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## Śabarās, the Vile Hunters in Heavenly Spheres

The Inhabitants of the Jungle in Indian Art, Especially in the Ajanta Paintings

Monika Zin, *München*

Ancient Indian society, which was based on the system of the four *varṇas*, considered the members of the *anārya* people, who did not belong to any *varṇa*, to be unclean. This social class consisted for the most part of inhabitants of the wilderness. If members of this class wanted to live alongside the members of the *varṇas*, they were allocated areas outside the towns and also assigned 'unclean' professions, such as road sweepers, leather-workers or executors of punishments (Bose 1940-1941:288). Contact with the members of these social classes was prohibited.<sup>1</sup>

### Buddhist sources

Buddhist canonical texts mention *hīnajātis*, low births, and list five of these several times, namely the births in the clans of the *caṇḍālakula*, *veṇakula*, *nesādakula*, *rathakārakula* and *pukkusakula*.<sup>2</sup> Three of these five, namely Caṇḍālas, Pukkusas (Paulkāsas) and Nesādas (Niṣādas), appear to designate purely ethnic groups; two others denote certain occupations (Bose 1940-1941:301).

The Buddhists have thus preserved the earlier view of the lower births, even if *hīnajātis* mentioned above are not intended as a damnation of the unclean people, but serve for digressions about having pity on them.

Of course, the monastic life was open to the members of the lowest births, as can be gathered from the songs of the *Theragāthā*, e.g., verses of the monk Sunīta, who was formerly a road sweeper.<sup>3</sup> The Bodhisatva<sup>4</sup> could be reborn as an outcast; in the *jātakas* that recount this, he even teaches kings.<sup>5</sup> The *Uddārajātaka* (no. 487, verses) also explicitly expresses that all classes, Khattiyas, Brahmanas, Vessa, Sudda, Caṇḍāla and Pukkusa, can attain *nirvāṇa*.

At the same time, however, the Buddhist tales contain direct statements about the reprehensibility of the outcasts. Thus the *Cittasambhūtajātaka* (no. 498, verses) holds that 'the lowest race to go upon two feet are the Caṇḍālas, meanest men on earth'. The texts contain many instances of the practice of untouchability; e.g., descriptions of people who wash out their eyes at the sight of a Caṇḍāla<sup>6</sup> or who turn their backs to the wind in order to prevent the air that has touched an outcast from tainting them.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, the people who act in this way are not religious Buddhists, but nevertheless their

behaviour is not called into question. The *Satadhammajātaka* (no. 179, prose) mentions a Brahman who dies of despair after eating the leftovers of the meal of a Caṇḍāla, who is the Bodhisatva. No comment is made on his reaction, as if it were understandable or even natural.

### Brahmanical sources

Buddhism was not the only factor responsible for the wavering attitude to the outcast; an ambivalent treatment can also be observed in the area of Brahmanism. The texts often follow the theoretical Brahmanical works, which stipulate the outcasts' exclusion, but they also mention completely different characteristics of the outcasts, especially with regard to the tribes living in the wilderness. As can be gathered from the *Kauṭīlīya Arthasāstra*, these tribes were of no small political importance, which explains the policy of the kingdoms to try to gain their favour and not to distance themselves from them.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative literature supports this attitude. Thus the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (KSS)<sup>9</sup> tells us that mem-

1 Bose 1940-1941:288, 291; Yamazaki 1997:12.

2 *Majjhimanikāya* 3.9 (129), ed. Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1925, vol. 3, p. 169; *Samyuttanikāya* 2.3.1, ed. Feer 1884-1904, Vol. 1, p. 9; *Anguttaranikāya* 3.13, ed. Morris and Hardy 1885-1910, Vol. 1, p. 107; 4.9.85, ed. Vol. 2, p. 85; 57.5, ed. Vol. 3, p. 385.

3 *Theragāthā* 602-631, ed. Oldenberg and Pischel 1883, pp. 63-64.

4 At the request of the author 'Bodhisatva' has been rendered with a single 'r' [ER].

5 E.g., *Chavakajātaka* (no. 309), prose, ed. Fausböll 1877-1897, Vol. 3, p. 27.

6 *Cittasambhūtajātaka* (no. 498), prose, ed. Vol. 4, pp. 390-391.

7 *Setaketujātaka* (no. 377), prose, ed. Vol. 3, p. 233.

8 Ruben 1957; Ritschl 1997.

9 *Kathāsaritsāgara* 12.70.19-21, transl. Penzer 1924-1928, Vol. 6, p. 25.

bers of the tribal chief's family were kept as hostages at *ārya* courts in order to guarantee peace. It would also ensure that the *ārya* kings could exert influence on the internal politics of the tribes and could cause the desired throne succession by force of arms.

The narrations about jungle inhabitants and their settlements in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* are imaginative. They describe not only simple dwelling houses, but also fantastic palaces decorated with elephant tusks and tiger skins,<sup>10</sup> such as the palace Karabhagrīva in the Vindhya mountains.<sup>11</sup>

The relations between those *varṇa* members who visited the tribes in the woods and the jungle inhabitants do not in the least correspond to the prescribed Brahman theories. Not only did the *varṇa* members enter the unfamiliar environment, they also spent quite some time there, speaking to the tribesmen and eating with them, 'though at a little distance' (KSS).<sup>12</sup> The visitors of the jungle kingdoms often cannot suppress their admiration for the jungle people, especially with regard to their beautiful women.<sup>13</sup>

The jungle tribes are given various names. We learn of Aṅgas, Pulindas, Niṣādas, Bhillas, Mātaṅgas, Kirātas, Caṇḍālas, Śābaras or Paulkasas (Law 1934-1935; Rönnow 1936). In the narrative literature some of these names are used interchangeably. Thus it seems that Mātaṅgas and Caṇḍālas perhaps denote the same people.<sup>14</sup> The names of the Pulindas and Bhillas are often interchanged; Śābara seems to be a generic term for many or even all tribal members.<sup>15</sup> Presumably originally each name designated a particular tribe, which even the ancient authors were unable to distinguish from each other.

Still, the descriptions are not stereotyped. The kings of certain groups have personal names in Sanskrit. These names reflect the fear they aroused, as they contain words such as '*rākṣasa*', '*piśāca*' or '*māyā*'. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* tells about Māyāvaṭu, king of the Bhillas, playing chess.<sup>16</sup> We hear of the king of the Kirātas, Śaktirākṣasa, who is interested in science, lives under a vow of chastity and presents his guests with precious stones.<sup>17</sup> And we are told about the black Mātaṅga King, Durgapiśāca, who was supposed to be unconquerable.<sup>18</sup>

In the descriptions of the jungle tribes bows often occur as weapons. The Mātaṅgas have an army of archers,<sup>19</sup> while Bhillas or Śābaras are also described as shooting arrows.<sup>20</sup> Caṇḍālas are mentioned as constituting an army, or as laying traps.<sup>21</sup> Only rarely do we find more precise descriptions of individuals. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* we learn that Śābaras or Bhillas were adorned with peacock feathers and ivory, and wore animal skins.<sup>22</sup> We are told of one man who tied his hair into a bun with a liana and wore a skirt of leaves.<sup>23</sup> The women wore peacock feathers and strings of beads of *guñjā* fruits.<sup>24</sup> The *Mahābhārata* contains a description of a Caṇḍāla

who is dark-skinned, with pointed ears.<sup>25</sup> In the *Harṣacarita* we read of a young Śābara who wears his hair tied up high and is adorned with rock crystal and parrot feathers. He has a broad face with watery eyes, a flat nose and a thick lower lip, plump cheeks and a bulging forehead, as well as a strong body deformed by constantly drawing his bow.<sup>26</sup> Finally, in the *Kādambarī* we read of a Śābara leader who has long curly hair and is wearing a snake as an ornament on one ear.<sup>27</sup>

### Ambivalence

The descriptions of the jungle inhabitants, their dwellings and their behaviour actually contain nothing that could justify the contempt for them as expressed in the Brahmanical theories. In fact, the opposite is the case; the tribal leaders and the organization of their kingdoms are described with admiration. There are many references acknowledging their knowledge of the jungle and their magical lore.<sup>28</sup> The opinions are so positive that the impression might arise that we are dealing with completely different Caṇḍālas or Mātaṅgas here, rather than with the 'underdogs' whose very sight makes one wash one's eyes out. This impression is misleading however, because even works that recount much good about the jungle tribes, still report on them as despised outcasts.<sup>29</sup>

This ambivalence in the attitude towards the jungle people was omnipresent. Certainly, contempt was felt, especially towards those who lived as foreigners in the societies of the kingdoms, where they were stigmatized as the progeny of the most despicable of all possible relationships, that of a Brahman woman and a Śūdra man.<sup>30</sup> In the jungle, however, where their origin did not have to be adapted to the system of the *varṇas*, these same tribal members were considered with respect. Generally speaking, a

10 KSS 18.123.49, transl. Vol. 9, p. 46.

11 KSS 12.102.55, transl. Vol. 7, p. 165.

12 KSS 12.102.115-116, transl. Vol. 7, p. 171.

13 E.g., KSS 10.59.26-27, transl. Vol. 5, p. 28.

14 Cp. e.g., *Vasudevahindī*, ed. Caturvijaya and Puṅyavijaya 1930, p. 156; transl. Jain 1977, p. 310.

15 E.g., KSS 10.59.41-45, transl. Vol. 5, p. 29.

16 KSS 12.71.290, transl. Vol. 6, p. 57.

17 KSS 12.102.29, transl. Vol. 7, pp. 164-165.

18 KSS 12.102.28, transl. Vol. 7, p. 164.

19 KSS 12.102.57, transl. Vol. 7, p. 166.

20 KSS 12.98.18, transl. Vol. 7, p. 117.

21 KSS 6.33.112, transl. Vol. 3, p. 116.

22 KSS 12.102.61, transl. Vol. 7, p. 167.

23 KSS 12.101.355, transl. Vol. 7, p. 158.

24 KSS 18.123.50, transl. Vol. 9, p. 46.

25 *Mahābhārata* 12.136.109-110, transl. Roy 1889-1896, Vol. 8, p. 238.

26 *Harṣacarita* 8, ed. Kane 1965, p. 70, transl. Cowell and Thomas 1961, pp. 230-231.

27 *Kādambarī*, ed. Kale 1968, pp. 55-56, transl. Kale 1968, p. 38.

28 E.g., *Ambajāta* (no. 474), ed. Vol. 4, pp. 200-207; KSS 18.123.38, transl. Vol. 9, p. 45.

29 Rönnow 1936:105; Sandesara 1988; Krottenthaler 1996:107.

30 Mukherjee 1974:8; Yamazaki 1997:10.

change in the relations to the tribespeople may be observed – a deterioration in the opinion about them: in the verses of the *Sāmajātaka* (no. 540) Śyāma is a *nesādaputto*; this was changed already by the additional *gāthās*, so that in Sanchi he is portrayed as the son of Brahman ascetics. In the *jātaka* prose, Śyāma is then miraculously born to the Brahman ascetics living in chastity and equipped by genii with magical abilities. The same is the case with non-Buddhist narrative motifs, where the outcasts are explained as genii under a magic spell, clearly because it was found impossible to provide any other explanation for the way the upper classes dealt with them as described in older sources.

### Jungle people portrayed in Hindu arts

One of the undoubted portrayals of the jungle people in the arts can be found in visual representations of the *Kairāta*-section in *Mahābhārata* 3.40. It describes how Śiva, in the guise of a Kirāta, tests the asceticism of Arjuna. According to the text the Kirāta, armed with a bow, came to Arjuna, who was meditating in the Himalayas, with a retinue of Kirātas and with Pārvatī, turned into a Kirāta woman.

Several depictions of this episode are preserved (Ramachandran 1950-1951). One of such images from Orissa (fig. 33.1) shows Śiva with a bow and Pārvatī with a sword and a shield.<sup>31</sup> The crown on Śiva's head is presumably meant to represent feathers, as corroborated through a comparison with a 16<sup>th</sup> century painting in Lepakshi (fig. 33.2).<sup>32</sup> In an image from Alampur (fig. 33.3)<sup>33</sup> Śiva has his hair tied into a bun. In the famous large relief at Mamallapuram, jungle people are also portrayed with their hair tied up like this (fig. 33.4).<sup>34</sup>

The jungle people rarely feature in older Hindu art, with the exception of the *Kairāta*-episode. They appear on some terracotta plaques, such as those



Fig. 33.2 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta. Lepakshi (AP), 16<sup>th</sup> cent. AD

from Paharpur that show a man with a bow, in a leaf-skirt and with his hair in a bun (fig. 33.5),<sup>35</sup> or a woman dressed in leaves and carrying a dead animal (fig. 33.6).<sup>36</sup>

### Buddhist representations

In Buddhist art the tribespeople feature more frequently. Apart from persons who obviously belong to the outcasts, such as the hunters, who nevertheless are shown with normal clothing, we encounter some



Fig. 33.1 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta. Svarṇajāleśvara Temple, Bhubaneswar (Orissa), 7<sup>th</sup> cent. AD

31 Svarṇajāleśvara Temple, Bhubaneswar, Orissa; Donaldson 1985-1987,3:pls 4160-4161.

32 Sivaramamurti 1975:fig. 153.

33 Khan 1973:fig. 95.

34 Goloubew 1921:pl. 40.

35 Das Gupta 1961:fig. 155.

36 Saraswati 1962:fig. 59.



Fig. 33.3 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta (?). Alampur (AP), Alampur Museum, 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD

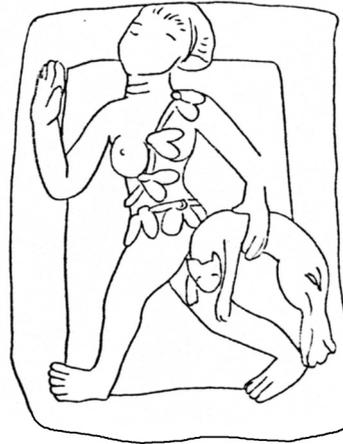


Fig. 33.6 Śabara woman carrying a dead animal. Paharpur, 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Indian Museum, Kolkata



Fig. 33.4 Śabaras. Mamallapuram, 7<sup>th</sup> cent. AD



Fig. 33.5 Śabara. Paharpur, 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD

people whose appearance allows to identify them as members of the tribes.

In the Ajanta paintings a couple of jungle inhabitants is depicted in the Śaḍḍanta tale in Cave 17 (pl. 33.1=fig. 33.7). The man here is armed with a dagger, a small bow and arrows, and is wearing

a loincloth; his female companion wears a belt of crude beads and a leaf loincloth covering her pubic region and her bottom. The jungle people portrayed here are looking at an elephant carcass; they are accompanied by jackals and scavenger birds.

We encounter a tribal hunter in another painting in Cave 17 (pl. 33.2=fig. 33.8). He can be recognized by his dark skin and his negroid facial features. The man is carrying a small bow and a net. The story that is depicted here casts a bad light on the hunter. It is the tale of King Sarvadada, a variation on the Śibi story: the dove which turns to the king for help was fleeing from the hunter, not from the falcon. The act of cutting out and weighing the flesh that the king sacrifices from his own body in exchange for the dove, emphasizes the repulsiveness of meat-eating and extends into the field of cannibalism. The tale of King Sarvadada is recorded for us only in its later versions, the oldest of which is documented in the *Bodhisatvāvadānakalpalatā* 55 (ed. Vaidya 1959) of the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. As the painting demonstrates, the tale was known earlier. There is a relief fragment from Amaravati in the Government Museum Chennai which portrays the same story (fig. 33.9).<sup>37</sup> The hunter carrying a net is presented here without any jewellery and with only a small cloth over his genitals.

The hunter's demand for the flesh may be portrayed as despicable, but the pictures show clearly that the fear of the sight of a Śabara, or even of the wind which had touched his body, is certainly not to be taken literally. After all, the outcast is standing in the midst of the court and the person standing closest to him in both depictions is none other than the royal minister – a Brahman.

37 Sivaramamurti 1942:pl. 28,1.

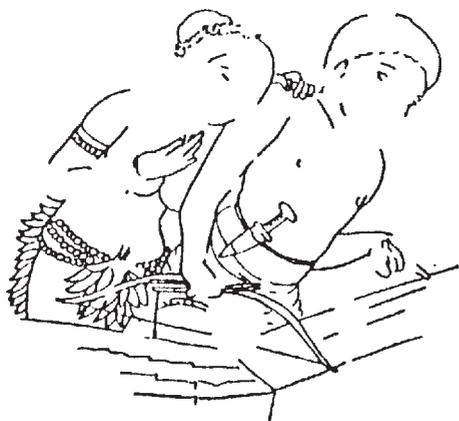


Fig. 33.7 Jungle inhabitants in the Śaddanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 17, left front wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.1



Fig. 33.8 A tribal hunter in the Sarvadada tale. Ajanta, Cave 17, left side wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.2

### Jungle people in the landscape

Apparently the presence of an outcast at court was conceivable, regardless of the Brahman purity regulations, Buddhist art also gives us a further indication: the tribespeople are also encountered in a superior environment, namely in the immediate vicinity of deities in the rocky landscapes surrounding the Bodhisatva kings in the Ajanta paintings. Each

Bodhisatva is depicted here in a landscape which contains beautiful *yakṣas*, flying *vidyādhara*s, cute dwarves and *kinnaras* playing music.

In one such landscape in Cave 1 (Zin 2003: no. 43) where the genii are not particularly well preserved, we find near one pair of *gandharvas* another couple – definitely not genii but the jungle people (pl. 33.3=fig. 33.10). The man has rather unkempt-looking hair and wears a piece of cloth around the genitals. His jewellery consists of a peacock feather on his bracelet and a little stick in his earlobe. He is holding a bow and arrows and is gazing lovingly at his female companion, who is sitting beside him with her hair falling loosely onto her shoulders.

The jungle couple in the picture is not the only example in Ajanta; similar couples appear in other landscapes. The people never look the same, nor are they dressed in the same way. The only invariable attribute is the small bow. Thus in the rocky landscape at the entrance to Cave 2 (Zin 2003:no. 42.4; here pl. 33.4=fig. 33.11), high up in the clouds, where the *brahmakāyikas* and the flying *vidyādhara*s are at home, we encounter another jungle couple (fig. 33.12). The man, standing lower, with a bow and arrow, is pointing at the Bodhisatva. The woman's hair is no longer preserved, and her jewellery consists merely of a simple band around her neck, while the man has a stick in his ear and a garland of small blossoms on his head.

The tribespeople are represented in the landscapes around the two Bodhisatvas on the rear wall of the verandah in Cave 17 too. The painting on the right-hand side contains fragments of a couple, which can be recognized in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century copy (pl. 33.5=fig. 33.13). The woman is wearing a garland of flowers or feathers and the man has the typical stick in his ear and is carrying a bow. On the verandah-wall, on the left-hand side (Zin 2003:no. 42.14) there is a corresponding couple (pl. 33.6=fig. 33.14). Here the man holds his weapon in his hand and he is carrying a child on his shoulders. His head is decorated with a band of pearls and peacock feathers; his garment is a piece of cloth over his genitals. The woman has been portrayed with some humour; she lays her hand on her head in order to show the child that it should hold on tight to the father's head. Her corpulent body, reminiscent of that of a dwarf, is adorned with some strings of large beads; her hair hangs loosely.

A different type of hairstyle for the jungle people can be seen in a landscape behind the Bodhisatva in Cave 11 (Zin 2003:no. 42.12; here pl. 33.7=fig. 33.15). At first sight the figures placed beside the *kinnaras* do not strike us as jungle people, because their hairstyle reminds us of the buns worn by the *jaṭila* ascetics. The arrows in the man's hand, however, give away his identity; the stripe on his belly



Fig. 33.9 Sarvadada tale. Amaravati, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD. Government Museum, Chennai

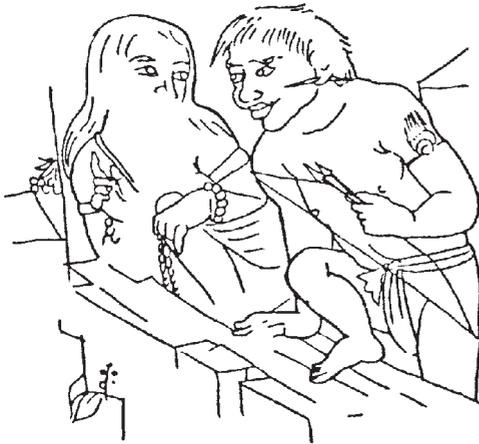


Fig. 33.10 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 1, ante-chamber, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.3

is probably the remains of his bow. The huge bun on the head corresponds to the hairstyle of Kirātas in Mamallapuram (fig. 33.4). Hardly anything remains of the Śabara's female companion, except for some jewellery on her arm and neck.

But what are the tribespeople doing in the landscapes of the Bodhisatvas? In order to answer this question another question must be posed first: why were these landscapes painted at all? Where does this tradition come from?

Part of the answer to this question can be found in Ajanta itself. A painting in Cave 10 (pl. 33.8=fig. 33.16), belonging to the earlier period (1<sup>st</sup> century BC), shows a landscape which is diminutive in comparison to the acting people. This landscape has no relevance for the presentation of the narrative other than as a scene-divider. The genii familiar to us from the rocky landscapes of later paintings are not shown here. Instead we see a pair of lovers, a scene with a man sitting above a lying woman and a couple of Śabarās, easily recognized by their bow.

The small section of painting from Cave 10 has no other function than to separate two narrative scenes, but in the relief art of approximately the same period there is an example which, in function and appearance, is reminiscent of the landscapes with the Bodhisatva kings in Ajanta. On the *torāna* of *Stūpa* 3 at Sanchi a landscape of a similar composition is depicted (fig. 33.17).<sup>38</sup> There is a god-king in the middle, who is surrounded by his court and is portrayed in a pavilion situated in a rocky landscape. The landscape contains genii, as encountered at Ajanta: *nāgas*, a *gandharva*, a *yakṣa* and a *yakṣiṇī*, a woman with the head of a horse and also a jungle inhabitant holding a bow and wearing feathers on his head. The example from Sanchi *Stūpa* 3 is not

38 Marshall and Foucher 1940,3:pl. 96.



Fig. 33.11 The landscape behind the Bodhisatva at the entrance to Ajanta, Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.4

the only one in ancient Indian art. A pair of tribespeople is also portrayed on the East *torāṇa* of Sanchi *Stūpa* 1 (fig. 33.18).<sup>39</sup>

Even if the kings at Ajanta do have the status of Bodhisatvas, their task is derived from the ancient tradition, and the function of the landscapes is exactly the same: these landscapes transfer the faithful to the paradisaical spheres and are therefore placed at the entrances in order to separate the holy area from the profane environment.

### Genii of the mountains

But what is the position of these sinister outcasts in paradise? The only possible answer seems to be to consider them as genii inhabiting the mysterious world of the mountains. *Kirātas* are described in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.5 beside the *kinnaras* in the



Fig. 33.13 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.5



Fig. 33.12 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Detail of pl. 33.4

mysterious environment at the source of the Ganges. In *Mahābhārata* 5.62.23-26 (transl. pp. 332-333) it is said that they are denied the privileges of the gods, because they perished in the attempt to steal from Kubera the nectar that gives eternal life. Perhaps the tribals were connected to a certain group of genii or even to several groups, or they formed the origin of a notion of some type of *devatās*. Perhaps they could live in caves (*guhās*) and thus become *guhayakas*, the

<sup>39</sup> Marshall and Foucher 1940,2:pl. 43.



Fig. 33.14 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.6

subjects of Kubera? The connection of the *guhyakas* to the pygmy-like people seems to be not without good reason. In a relief in Bharhut none other than the jungle inhabitants in their typical costumes of leaves and feathers are portrayed as the makers of the caves (fig. 33.19).<sup>40</sup> Perhaps they were the force behind the origin of the *vidyādharas* (Zin 2003: no. 16), because they knew medicinal herbs? The jungle people as experts on herbs are mentioned al-



Fig. 33.15 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 11, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.7

ready in Vedic literature. In the *Atharvaveda* 10.4.14 one snake-charming hymn mentions a Kirāta girl digging for herbs (antidote?) with a golden spade. The

<sup>40</sup> National Museum, New Delhi, acc. no. 68.163; ill. in Klimburg-Salter 1995:pl. 47.



Fig. 33.16 A tribal couple in the Śaḍdanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 10, right side wall, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC. Detail of pl. 33.8

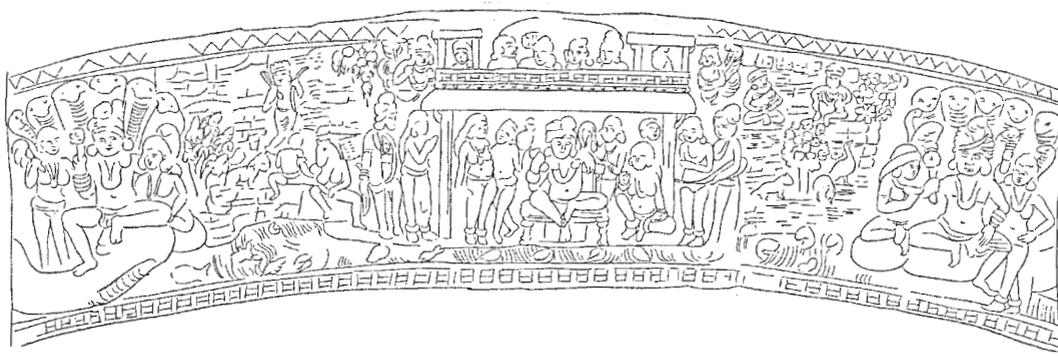


Fig. 33.17 Sanchi Stūpa 3, *torāṇa*, lower lintel, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD

later concepts of *mātaṅga-vidyādharas* or *śvapaka-vidyādharas* (in the *Bṛhatkathāślokaśaṃgraha* 16.3; 3.48) could have their origins in these beliefs.

Whereas the similarities of the tribespeople to the *guhyakas* or *vidyādharas* are based on presumptions, we can present solid proof of their link to other genii, namely the *kinnaras*. The first thing which must be said at this point is that the *kinnaras* as we know them today, as composite creatures, are not documented under this name in ancient times. This does not mean that composite beings were unknown. For example, a being with a horse's head appears since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, but only as a woman in scenes with a male human (Zin 2003:no. 24). Also, we never find any half-bird creatures as couples or playing music in ancient art, *i.e.*, with such features as are characteristic of *kinnaras* both in literature as well as in later art. The bird people of the ancient period correspond to those on the standards at Bharhut (Coomaraswamy 1956:figs 15-16) and must be equated with the *garuḍas*. Literature and inscriptions provide much evidence of *garuḍadhvajās*,<sup>41</sup> whilst a *kinnaradhvaja*, a *kinnara* standard, is not documented.

Ancient art has left us with a portrayal which proves that the iconography of the couples of composite beings was not established for a long time.

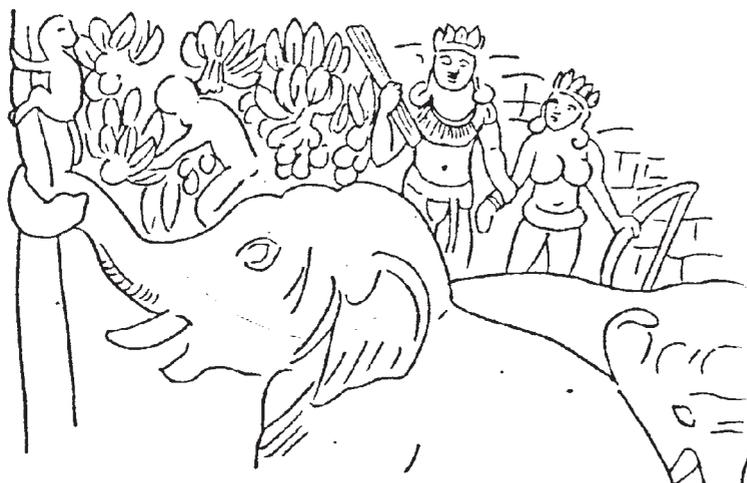


Fig. 33.18 Relief at the Sanchi Stūpa 1, East *torāṇa*, middle lintel, front side; 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC

The relief in the Rāṇī Gumphā at Udayagiri in Orissa – also a rocky landscape at the entrance, for that matter – depicts two beings for whom the name ‘*kinnara*’, (literally ‘what kind of person?’) ‘quasi-human’, would be most appropriate (fig. 33.20).<sup>42</sup> These beings are actually nude humans, but with excessively large ears and long monkey's tails. However, we do not know if these were the *kinnaras*, just as so much concerning the *kinnaras* is unknown. For instance, we do not know whether the names ‘*kinnara*’ and ‘*kimpuruṣa*’ originally designated the same species. In the lists they often appear beside each other (e.g., *Mahābhārata* 3.45.13); usually however they are used interchangeably. *Vānaras* are often named alongside *kinnaras*, perhaps not just because of the similarity of the words (Raven 1990), but because these were originally considered to be monkey-like. The word ‘*kimpuruṣa*’ seems to have been used more frequently in the older text levels, as for instance in the *jātaka* verses, whilst the commentary prose refers to ‘*kinnara*’.

The word ‘*kimpuruṣa*’ is documented in later Vedic literature, in the sacrificial ritual, in which it

41 E.g., *Mahābhārata* 7.57.2; Irwin 1975-1976.

42 Zimmer 1955:pl. 54.

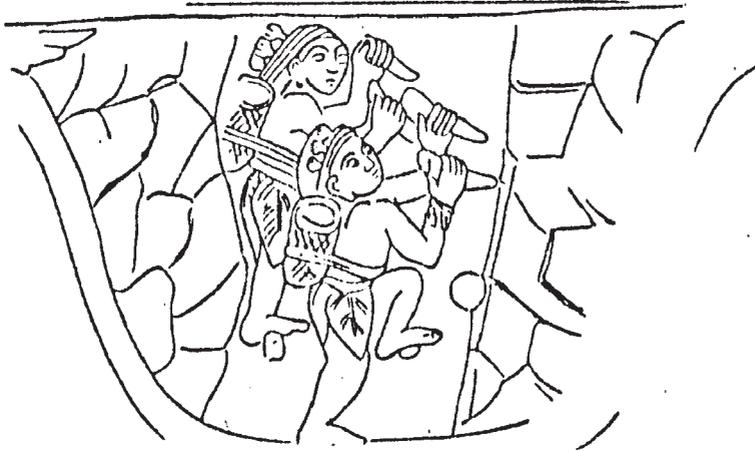


Fig. 33.19 Relief from Bharhut, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC; now National Museum, New Delhi



Fig. 33.20 Relief at the Rāṇī Gumphā, Udayagiri (Orissa), 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC

denotes the sacrificial animal.<sup>43</sup> The meaning of the word is not clarified; it is usually translated as ‘monkey’, but also as a ‘subhuman’ (Heesterman 1993:28). The fact that a monkey is not meant is evidenced by a reference from the *Vāja-saneyi-saṃhitā* 30.16, in which *kimpuruṣa* is named alongside hunters and fishermen; the *kirāta* is mentioned directly beside this.

The oldest narrative texts about the *kinnaras* or *kimpuruṣas*, the *jātaka* verses, make no statement about their composite form, but say that they are of human-like appearance, *mānusedehavaṇṇa*, and are both game and human, *migā va manusā va*.<sup>44</sup> In the *Candakinnarajātaka* (no. 485) we learn that a king fell in love with a *kinnarī* and shot her husband in order to have her for himself; in this case the woman could hardly have been a composite being. A depiction of this story in a relief from Gandhāra shows completely anthropomorphic beings.<sup>45</sup> This understanding of the *kinnaras* was obviously not unique, as proven by the tale of Prince Sudhana. His beloved

43 *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 7.5.2.32; for further references cp. Mylius 1976-1978:513.

44 *Bhallāṭiyajātaka* (no. 504), verse.

45 Indian Museum, Kolkata, acc. no. 5130; Majumdar 1937,2:pl. 6a.

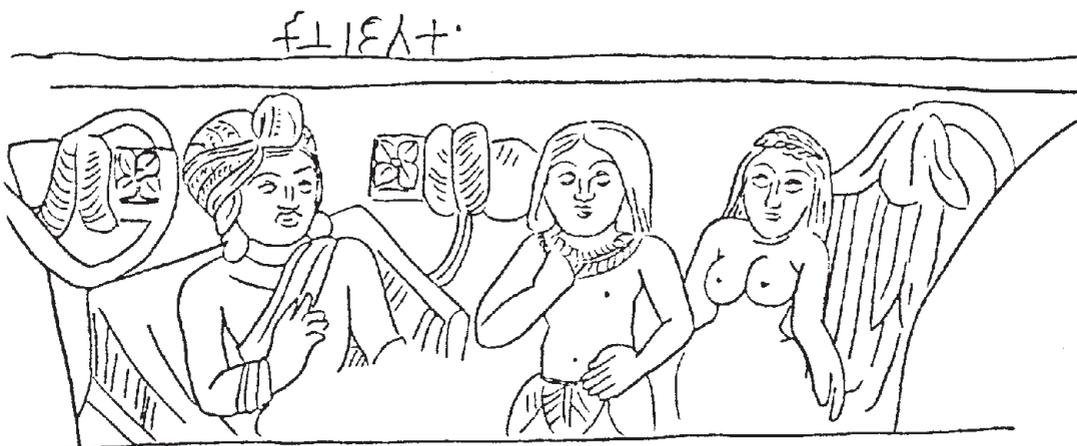


Fig. 33.21 Relief from Bharhut, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC. Now Indian Museum, Kolkata

wife, a *kinnarī*, is described in the *Divyāvadāna*<sup>46</sup> from head to toe as a human-like woman, and she is portrayed like this in art as well.<sup>47</sup> In the *Mahāum-magajātaka* (no. 546, verse)<sup>48</sup> we also hear of a relationship between a human and a *kimpurisā*; here however, it is cited as an example of something most inappropriate; the woman is called *miga*.

A Bharhut relief in the Indian Museum,<sup>49</sup> unfortunately very badly damaged (fig. 33.21), shows a scene with three persons: in front of a well-dressed man, seated on a chair, stand two smaller people, apparently a couple. Both of them have hair falling loosely and are without headwear. They are wearing necklaces of leaves and leaf skirts that are partly broken off today, but which were still preserved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as evident from a drawing published by Cunningham (1879:pl. 27.12, here fig. 33.22). The relief contains a typical element of Bharhut art: a wishing branch with pieces of jewellery growing out of it. This element is not part of the woman's figure or costume. Although the couple's legs are not preserved, the relief fragment offers sufficient clues that this is a couple belonging to the jungle people. The inscription above the relief, however, declares: 'kinarajātakaṃ'. The narrative portrayed here corresponds to the verses inserted into the *Takkāriyajātaka* (no. 481),<sup>50</sup> in which a *kinnara* couple, caught by a hunter, is presented to the king (Lüders 1963:135). Although they are instructed to sing, the *kinnaras* refuse out of fear. It is only when the king announces that they are nothing but game without the ability to talk, and orders them to be killed, that they speak.

Grünwedel (1900:47) had already recognized the indigenous people in these *kinnaras* / *kimpuruṣas* and pointed to the fact that the Sanskrit word 'parṇa', which means both 'leaf' and 'feather', had contributed to the change in the understanding of the *kinnaras*. Therefore it would be quite conceivable that the tribespeople in their leaf clothing, perhaps the

*kimpuruṣa* of the Vedic rituals, who since then had always been considered to be semi-human, in the course of time began to be portrayed like the composite beings with the lower body of a bird, following the example of the *garuḍa*.

The fact that the bird people were not originally part of the concept of the *kinnaras* can also be gathered from literary references. Thus a relief on the Candi Borobudur (fig. 33.23)<sup>51</sup> depicts the tale from the *Bhallaṭiyajātaka* (no. 504), which describes *kinnaras* who have been in mourning for centuries, because they were separated from each other for one night by a suddenly swollen river. The *kinnaras* are presented to us here in the familiar manner as composite beings, partly birds; in other words, in an iconography that came to be taken for granted in the course of time. The artists who created this picture took over the depiction of *kinnaras* usual in their time, viz., as flying creatures, without realizing that this contradicted the plot of the story – that of being separated by the flood.

What then are the jungle people doing in the paradisaical landscapes of the shrines? They simply belong there. The ancient pictorial tradition of depicting these 'quasi people' in the mountains has lasted longer than the newer iconography of the *kinnaras* as composite beings.

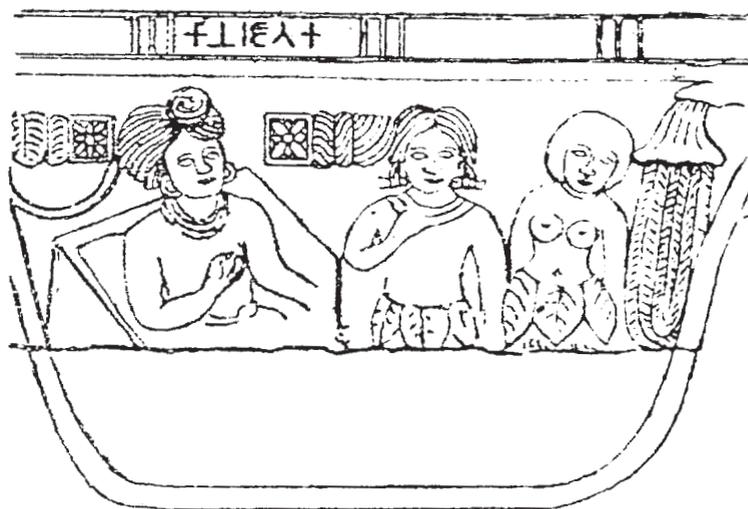


Fig. 33.22 = Cunningham 1879:pl. 27.12

46 *Divyāvadāna* 30, ed. Cowell and Neill 1886, p. 444.

47 Schlingloff 1973; 2000:no. 40.

48 Ed., Vol. 6, p. 422; transl. Vol. 1, p. 217.

49 Indian Museum, Kolkata, acc. no. A.112, Coomaraswamy 1956: fig. 242.

50 Ed. Vol. 4, p. 252, transl. Vol. 1, p. 159.

51 Krom 1927:245, 301-303; 1b, pl. 45.

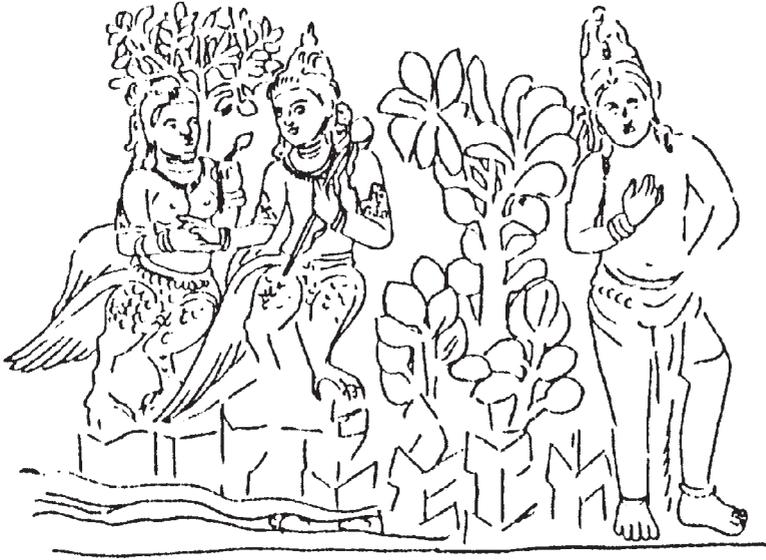


Fig. 33.23 Relief from the Borobudur, first gallery, lower row, 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD

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## Illustrations

### Text figures

Fig. 33.1 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta. Relief frieze on the Svarṇajāleśvara Temple, Bhubaneswar (Orissa), 7<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Donaldson 1985-1987,3:pl. 4160.

Fig. 33.2 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta. Detail from the wall painting at Lepakshi (Andhra Pradesh), 16<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Sivaramamurti 1975: fig. 153.

Fig. 33.3 Śiva in the guise of a Kirāta (?). Relief frieze, Alampur (Andhra Pradesh), Alampur Museum, 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Khan 1973:fig. 95.

Fig. 33.4 Śabaras. Detail of the relief at Mamallapuram, 7<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Goloubew 1921: pl. 40.

Fig. 33.5 Śabara. Terracotta plaque from Paharpur (Bengal), 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Das Gupta 1961:fig. 155.

Fig. 33.6 Śabara woman carrying a dead animal. Terracotta plaque from Paharpur (Bengal), 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Indian Museum, Kolkata; after Saraswati 1962:fig. 59.

Fig. 33.7 Jungle inhabitants in the Ṣaḍḍanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 17, left front wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after the copy by J. Griffith. Cp. pl. 33.1.

Fig. 33.8 A tribal hunter in the Sarvadada tale. Ajanta, Cave 17, left side wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after the copy by J. Griffith. Cp. pl. 33.2.

Fig. 33.9 Sarvadada tale. Stone relief, Amaravati, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD. Government Museum, Chennai; after Sivaramamurti 1942:pl. 28.1.

Fig. 33.10 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 1, ante-chamber, right rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.3.

Fig. 33.11 The landscape behind the Bodhisatva at the entrance to Ajanta, Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after the copy by J. Griffiths. Cp. pl. 33.4.

Fig. 33.12 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after the copy by J. Griffiths; detail of pl. 33.4.

Fig. 33.13 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, right rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.5.

Fig. 33.14 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, left rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.6.

Fig. 33.15 A tribal couple in the landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Ajanta, Cave 11, verandah, left rear wall; painting, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. pl. 33.7.

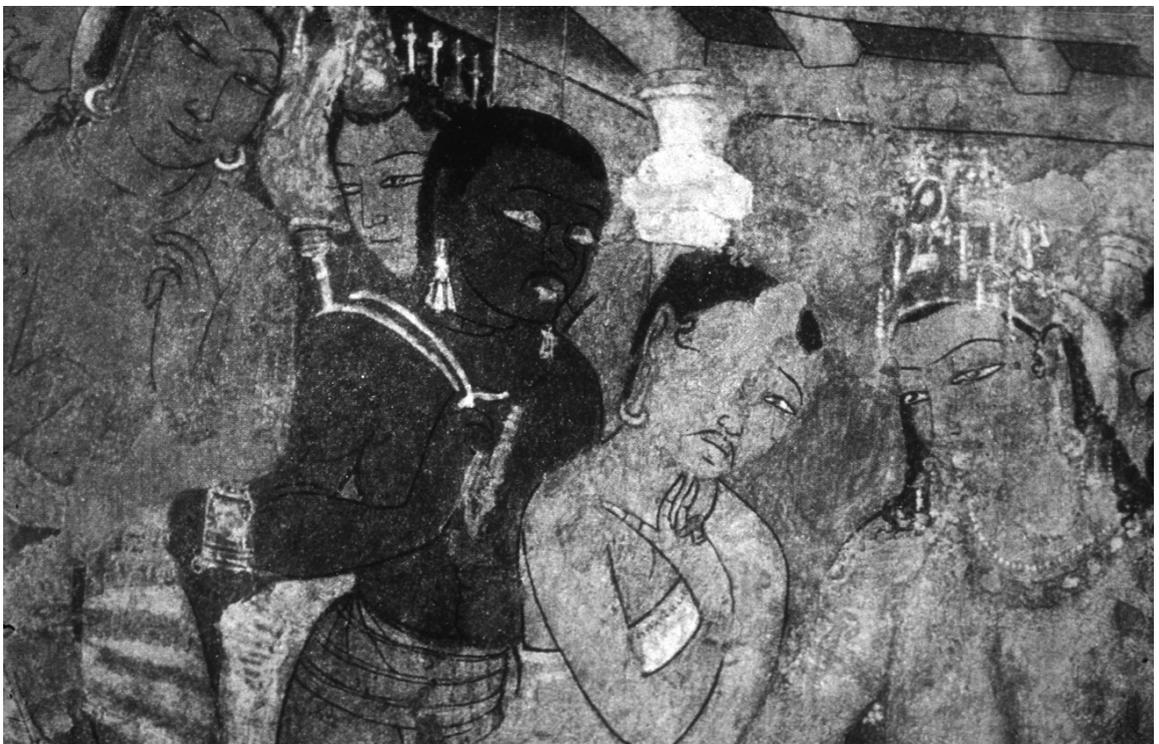
- Fig. 33.16 A tribal couple in the Ṣaddanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 10, right side wall; painting, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC (after the copy). Detail of pl. 33.8.
- Fig. 33.17 Sanchi *Stūpa* 3, *torāṇa*, lower lintel. Relief, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD; after Marshall and Foucher 1940,3:pl. 96.
- Fig. 33.18 Relief at Sanchi *Stūpa* 1, East *torāṇa*, middle lintel, front side; 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC; after Marshall and Foucher 1940,2:pl. 43.
- Fig. 33.19 Relief from Bharhut, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC; now National Museum, New Delhi, acc. no. 68.163; after Klimburg-Salter 1995:pl. 47.
- Fig. 33.20 Relief at the Rāṇī Gumphā, Udayagiri (Orissa); 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC; after Zimmer 1955:pl. 54.
- Fig. 33.21 Relief from Bharhut, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC. Now Indian Museum, Kolkata, acc. no. A.112; after Coomaraswamy 1956:fig. 242.
- Fig. 33.22 = Cunningham 1879:pl. 27.12.
- Fig. 33.23 Relief from the Borobudur, first gallery, lower row; 8<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; after Krom 1927:1b, pl. 45.
- Pl. 33.5 Fragments of a tribal couple in the landscape behind the two Bodhisatvas. Painting, Ajanta, verandah of Cave 17, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. After the copy by Griffiths (17G) in the V&A Museum, I.S., no. 86-1887. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 72, no. 6033; ill.: Yazdani 1930-1955,3:pls 71-72; Ghosh 1967:pls 64-65; Zin 2003:no. 21.6 (drawing). Cp. fig. 33.13.
- Pl. 33.6 A tribal couple in the painted landscape behind the two Bodhisatvas. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. After the copy by Griffiths (17D) in the V&A Museum, I.S., no. 41-1885. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 74, no. 6132; ill.: Griffiths 1896-1897,1:pl. 60; Yazdani 1930-1955,3:pls 67-68; Ghosh 1967:pls 59-60; Takata 2000,3:pl. C.17-3; Zin 2003:no. 21.5 (drawing). Cp. fig. 33.14.
- Pl. 33.7 Jungle people in a landscape behind the Bodhisatva. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 11, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. After the copy by Griffiths (11A) in the V&A Museum, London, I.S., no. 1-1892. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 75, no. 6150; ill.: Yazdani 1930-1955,3:pl. 39; Spink 1968:fig. 4; Zin 2003:no. 21.4. Cp. fig. 33.15.
- Pl. 33.8 Śabarās in the Ṣaddanta tale. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 10, right side wall, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC. After the copy by Griffiths (10B-C) in the V&A Museum, I.S., no. 19-1885; no. 34-1885. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 70, no. 5964-65; ill.: Griffiths 1896-1897,1:pl. 63 (tracing); Kramrisch 1937:pl. 1; Takata 2000,3:pl. C.10-5b; Zin 2003:no. 21.3 (drawing). Cp. fig. 33.16.

### Photographs

- Pl. 33.1 Jungle inhabitants in the Ṣaddanta tale. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 17, front transept, left front wall, 6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. A photograph of the present condition. Copy by Griffiths (17W). Photographs of the copy are kept in the India Office, British Library, London, Vol. B, pp. 21-23; ill.: Griffiths 1896-1897,1:pl. 63; Yazdani 1930-1955,4:Pls 10-12; cp. Schlingloff 2000:no. 28(3). Cp. fig. 33.7.
- Pl. 33.2 A tribal hunter. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 17, front transept, left side wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. A photograph of the present condition. Copy by Griffiths (17S) in the V&A Museum, London, I.S., no. 93-1887. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 73, no. 6093; ill.: Griffiths 1896-1897,1:pl. 64a; Yazdani 1930-1955,4:pl. 5; identified by Schlingloff 1987:89; cp. Schlingloff 2000:no. 48(1). Cp. fig. 33.8.
- Pl. 33.3 A couple of jungle people. Painting, Ajanta, Cave 1, ante-chamber, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. After the copy by Griffiths (1Y) in the V&A, I.S., no. 17-1885. Photographs of the copy in the V&A Museum, London and in India Office, Vol. 68, no. 5867; ill.: Yazdani 1930-1955,1:pl. 30; Okada and Nou 1991:20; Takata 2000,2:pl. C.1-18. Cp. fig. 33.10.
- Pl. 33.4 A rocky landscape. Painting, Ajanta, entrance to Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. After the copy by Griffiths (2A) in the V&A Museum, London, I.S., no. 21-1885. Photographs of the copy in the V&A and in India Office, Vol. 68, no. 5870; ill.: Griffiths 1896-1897,1:pl. 21; Yazdani 1930-1955,2:pls 7a-b; Zin 2003:no. 21.1 (drawing). Cp. fig. 33.11.



Pl. 33.1 Jungle inhabitants in the Śaḍdanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 17, front transept, left front wall, 6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.7



Pl. 33.2 A tribal hunter. Ajanta, Cave 17, front transept, left side wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.8



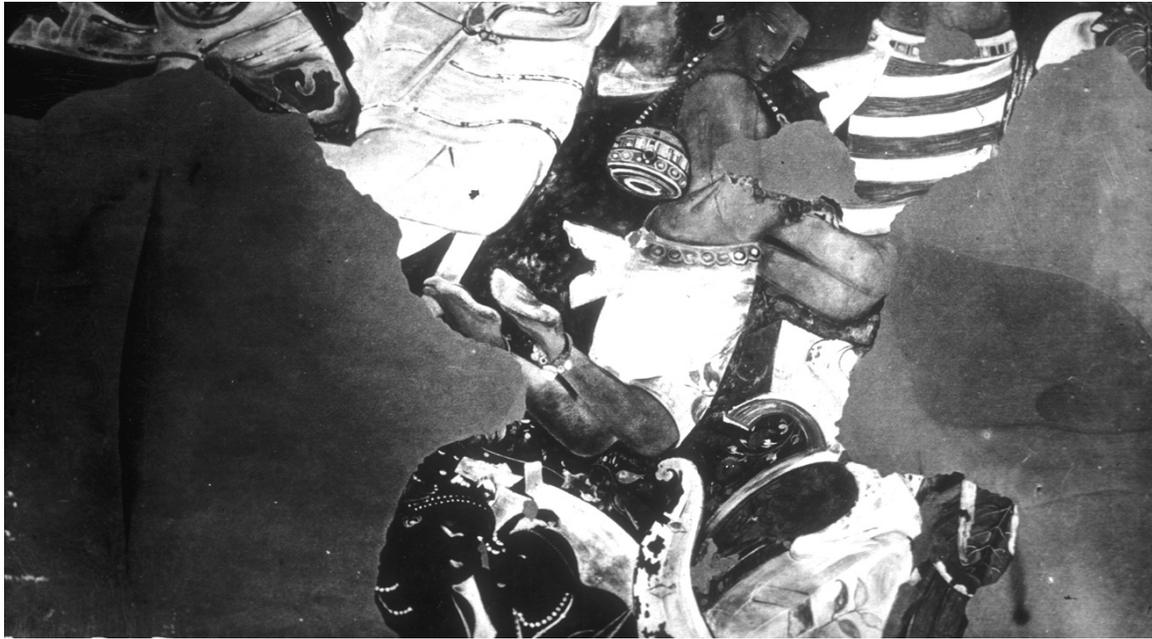
Pl. 33.3 A couple of jungle people. Ajanta, Cave 1, ante-chamber, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD.  
Cp. fig. 33.10



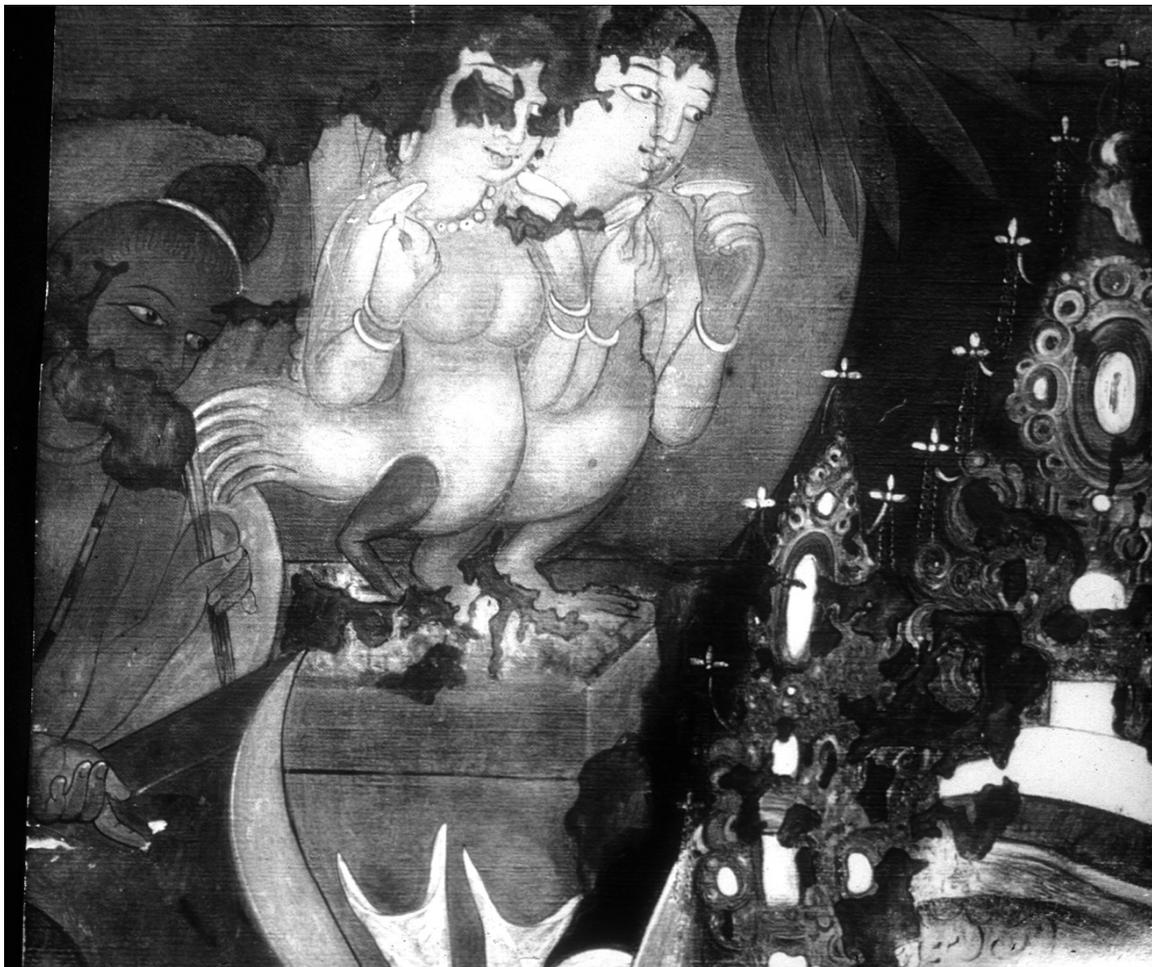
Pl. 33.4 A rocky landscape. Ajanta, entrance to Cave 2, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.11



Pl. 33.5 Fragments of a tribal couple in the landscape behind the two Bodhisattvas. Ajanta, verandah of Cave 17, right rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.13



Pl. 33.6 A tribal couple in the painted landscape behind the two Bodhisattvas. Ajanta, Cave 17, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.14



Pl. 33.7 Jungle people in a landscape behind the Bodhisattva. Ajanta, Cave 11, verandah, left rear wall, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. Cp. fig. 33.15



Pl. 33.8 Śābaras in the Śaḍdanta tale. Ajanta, Cave 10, right side wall, 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC. Cp. fig. 33.16