to the Tathāgata composed in verses:

adbhutānām ca dharmāṇām viśuddhiḥ upalabhyate |
tvām prāpya puruṣāditya tamontakaram acyutaṁ || (Mvu I 175)

O Man of Light, thanks to thee, the steadfast dispeller of darkness, the pure radiance of wondrous states is won (trans. J. Jones 1949: 139).⁸

In addition to *puruṣāditya* (litteraly, “Sun-Man” or “Sun among Men”), as well as many other comparable solar metaphors,⁹ the *Mahāvastu* also gave several occurrences listed below of the Sanskrit epithet *ādityabandhu*, i.e. Kinsman/men of the Sun, related to the Buddha(s):

⁷ Vincent Tournier (2012) argued convincingly that the text once belonged to the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins.

⁸ This stock phrase is reproduced almost *verbatim* in Mvu III 347; trans. J. Jones 1956: 344.

⁹ See also Mvu I 296, and Mvu II 21, 304; trans. J. Jones 1949: 246, and 1952: 19, 285.

daśa vaśitā ākhyātā buddhenādityabandhunā |
bodhisatvāna śurāṇām bhāṣato taṃ śṛnotha me || (Mvu I 282)

Ten powers are declared by the Buddha, **the kinsman of the sun**, to be the attributes of the valiant Bodhisattvas. Hear me as I recount them (trans. J. Jones 1949: 234).

yatra te lokapradīyotā āgatā bodhi prāpūṇe |
krakucchando konākamuni kāśyapo ca mahāmuni ||
taṃ deśam lokapradīyoto upāgame lokanāyako |
yo so vādityabandhūnām śākyānām paramo muniḥ || (Mvu II 302f)

Where those Lights of the world, Krakucchanda, Konākamuni, and the great seer Kaśyapa, came and achieved enlightenment, To that place has come this **Light of the world**, the world's Guide, he who is the foremost seer of the Śākyans, **kinsmen of the sun** (trans. J. Jones 1952: 284)

jaleruho va kanako daśaśataraśmi bhāṣati |
tathā bhāsensu nāthānām mukhā ādityabandhunām || (Mvu II 306)

As the golden thousand-rayed lotus gleams, so did gleam the faces of the saviours, **the kinsmen of the sun** (trans. J. Jones 1952: 288)

muni mauneyapadeṣu prāptiprāpto akampīyo |
atulya ādityabandhu vimuktido śubhavrato || (Mvu III 401)

O Sage, thou hast successfully and unwaveringly trod the path of sagedom. O Peerless One, **kinsman of the sun**, thou art a gentle giver of freedom (trans. J. Jones 1956: 400).

Similarly, the Buddha is described as one who shone with radiance in the Pali *Dhammapada* or as someone whose brilliance was comparable to the Sun in the *Suttanipāta*.¹⁰ He was also frequently designated by the epithet *ādiccabandhu* in the early Pali literature.¹¹ The *Mahāniddeśa*, a commentarial work included in the Pali Canon as part of the *Khuddakanikāya*, explained *Ādicca* (Skt, *Āditya*) as another name for Suriya (Skt, *Sūrya*), a Gotama by “lineage” (Skt, *gotra*; P. *gotta*):

*ādiccabandhun ti || ādicco vuccati suriyo || suriyo gotamo gottena |
bhagavā pi gotamo gottena | bhagavā suriyassa gottañātako
gottabandhu | tasmā buddho ādiccabandhū ti | pucchāmi tam
ādiccabandhum ||* (Nidd I 341)

“Kinsman of *Ādicca*”: *Ādicca* denotes Suriya. Suriya is a Gotama by lineage, the Lord also is of the Gotama lineage, the Lord is a relative, a kinsman, of Suriya’s lineage; therefore, the Buddha is a Kinsman of *Ādicca*. I ask [the meaning of] that Kinsman of *Ādicca* [i.e. the Sun] (my translation).¹²

The name *Ādityabandhu* is also found, albeit rarely, in Indian epigraphy. For example, a fifth–sixth century inscription in Sanskrit from Sārnāth qualified the erection of a Buddha image, now lost, with the same epithet:

¹⁰ *divā tapati ādicco | rattim ābhāti candimā | sannaddho khattiyo tapati | jhāyī tapati brāhmaṇo | atha sabbam ahorattim | **Buddho tapati tejasā***, i.e. “The sun shines by day, the moon is bright by night; the warrior shines when his armour is fastened on, the brahman shines when meditating, but **the awakened one shines all day and night by his radiance**” (Dhp 387; trans. Norman 2000: 55); *Bhagavā hi kāme abhibhuyya iriyati ādicco va paṭhavim teji tejasā*, i.e. “The Blessed One indeed dwells having overcome sensual pleasures, **as the brilliant sun** [overcomes] the earth **by its brilliance**” (Sn, v. 1097; trans. Norman 2001: 139).

¹¹ See the following references: Vin II 296; D III 197; S I 186, 192; A II 17, 54, 74; Th 26, 158, 417, Sn, vv. 540, 915, 1128, etc. According to the DPPN (s.v.), *Ādiccabandhu* was also the name of a (past) Pacceka Buddha in the *Khaggavisāṇasutta* (Sn, v. 54). Countless other instances occur in the Pali commentaries where the Lord is compared to the rising sun. To give just one example: *yugandharapabbate bālasūriyo viya virocamaṇo*, i.e. “[the Buddha is] **shining forth like the newly arisen sun** on Mount Yugandhara” (Cp-a 8; Pv-a 137, my translation).

¹² See also Nidd II 275 S^c. The Śākya clan of the Buddha is also claimed to belong to the lineage of *Āditya/Ādicca*: *ādiccā nāma gottena | sākiyā nāma jātiyā ||* (Sn, v. 423). The *Theragāthā* commentary says that *ādiccabandhu* refers to the “lineage of the Sun” (*ādiccagotta*), i.e. the Sākiyas, descendants of King Okkāka (Th-a II 177). The *Vimānavatthu* commentary (Vv-a 116) also adds that *Ādicca* belonged to the lineage of the Great Sage Gotama (*gotamagotta*), as did also the Buddha of our time, hence their common epithets. For more on the system of caste and *gotra/gotta* in early Indian society, see Brough 1953.

Om ādityabandhor buddhasya pratimāpratimadyutheḥ kārītā
Śīlayaśasā kāṅksatā padam uttamam ||

Om. Of **the Sun’s kinsman** the Buddha of matchless splendour [this] image was caused to be made by Śīlayaśasās striving after the highest state of bliss (Oertel 1908: 89, inscr. no. XIII).¹³

This epithet for the Buddha and his alleged kinship to the Sun led Émile Senart to assert long ago (1875) that the Blessed One was on a par with a solar deity. Naturally, the “solar descent” of the Buddha may have been necessary only for the purpose of showing his royal lineage, since several great dynasties of ancient India such as the Ikṣvākus similarly claimed to belong to the Sūryavaṁśa, i.e. “the solar race” (Pargiter 1922: 90ff). But there is more. The *Brahmajālasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, also listed Sun worship (*ādiccupaṭṭhānam*) as a “wrong means of livelihood” for monks and those who engage in this ritual were subjected to mockery in the time of the Buddha (D I 11). This devotion was similarly ridiculed in the *Ādiccupaṭṭhānajātaka*, the story of a mischievous monkey venerating the Sun (Jāt no. 175). In other words, early Buddhists not only mocked the solar religion in their texts, they also attempted to place the Buddha “higher” than the Sun. This was clearly evident in the *Samyuttanikāya*, which mentioned the Sun god in its *Suriyasutta* where Suriya was shown invoking the power of the Buddha, asking for his protection and praying to the Buddha to get rid of Rāhu, Lord of the Asuras (S I 51). Here is the passage, also recounted verbatim in the *Vimānavatthu* commentary:

yo andhakāre tasmā pabhaṅkaro | verocano maṇḍalī uggatejo ||
mā rāhu gilī caramantalikkhe | pajam mamaṁ rāhu pamuñca
suriyan ti || (Vv-a 116)

Orbed Verocana [the Sun] of mighty heat, who is radiance-maker amidst the blindness, amidst the darkness — “Rāhu! do not swallow

¹³ See also Tsukamoto 1996: 901, IV: Sarn 20. The latter also lists a copperplate grant from Gunaighar (1996: 168–170, I: Guna 1) where the term “*ādityavandhu*” appears (l. 20). The inscription records (l. 3–4) that the local King Vainyagupta approved, in the Gupta year 188 (= 507 CE), the petition of a gift of land “in the name of the follower of the Mahāyāna, the Śākyabhikṣu, the Teacher, Śāntideva” (*mahāyānika śākyabhikṣv-ācāryya śāntidevam uddiśya*) [...] “in the monastery of the hermitage of the Noble Avalokiteśvara which was being built” (*kāryyamānā kāryyavalokiteśvarāśrama vihāre*). See also Dinesh C. Bhattacharyya 1930: 53–55, 57–58.

the sun, the traveler through the sky! **Release my progeny, Rāhu**
(trans. Masefield 1997: 172).

On this occasion, the Buddha thus spoke of the Sun as his own “offspring” (*pajam mamam*) which Buddhagosa explained as simply meaning “spiritual son” in the commentary (Spk I 109); that is, Suriya was considered a “disciple” (*sotāpanna*) of the Buddha, with no specific connection to his own legendary solar descent. At any rate, in the same manner that the Sun was perceived as the symbol of the supreme principle, the transcendent center of the cosmos (*axis mundi*), so was the Buddha who was also described sometimes as the “eye of the world” (*cakkhumāloka*; D II 139ff), who surveyed the whole universe and saw all things simultaneously.

It is probably in this sense that the other name sometimes given in the texts for the Sun, viz. Verocana/Virocana, also known as Vairocana, literally the one who is “shining forth” (PED; SED, s.vv.), was often used for the Buddha in early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts. For instance, in the **Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* preserved in Chinese (*Shoulengyan sanmei jing*, T. 642), Śākyamuni was reported as saying to Ānanda:

That Buddha [**vairocanaraśmipratimaṇḍitavikurvāṇarāja*, i.e. ‘Shining One, Prodigious King, adorned with Solar Rays’] is myself who, under a different name, expounds the Dharma in that [Adorned/Pratimaṇḍitā] universe and delivers beings [in the eastern region].¹⁴

As John McRae aptly surmised in his translator’s introduction to the text, the Buddha Śākyamuni that we see here “is no mere historical personage, but the one eternal cosmic Buddha who is the source of all other Buddhas” (1998: 1). In short, as Étienne Lamotte (1998: 53) also reckoned, we grasp in this text “the skeleton of esoteric Buddhism for which Mahāvairocana is the historical Śākyamuni idealised in the *dharmakāya* ‘which is not born and does not die’.”

¹⁴ Cited in Lamotte 1998: 237 (with minor stylistic changes). See also McRae 1998: 83–84 who translates this reconstructed Sanskrit compound **vairocanaraśmipratimaṇḍitavikurvāṇarāja* as “King of Autonomous Illumination and Ornamentation,” and Snellgrove 2004: 78, n. 57, 196, who renders it as “Resplendent One, Adorned with Rays, Transformation-King.” Incidentally, another Buddha of the eastern region, similarly called Vairocanaraśmipratimaṇḍita (“Universe adorned with the Rays of the Sun”), appears in the *Lotus Sūtra* (Kern 1884: 393ff, 419, 429).

According to the larger **Buddhāvataṃsakasūtras* (Ch. *Da fangguang fo huayan jing*, T. 278ff), Susumu Ōtake concluded that “Vairocana” was, just as “Śākyamuni,” one of the epithets used for the historical Buddha, or even the Bodhisattva, Gautama (2012: 39ff).¹⁵ His hypothesis was supported by the Indian Buddhist Sūryasiddhi (*circa* seventh–eighth centuries) who wrote a sub-commentary preserved in Tibetan on Vasubandhu’s commentary on the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, a text also incorporated into the larger **Buddhāvataṃsaka* collection as the “Ten Stages” chapter:

*bcom ldan 'das rnam par snang mdzad 'di nyid kyi sngon gyi smon
lam dang byin gyis brlabs kyi zhes bya ba ni | bcom ldan 'das shā
kya thub pa rnam par snang mdzad ces bya ba yi 'o || ci 'i phyir
mtshan 'di skad ces bya zhe na | smras pa (1) gdul bar bya ba rnams
la dam pa 'i chos sna tshogs snang bar mdzad pas rnam par snang
bar mdzad pa 'o || de nyid rnam par snang mdzad de dka' thub can
bzhin no || (2) rnam pa gcig tu na sna tshogs su snang ba dang dgyes
par byed pas rnam par snang ba 'o || yon tan rnam pa mang po snang
ba dang / mkhas pa rnams kyi mngon du dgyes par byed ces bya ba 'i
tha tshig ste / de nyid rnam par snang mdzad do || (3) **rnam pa gcig tu
na** / **rnam par snang mdzad ni nyi ma ste** / **skar ma dang zla ba la
sogs pa zil gyis mnan khyad par du snang ba 'i phyir ro || rnam par
snang mdzad 'di ni de 'i yin te / de 'i rgyud las skyeszhes bya ba 'i
tha tshig go ||***

In the line “owing to the original vow and supporting power of this Blessed One Vairocana”, [the words “of this Blessed One Vairocana” mean] “of Śākyamuni who is called Vairocana”. Why is the epithet worded thus? Answer: (1) Since [he] clarifies various right laws (*saddharma*) to his disciples (*vineya*), [he is called] Vairocana. This is [the meaning of] Vairocana; just as [we say] *tapasvin* (“one who radiates heat” *i.e.* ascetic). (2) Or, since [he] variously illuminates and delights, [he is called] Vairocana. [This] means that [he] illuminates many kinds of qualities (*guṇa*) and he delights in skillfulness

¹⁵ The *Mahāvastu* also calls Śākyamuni “Vairocana Bodhisattva,” a simile for the Sun (Mvu II 304; trans. J. Jones 1952: 285).

(*kaśālyā*). This is [the meaning of] Vairocana. (3) **Or, Vairocana is the Sun (Āditya, the god of the sun), because Āditya is more brilliant than the moon and stars. This Vairocana (Śākyamuni) belongs to him (Āditya), meaning that [Śākyamuni] was born into the family descendant from him (Āditya).**¹⁶

Later tantric texts also constantly used the names (Mahā-)Vairocana and Śākyamuni interchangeably. On this basis, Paul Mus long ago concluded that, in due course, “Vairocana appears to have purely and simply substituted Śākyamuni on the seat of the Preaching of the Law” (1934: 182). Wayman and Tajima also stipulated that “Mahāvairocana is a deification of Śākyamuni,” and that “Śākyamuni in *Nirmāṇakāya* and Vairocana in *Dharmakāya* are identical” (1992: 228, 249). However, adding to the confusion, Hodge (2003: 544, n. 6) wrote that “in Sino-Japanese exegesis of the MVT, Mahā-Vairocana as the *Dharmakāya*, is distinguished from ‘Vairocana’, the *Sambhogakāya*.” But in the quotation from Wayman and Tajima, “Vairocana” was presumably used in the sense of “Mahāvairocana.” Thus, in simple terms in Shingon understanding (following the *trikāya* doctrine), Mahāvairocana is the *dharmakāya*, Vairocana the *sambhogakāya*, and Śākyamuni the *nirmāṇakāya*.

Now, to return to the discussion on solar symbolism, an important distinction should be made at this point between the physical sun of our everyday experience and the supernal Sun. When Śubhākarasimha, a Buddhist master from Nālandā monastery in northeast India, came to China during the Tang dynasty in *circa* 716 CE, he glossed Mahāvairocana as the “Great Sun.” In the opening section of the commentary on the **Vairocanābhīśambodhi* (*Da Piluzhena chengfo jing shu*; T. 1796, vol. 39, p. 579a), composed in 724 by Yixing on the basis of Śubhākarasimha’s oral teachings and lecture notes (Orzech *et al.* 2011: 276, n. 56, 340), the following explanation was given for the name Mahāvairocana:

The Sanskrit word PILUZHENA (Vairocana) is another name of the sun and has the meaning of “to drive away darkness and to cause light to spread everywhere.”

The natural sun, however, has limitations of space and time. It sheds lights on the outside, yet cannot reach the inside; it is bright in

¹⁶ Cited in Ōtake 2012: 40 (my emphasis). The Tibetan sources seem to preserve two different recensions of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, one belonging to the **Buddhāvataṃsaka* family of texts, the other apparently circulating as an independent *sūtra* in several Kanjur editions (Skilling & Saerji 2013: 196).

one place, but does not reach to another; and furthermore, it shines only during the day, and does not light up to the night. With the splendour of the sun of the Tathāgata’s wisdom, now, it is not like that. Everywhere it creates great radiant light, and there is no distinction of inside and outside, of places, of day and night.

Furthermore, when the sun travels over Jambudvīpa, all plants and trees, bushes and groves are able to grow according to their inborn lot and, because of it all natural functions are performed. **The splendour of the Tathāgata-sun sheds light all over the dharmadhātu** and also is able universally to develop all kinds of good roots of the numberless beings; and finally, all wonderful things in the world and beyond the world are performed through it.

And as the sun is not destroyed when it is hidden behind heavy clouds and dark covers, and as it does not start to be born when fierce winds blow the clouds away and the splendour of the sun becomes visible and bright, so it is also with the sun of the Buddha-mind. It might be covered and veiled by the heavy clouds of ignorance (*avidyā*), moral defilements (*kleśa*), and vain arguments (*prapañca*), but nothing of it is reduced; the *samādhi* of the reality of all things might finally become perfect and limitless, but nothing is added (to it).

Because of many such reasons, the natural sun is not fit to serve as a comparison; but because of its partial resemblance we add the modification “great” and say MOHEPILUZHENA (Mahāvairocana, i.e. “The Great Sun”) (trans. Müller 1976: 21–22; with minor stylistic changes).¹⁷

In tantric Buddhist traditions, indeed, the identity between the Buddha with the “Great Sun” was very explicit because the supreme Tathāgata Mahāvairocana was reckoned as the

¹⁷ Wayman and Tajima (1992: 248) provide another reading of this passage rendered from a Japanese Shingon perspective. See also the abridgment offered by Snodgrass (1988: 25) who renders the last paragraph of this commentary in a slightly different fashion as: “The Great Sun cannot truly be likened to the physical sun except by analogy; the physical sun is subject to the limitations of causality, whereas the Great Sun is wholly transcendent. Therefore it is called the Great Sun, Mahāvairocana.”

solar source from which all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas shine forth as rays of light.¹⁸ Again, according to the **Vairocanābhisambodhi* and the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, Mahāvairocana stood in Akaniṣṭha, the highest heaven above Mount Meru, before revealing the Dharma and radiating forth the *Garbhadhātumaṇḍala* and the *Vajradhātumaṇḍala*. (Mahā)-Vairocana was thus clearly the transcendent and cosmological apotheosis of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. As the “Great Sun,” he was envisioned as the all-encompassing Lord of the cosmos or universe.

As we have seen above at Auraṅgābād, Ellorā, and possibly other western Indian caves as well, certain authors identified icons of the Buddhas in *bhadrāsana* as the “Great Illuminator,” i.e. Mahāvairocana. Although this fragile hypothesis remains unproven and largely speculative for reasons already addressed in **Chapter 4**, I do not mean to contest the intrinsic royal and solar symbolism embedded in these great seated images of Buddha Śākyamuni. However, perhaps an intentional plurality of meaning has always been present with these icons, allowing for various exoteric and esoteric interpretations. The principle that all Buddhas are related seems a profound truth that should be further explored on firmer ground.

¹⁸ The larger **Buddhāvataṃsaka* texts and other early Mahāyāna *sūtras* translated in Chinese where the names Vairocana and Rocana appear are usually transcribed as Piluzhena 毘盧遮那 and Lushena 盧舍那, but may also be translated as Bianzhao 遍照, i.e. “Universally Illuminating.” It would appear *prima facie* that Śubhākarasimha and Yixing were actually the first to translate Mahāvairocana as the “Great Sun” in Chinese ideograms 大日 (Ch. Dari; Jap. Dainichi), but this hypothesis needs further substantiation. My heartfelt thanks are extended to Rolf Giebel for the above references and his assistance in checking these occurrences in the Chinese Tripiṭaka.

APPENDIX B: Legends of the First (Seated) Buddha Image

In the early days of Buddhist art in India, “icons” of the Buddha are not represented and the artists or craftsmen used what is called “indexical” forms of representation, where an “index” indicates the physical trace of a missing object.¹ For example, in the same manner that smoke is indexical of fire, the *bodhi*-tree, a pair of footprints, or the “empty throne” can be indices of the Buddha in the early Buddhist carvings and low-reliefs at the sites of Bhārhut, Bodhgayā, Mathurā, Amarāvātī, or Sāñcī (**Chapter 3**).

In this appendix, however, I turn to examine some legendary traditions relating to the appearance of the “first” ever icon of the living Buddha. The legend is well known across Buddhist Asia and may have been created *a posteriori* to justify the production and worship of anthropomorphic icons of the Buddha. In brief, the story states that the statue was executed in sandalwood by the order of a pious king² when the Buddha went away on a preaching journey. But what exactly did the “sandalwood” model look like according to the literary evidence? Many observers have long pointed to the importance of the sandalwood statue’s presumed resemblance to the living Buddha. According to A.B. Griswold (1957: 17), this “likeness” indicated that the icon had ultimately inherited some part of the power of the Buddha himself through a series of copies extending back to the original sandalwood image.³ Moreover, as Angela Chiu aptly expresses, “the Sandalwood image was the progenitor of a lineage of images” (2012: 271). Naturally, the features on the imitations were not expected to be exact reproduction of the original. Only the model’s iconography (i.e. his posture and hand gesture) would be duplicated; the style, however, would depend much more on the training and experience of the craftsman than on the model and slight variations could thus be made from the original image.

¹ I use the terms “icon” and “index” following Charles Peirce’s famous semiological theory of signs (for a summary of which, see Atkin 2013). Accordingly, an icon most closely resembles the object it evokes, hence the “exact identity” of Buddha statues with the Buddha is sought.

² Diverse competing traditions and texts recount that this pious king was Udayana or Prasenajit. The two also appear together in perhaps the oldest version of the tale, from the *Ekottarāgama*, where Udayana has a sandalwood image and Prasenajit a gold image produced, in a kind of rivalry. For textual citations of this and various other sources in Chinese translation, see Soper 1959: 259ff. For more on King Udayana, said to have been either converted to Buddhism, Jainism or Hinduism, see Adaval 1970.

³ On sandalwood, a very precious wood found in India and Southeast Asia, known for its fragrance, and its medicinal qualities, see Gode 1961. Compared to stone or metal, wood is a living material, that is, it lives and dies, has diseases, is individualized, suffers like human beings and so on. In this light, a wooden icon probably has more chance to be perceived as a “living image” and perform miracles than a sculpture in stone.

Chinese Accounts

One of the best known accounts of the legend is probably the one found in Xuanzang's seventh-century *Datang Xiyuji (Record of the Western Regions During the Great Tang Dynasty)*. The great monk (602–664 CE) mentions a statue of Śākyamuni, said to have been commissioned by King Udayana, which he discovered at Kauśāmbī, North India. He describes the miraculous circumstances⁴ of its manufacturing as follows:

When the Tathâgata first arrived at complete enlightenment, he ascended up to heaven to preach the law for the benefit of his mother, and for three months remained absent. This king (i.e., Udâyana), thinking of him with affection, desired to have an image of his person; therefore he asked Mudgalyâyanaputra, by his spiritual power, to transport an artist to the heavenly mansions to observe the excellent marks of the Buddha's body, and carve a sandal-wood statue. When the Tathâgata returned from the heavenly palace, **the carved figure of sandal-wood arose** and saluted the Lord of the World. The Lord then graciously addressed it and said, "The work expected of you is to toil in the conversion of heretics and to lead in the way of religion future ages" (trans. Beal 1884: I, 235–236).

Xuanzang's report that the sandalwood image "arose" clearly indicates that the statue was originally "seated," not standing. The monk Faxian (337–ca 422 CE), who had previously travelled to India, but not to Kauśāmbī, also recounts the story in a similar way, albeit with King Prasenajit of Śrāvastī instead of Udayana (Deeg 2005: 297–301).⁵ The narrative thus takes place in the Jetavana monastery. Accordingly, when the Buddha returned from Trāyastriṃśa heaven after three months, he addressed these words to the sandalwood portrait when it miraculously descended from its elevated seat to salute the Master:

⁴ For a reflection on the "miraculous nature" of the Buddhist images seen by Xuanzang in India, see Brown 1998: 26–27; also Choi 2012 and 2015.

⁵ Xuanzang also confirms that he saw another sandalwood Buddha image in Śrāvastī made for Prasenajit, but that the latter got the idea from Udayana (Beal 1884: II, 4).

When Buddha on his return entered the vihâra, Buddha said to it, **“Return to your seat [還坐].** After I have attained to pari-nirvâna, you will serve as a pattern to the four classes of my disciples,” and on this the image returned to its seat. This was the very first of all the images (of Buddha), and that which men subsequently copied (Legge 1886: 57).⁶

In the same vein, Benjamin Rowland (1948: 183–184) interpreted a Gandhâran relief kept in the Peshawar Museum depicting a royal figure offering a seated Buddha statuette to a large preaching Buddha as the “gift of Udayana.” Martha Carter concurs but thinks that this scene should rather be identified as the “gift of Prasenajit” (1990: 8, n. 24). At any rate, persistent traditions relate that an early copy of the sandalwood Buddha image, often assumed to be of a standing type, eventually reached China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, and even, perhaps, Russia (Warner 2008; Terentyev 2010; Charleux 2011, 2013 and 2015).⁷ But as we have seen in **Chapter 6**, the argument that the first Buddha image, either carved at the order of King Udayana or Prasenajit, was actually thought to be seated finds further confirmation.

Southeast Asian Accounts

This legend of the first sandalwood Buddha image is also known in Southeast Asia, although the story differs in many respects and is always associated there with King Pasenadi the Kosalan (Skt, Prasenajit). The story is found for example in one Pali text from Sri Lanka, the *Kosalabimbavaṇṇanā* (Gombrich 1978), in a Khmer recension (Bizot 1994: 102–104; Thompson 1999: 437–440), and in a few vernacular Thai chronicles from Lanna, northern Thailand, known as *Tamnan Phra Kaenchan* (ed. Sanguan 1972: 68–88), *Tamnan Phra Chan Chao* (MS EFEO 005 012), and *Tamnan Phra Chan Phra Sing Phra Kaeo* (MSS EFEO 006

⁶ Another translation in English is as follows: **“Return, I pray you, to your seat.** After my Nirvâna you will be the model from which my followers shall carve their images” (trans. Beal 1884: xlv). We can see from both Legge and Beal’s translations that they treated the usage of *zuo* (坐) in *huanzuo* (還坐) in a nominal way as “seat” although one could also parse it as “to be seated.” I thank Minku Kim for this clarification. On this passage, see also Deeg 2005: 297ff.

⁷ For other literary sources and further references on the tale of the first image of the Buddha in South and East Asia, see Demiéville 1937: 210–211, Carter 1990, and Choi 2012: 61–72. In other legends, the Buddha portrait is simply projected onto a cloth as a painting (Skilling 2006: 228–229).

003 and 034 008).⁸ The Lanna chronicles composed locally extend the story to say that the image moved from India to the northern Thai region at the request of a certain king named Phraya Suwannaphum (Chiu 2012: 49–50, 270). The sandalwood Buddha image is said to have been installed at the Asoka monastery to the east of Chiang Mai for fifteen years but no longer exists (*ibid.*: 50, 83). From the foregoing, Chiu concludes that the story was certainly known in Lanna by at least the early sixteenth century (*ibid.*: 50), but she also reckons that a version of the story was probably already in circulation from a very early time in mainland Southeast Asia and that it may have even inspired the creation of other famous Buddha images and chronicles such as the seated Mahāmuni image of Rakhine/Arakan in Myanmar (*ibid.*: 204–205).

The same legend is incorporated into the *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājajātaka*, part of an “apocryphal collection” of Pali *jātakas* or so-called *Paññāsajātakā* (Jaini 1979). The latter composition is known in the Chiang Mai/Burmese recension (ed. Jaini 1983: 414–432; trans. Jaini 1986: 103–121), but a similar version is also found in palm-leaf manuscripts, written in Khom/Khmer script, from the central Thai region (ed. Unebe *et al.* 2007: 16–23). It is known there under the title *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājasuttavaṇṇanā* or “Exposition Sutta of the King with Tapering Finger.” These two versions are nearly identical in content, but, while the latter is described as an “Exposition Sutta” (*suttavaṇṇanā*) and starts with *evam me sutam*, i.e. “so it was heard by me,” followed by the narrative of the sandalwood image, the former is typically portrayed as a former-birth story, i.e. a *jātaka*. In both versions, however, the Buddha narrates to King Pasenadi the story of the Bodhisatta who once repaired a broken finger of a Buddha image. As a result, the Bodhisatta was reborn as King Vaṭṭaṅguli who could deter one hundred rival kings eager to attack him by the power of a single finger, hence his name. As far as I am aware, the *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājasuttavaṇṇanā* remains untranslated into English. Here I give the passage where the Buddha, after having returned from his journey, enters the royal dwelling of King Pasenadi and then approaches the sandalwood image:

*tasmim̐ khaṇe buddhapatimā satthāram̐ disvā
sajīvamānasammāsambuddhe dharamāne mayā evarūpe uccāsane
nisīditum̐ ayuttan ti cintetvā sattaratanasihāsanato otaritum
ārabbhi | atha bhagavā pana tam̐ disvā erāvanasoṇḍasadisam̐*

⁸ The EFEO manuscripts are still unpublished but now inventoried online in the database of Lanna Manuscripts: http://www.efeo.fr/lanna_manuscripts/. The legend is also summarized in the *Jinakālamālī* composed in Chiang Mai in the early sixteenth century. See Jayawickrama 1978: 174–180.

*dakkhiṇahattham pasāretvā nivāresi nisīdatu mā āvuso otari aham
na cīrasseva parinibbāyissāmi tvañ cāvuso pañcavassasahassāni
mama sāsanaṃ pālehi sabbalokathāyā ti sāsanaṃ paṭicchādesi | so
taṃ sutvā viya punāsane nisīdi* | (ed. Unebe et al. 2007: 17).

At that moment, **the [sandalwood] Buddha image**, upon seeing the Teacher, thought: “When there is a Perfectly Self-Enlightened One still living, it is unfitting for me to sit on a lofty seat (*uccāsane*) of this kind,” and **started to descend from the seven-jeweled^[9] lion throne** (*sattaratanasihāsanato*). Then, the Lord, upon seeing him, stretched out his right arm, that was similar to Erāvana’s trunk, restraining him, saying: “**Be seated; do not descend, friend.** I will very shortly attain *parinibbāna*, and you, friend, should guard my Sāsana for five thousand years for the benefit of the whole world,” thereby covering the Sāsana. As though hearing this, **he sat down once again on the throne** (my translation).¹⁰

It is important to note that in all these versions of the same tale the sandalwood image is clearly intended as a seated image, though his exact posture on the seat/throne (P. *āsana*) is not always precisely described and can only be conjectured. But in this regard, the Thai versions of the sandalwood image story add a significant detail concerning the image’s posture. For example, the relevant section from the *Tamnan Phra Kaenchan* reads:

At that time **the Buddha image** was totally as if alive. It signaled respect to the Lord Buddha when he entered and **extended its foot/feet down** [in order to arise] to receive Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha then prohibited it, saying: “Friend, **you should not come down from the throne**” [...]. At that time the **Buddha image raised its foot/feet** and sat on the throne as before (ed. Sanguan 1972: 71–72; my translation).

⁹ Gold, silver, pearls, rubies, lapis-lazuli, coral, and diamond (CPED).

¹⁰ I am grateful to Peter Masefield for his assistance in reading this passage.

To be sure, in Thai, it is not always clear if nouns are singular or plural. In this particular case, this gives rise to the question whether the image extended only one foot or two feet (Th. *bat*; P. *pāda*) when it began to descend from his throne. When describing this action, the above Thai texts use the words “เหยียดบาทลงมา” and “เลิกบาท ขึ้น,” which Hans Penth renders as “the image stretches its leg to descend from the pedestal” and “the image draws its leg up and returns to its former sitting position” (1994: 324). In other words, Penth assumes, probably with good reason, that the word *bat/pāda* referred to above should be singular. The edition and translation of the corresponding Pali passage by Padmanabh Jaini in the *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājajātaka* confirms this interpretation:

*evañ ca pana cintento viya eso bimbo sammāsambuddhasa’eva
gāravam karonto attano nisinnāsanā ekapādam nikkhipitva tatth’eva
āgatañ sammāsambuddham paccuggamanākāra dassesi ||* (ed. Jaini
1983: 425).

That image, as if thinking thus, appeared to be showing his respect to the Fully Enlightened One. He seemed to be about to go forth [to receive] the Buddha who had arrived there, **by raising one leg** (*ekapādam*) **from the seat upon which he was sitting** (trans. Jaini 1986: 115).

It is presumably this version of the tale which is still depicted in some unique modern mural paintings from Battambang, Cambodia, showing the sandalwood image stretching its leg down from the seat upon seeing the Buddha (Roveda 2009: 168).¹¹ Moreover, there are several standing Buddha images from Thailand that depict precisely this moment in the narrative when Lord Buddha forbids the sandalwood image from rising up from its seat. This iconographic type is traditionally known as “restraining the sandalwood image” (Khaisri 1996: cat. no. 37; Skilling 2007b: 81–82, figs 6, 8). Overall, given the fortune of the legend in different Buddhist regions and cultures and its plethora of variant versions and readings in diverse languages, a good case can be made that the posture of the first Buddha image was at times interpreted as seated with one or two legs pendant by a few artists/craftsmen in ancient

¹¹ It should be noted that although this posture with one leg down is often replicated by kings and Bodhisattvas throughout South and Southeast Asia, to my knowledge, it never is used for Buddha images except these modern painted examples.

times. Indeed, the legend of the first Buddha image was highly influential in first-millennium China as we have seen, for example, with the making of the mysterious and short-lived inscribed “King Udayana” sculptures of the Buddha, found in rather large numbers at the Longmen caves (*ca* 655–680 CE), and, importantly, all seated with both legs pendant (Revire 2012b; also **Chapter 6**).

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The Enthroned Buddha in Majesty: An Iconological Study

Abstract

This dissertation provides a detailed study of a particular representation of the Buddha, in which he sits on a prominent throne, i.e. a *bhadrapīṭha* or *bhadrāsana*, in a majestic posture with two legs pendant, that is, in *bhadrāsana* or the “auspicious pose.” This pendant-legged imagery, generally associated with the throne, has been found widely depicted in South, East, and Southeast Asian art and is, as a rule, mostly associated with kingship, fertility, and even divinity. The results of this iconological examination have wide implications for understanding the origins, spread, and development of Buddhist art in those lands, particularly during the first millennium CE.

Keywords: *bhadrāsana, Buddha, Buddhist art, dharmarāja, iconography, South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Throne*

Le Bouddha trônant en majesté : étude iconologique

Résumé

Cette thèse étudie en détail un type particulier de représentation du Bouddha où il est représenté assis sur un trône prééminent, le *bhadrapīṭha* ou *bhadrāsana*, dans une posture majestueuse avec les deux jambes pendantes, c'est-à-dire assis en *bhadrāsana* ou dans l'attitude « de bon augure ». Cette iconographie, étroitement associée à l'imagerie du trône, se retrouve largement représentée dans l'art de l'Asie du Sud, de l'Est et du Sud-Est, et est, en règle générale, intimement liée aux modèles de la royauté, de la fertilité, et même du divin. Plusieurs implications notables ressortent de cet examen iconologique concernant les origines, la diffusion, et le développement de l'art bouddhique dans ces contrées, particulièrement au cours du premier millénaire de notre ère.

Mots clés : *art bouddhique, Asie du Sud, Asie de l'Est, Asie du Sud-Est, bhadrāsana, Bouddha, dharmarāja, iconographie, trône*

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