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The Identification of the Bagh Painting

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With the exception of the world-famous monastery caves of Ajanta, only few examples of paintings are preserved, that are suitable for conveying an impression of the development of the art of painting in ancient India ⁽¹⁾. The most important of these are the wall paintings in the Buddhist monastery complex of Bagh, a group of ten caves, situated approx. 300 km north of Ajanta, in the Vindhya mountains on the river Bagni (Bagh), which dates from the period 460-480, thus corresponding to the more recent Ajanta complex ⁽²⁾.

The similarities between certain motifs in the paintings in Bagh and Ajanta suggest that the paintings not only date from the same period, but could also be by the same school or even the same artists (Fig. 1a-b ⁽³⁾) ⁽⁴⁾.

Considering the high quality of the Bagh painting, it is very unfortunate that here, in contrast to Ajanta, only few remains have been preserved. Remains of murals are to be found in five caves (Caves II, III, IV, V and VII), but in most cases these are merely fragments of the ornamental decor or remains of the non-narrative paintings, which correspond to those of the Bodhisatva kings at the entrances to the cellas in Ajanta.

⁽¹⁾ A compilation of the sites, including a complete list of secondary literature, is to be found in D. Schlingloff, *Ajanta-Handbuch der Malerei/Handbook of the Paintings*, 1. *Erzählende Wandmalerei/Narrative Wall-Paintings*, Wiesbaden 2000, vol. 2, 'Bibliography', 4.1-4.23.

⁽²⁾ W. Spink ('Bāgh, A Study', *AAA*, 30, New York 1976-77, pp. 53-84) dates the Bagh caves to the period approx. 465-480.

The other treatises regarding the dating of the caves diverge from this view. For some researchers, the copper plate with the inscript of King Subandhu, found in Cave II in 1929, and the stupas in the cellas push the date backwards, but others date the caves as late as the 7th century, cf. V.V. Mirashi, 'The Age of the Bagh Caves', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 21, 2, Calcutta 1945, pp. 79-85; P.K. Agrawala, 'The Date of the Bagh Caves and Their Paintings', *Bharati*, 9, 2, Varanasi 1965-66, pp. 9-16; J. Anderson, 'Bagh Caves, Historical and Descriptive Analyses', *Marg*, 25, 3, Bombay 1972, 'Preliminary', pp. 17-20.

⁽³⁾ Fig. 1a: a detail from the ceiling ornamentation in Ajanta I (ill.: A. Ghosh, *Ajanta Murals*, New Delhi 1967, pl. 30); Fig. 1b: a detail from the wall ornamentation in Bagh IV (ill.: Anderson, *op. cit.*, 1972, fig. 42).

⁽⁴⁾ The comparison with better preserved motifs of the Ajanta paintings provides insights regarding the identification of the Bagh murals. The mushrooms in the ceiling painting of Cave IV, recognised by M.M. Payak ('Mushroom Paintings in Bagh Caves', *Roopa Lekha*, 55, 1-2, New Delhi



Fig. 1a-b.

The only painting in Bagh for which we can assume a narrative model is also the largest and is located on the exterior façade of the complex.

Description of the Painting and Previous Interpretations

The preserved part of the largest Bagh painting of approx. 13 m length reaches from the position of the right-hand window of Cave IV to the start of Cave V, thus filling the rear wall of the common veranda, once situated in front of the two caves, the existence of which is borne witness to today by a few remains of the 20 pillars. The collapse of the veranda at a time which can no longer be determined led to the exposure of the murals to the influence of the weather. The paintings preserved today are remnants of a composition which originally covered the whole wall of the veranda, but today only the parts covered by a protruding rock are preserved.

The painting was first mentioned in 1818⁽⁵⁾. The first detailed description by a Mr Impey was written in 1854⁽⁶⁾. Although several mistakes in interpretation were found in Impey's description, later to be corrected by J.Ph. Vogel in Marshall's book⁽⁷⁾, this description has been quoted again and again in works on Bagh, most

1984, pp. 41-47) can be much more convincingly explained as the special form of flowers or as ruler's emblems with parasols of honour – a motif also to be found in Ajanta XVII (ill.: J. Griffiths, *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave Temples of Ajanta*, London 1896-97, vol. 2, pl. 142.23).

⁽⁵⁾ W. Erskine informs in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, 2, London 1820, pp. 194-202 from the report of F. Dangerfield 'Some Account of the Caves Near Baug Called Panch Pandoo' from 1818. A copy of a ceiling painting is reproduced with the paper.

⁽⁶⁾ E. Impey, 'Description of the Caves of Bagh in Rath', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 5, Bombay 1856, pp. 543-73 (read 28th December 1854).

⁽⁷⁾ J.Ph. Vogel, 'Paintings', in J. Marshall, ed., *The Bagh Caves in the Gwalior State*, London 1927 (repr. 1978) pp. 46-63.

probably because the paintings themselves were fading rapidly and the first explanation had to be applied to some spots in order to provide any description at all.

Although all of these later descriptions emphasize the poor state of preservation of the paintings, it must be said that the remains are still discernible even today⁽⁸⁾, as, for example, the photographs of the South Asian Photo Collection show⁽⁹⁾. However, in the publications, usually the 1920s copies made by A.K. Haldar, N.L. Bose, S.N. Kar, A.B. Bhonsle, B.A. Apte, M.S. Bhand and V.B. Jagtap, which are kept in the Gwalior Museum and in the British Museum⁽¹⁰⁾ and are reproduced in their entirety as colour prints in Marshall's book⁽¹¹⁾, are reprinted.

The redrawings in this essay (Fig. 2), taken from Marshall's publication, were made by Bose, Haldar, Kar and Apte, on the basis of this original copy; they verify the descriptions given by Impey and Vogel, which run from left to right and can be summarized as follows:

- Two women seated inside a building are mourning; the woman on the right is holding an object, presumably a cloth, in front of her tear-stained face.
- Four male persons are seated in conversation together; the two in the middle, obviously the protagonists, are somewhat bigger, the person on the left is particularly richly decorated with jewellery. Beneath the two persons seated on the left is yet another, much smaller person, according to Vogel it is 'of blue colour – it must be either a child or a dwarf [...]'⁽¹²⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ The description, the copies and illustrations were of the upper part of the painting. Impey writes that the wall contained two rows of murals: 'At one time the whole front of this has been covered with paintings about the natural height, in a double row, one set above the other, and the surface extant of the work thus elaborately depicted must have been at least 3,000 feet' (1856, p. 561). Obviously, even then, nothing remained of the lower row. The description does not even suggest whether the lower row portrayed persons or ornamental work. The remains of the painting on the north side of Cave IV, i.e. to the left of the entrance door, on the left-hand side of the former veranda, seem, in contrast, to have actually contained at least two rows. The description implies that the figures here were 'much smaller' and were grouped around the central 'Buddh'. 'The commencement of the upper row resembles the healing of the sick: one lean man is sitting and another lying down, their limbs emaciated, while a third seems to be carried before a fourth figure, who appears to be advising them. Two females next occur in a mourning attitude, preceded by a child in glee; then four dancing figures, and another child running, but looking backwards; this borders on the figure of Buddh referred to. The lower row is excessively indistinct, the heads only being traceable satisfactorily; none can be continued: there is one, however, a female with a child at her feet, evidently praying to the figure of Buddh above described' (*ibid.*, p. 565). In my opinion the painting could have depicted not the Buddha but Avalokiteśvara, the so-called Saviour, i.e. the Bodhisatva, surrounded by small scenes with people in various difficulties. Such paintings are to be found in Ajanta in Caves II, VI and XVII (ill.: G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Oxford 1930-55, vol. 2, pl. 28b and vol. 4, p. 4a).

⁽⁹⁾ *South Asian Archaeology Photo Collection*, no. 1081, 5:11-5:21.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cf. M.B. Garde, 'Miscellaneous Notes on Bagh Caves', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁽¹¹⁾ Marshall, *op. cit.*, pl. A-I.

⁽¹²⁾ Vogel, 'Paintings', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 48.



Fig. 2.

– Continuing towards the right, the following section of the painting is divided horizontally into two scenes: below we can discern the upper bodies of five women, the second from the left is holding a mandolin-shaped *vīṇā*; in the scene above, six bald male persons are portrayed flying through the clouds.

– Immediately to the right we see a scene showing in the centre a man with a collared costume and a cap, who is dancing to the music played by seven women (three women are holding cymbals, three others have sticks and one is playing a drum).

– The same event is repeated in the scene, to the right again ⁽¹³⁾; here, too, a man is dancing, surrounded by female musicians. There are only slight differences compared with the previous scene: here the dancer has no cap on and the female orchestra consists of only six women.

– The following two scenes are separated from the dancing scenes by a wall ⁽¹⁴⁾ and separated from each other by a conventionally portrayed rock formation. The first of these two scenes shows a procession of many horsemen. The king is in the centre, marked by a parasol of honour, and is accompanied by an archer walking in front of him. (On the basis of comparisons with similar scenes in Ajanta ⁽¹⁵⁾, we can assume that in this scene the armed infantry accompanying the cavalry was portrayed in the lower section of the picture).

– The next scene to the right portrays another army procession, moving in the same direction as the previous one, but in this case the participants are riding on elephants instead of horses. The king, again with a parasol of honour held over him ⁽¹⁶⁾, rides at the head of the procession; at the end come three women seated on an elephant led by a mahout.

– Next to this, the copy of the painting only shows a gate, which probably served merely as a scene divider, and behind this the remains of another elephant, led by a mahout, which, however, here is facing in the opposite direction, that is, to

⁽¹³⁾ In *Marg*, 25, 3 (Anonymous, 'Portfolio: Bagh Plates', p. 10) the hypothesis is stated, that the left scene originated earlier than the one on the right. This assumption has nothing to justify it. The author's subjective impressions that the dancer on the left is 'polished' and the dancer on the right 'signifies a folk presence', are as little based on fact as the statements: 'It is likely that while the painter of the left-hand side panel was in touch with the court poetry, the artist who elaborated the second scene had a more vague apperception of the poet Kalidasa'. The composition of the painting is most certainly planned and there is nothing to indicate later additions.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Vogel saw the remains of a two-line inscription in Gupta script under the wall. 'Only one letter is plainly visible, it is a looped *ka*, apparently the concluding letter of the first line. In front of it there are traces of another letter which can no longer be identified, but seems to be provided with the vowel-mark *e*' (*op. cit.*, p. 51). Garde (*op. cit.*, p. 22) dates the letter to the 6th or 7th century.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ajanta I, left side wall, Janaka story, redrawing and records of illustrations in Schlingloff, *op. cit.*, no. 45(4), p. 223; Ajanta II, right side wall, Vidhura story, cf. *ibid.*, no. 37(14), p. 172; Ajanta XVII, left side wall, Viśvantara story, cf. *ibid.*, no. 43(1), p. 217; Ajanta XVII, right side wall, Śibi story, cf. *ibid.*, no. 49(4), p. 240.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The figure of the king and his riding elephant, not originally in the redrawing, was added in accordance with the copy, ill. in Marshall, *op. cit.*, pl. H and in *Marg*, 25, 3, 1972, panel 6, facing p. 9.

the right. In order to understand this scene in its entirety we must refer to the old description. Vogel's (who had seen the painting) corrected version of Impey's text tells that the part which is preserved in copy belongs to a scene in which elephants and horses stop at a tree honoured by flags and a cakra; under the tree stood 'two small frames or stands containing some drinking vessels and a gourd' (17).

– Further to the right there was, according to Impey's description, another tree, under which two male persons were shown sitting. One of them, an ascetic or monk (incorrectly designated as 'Buddh' by Impey) (18), was teaching a man seated beside him, about whose appearance we know nothing, as already at the time the descriptions were made, only a part of his face and a hand were preserved.

Most of the descriptions of this painting are restricted to an aesthetic appreciation of this portrayal, which is truly distinguished by the highest quality (19). However the contents of the paintings had not been identified. Vogel contented himself with the comment that the painting probably did not show a story from the life of the Buddha, but a Jātaka or Avadāna (20). Debala Mitra was of the opinion that we have here 'depicted a string of seemingly unconnected narratives' (21). To date, only two attempts have been made to link the painting to a literary model; however, neither of these attempts is sound. In 1928, on the occasion of the debate on the book published by Marshall, Ghose attempted to explain the scene as being a portrayal of the Buddha legend (22), even though in the book under discussion, Vogel himself had mentioned the person whom Impey named as 'Buddh', as wearing 'little blue adornments' and being without the 'characteristic marks of the Buddha' (23). In 1972 Anderson, without even attempting to provide evidence to support his assertion, made the claim that the scenes showed the Mahājanaka story (24), solely on the basis of the similarity with the dancing scenes in the well-known Mahājanaka painting in Cave I of Ajanta.

(17) Impey, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

(18) Impey himself was not quite certain of his identification, he writes: 'He differs from Buddhist figures in general in being *without curly hair...*', *ibid.*, p. 564.

(19) C.E. Luard, 'The Buddhist Caves in Central India', *Indian Antiquary*, 39, Bombay 1910, pp. 225-35; A.K. Haldar, 'The Paintings of Bagh Caves', *Rupam*, 2, 8, Calcutta 1921, pp. 12-19; C.L. Luard, 'Les grottes de Bagh et leur fresques', *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, 3, 1, Paris 1926; E.B. Havel, 'Notes on the Paintings', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-67; J.H. Cousins, 'Aesthetical', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-74; S. Sezai, 'On the Art of the Bāgh Caves in India', *The Kokka*, 481-482, Tokyo 1930-31; M. Carelli, 'Le grotte di Bagh e le loro pitture', *Asiatica*, 4, 2, Roma 1940, pp. 81-89; M.R. Anand, 'Rhythm of Dance and Music in the Bagh Caves', *Marg*, 25, 3, Bombay 1972, pp. 2-16.

(20) Vogel, 'Paintings', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

(21) D. Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, Calcutta 1971, p. 101.

(22) A. Ghose, 'The Bagh Cave Frescoes, A Review', *Rupam*, 33-34, Calcutta 1928, pp. 16-22. The scenes of the painting are supposed to portray the events of leaving Kapilavastu, as recounted in *Buddhacarita*.

(23) Vogel, 'Paintings', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

(24) Anderson, 'Bagh Caves...', *cit.*, p. 44: 'the surviving painting seems to illustrate the court life and events that accompanied King Mahajanaka's renunciation, as recorded in the Jataka [...] from the

In our attempt to analyse the various truly plausible identifications of this painting, we will disregard both of these purely speculative interpretations.

Analysis of the Evidence for Identification

In the painting, one figure can be identified unambiguously and unquestionably: one of the two persons shown in conversation in the second scene from the left is with certainty the god Indra. His elaborately-worked, basket-shaped crown cannot be confused with any other royal headwear and corresponds exactly to the shape of the Indra crown in the Ajanta paintings (Fig. 3a-c) ⁽²⁵⁾. A further unmistakable sign that this person is Indra is the small figure, called a child or dwarf by Vogel, seated to the left at Indra's right knee. This figure displays a strange growth on its head (Vogel: 'curious white crest, trefoil-shaped') ⁽²⁶⁾. This person can be none other than Vajrapuruṣa – the personified weapon of Indra, also shown occasionally in other schools of art, sometimes in the form of a fat dwarf (Fig. 4a-c) ⁽²⁷⁾.



Fig. 3a-c.

The fact that we have identified Indra in the painting greatly narrows the range of possible interpretations. The explanation must lie in one of two areas: either it is a narration, in which Indra is discussing an earthly event with another god, namely

appearance of the Mahajanaka Jataka on the left and back walls of the later Ajanta I, we see that this Jataka was thought suitable for illustration and was depicted in the "narrative-recall" scenes; and that these paintings in Ajanta I do show similar events as those before Bagh Caves IV and V'. Apart from this observation, Anderson's study is devoted to the detailed analysis of the composition of the painting and not to its content.

⁽²⁵⁾ Fig. 3a: Ajanta IX, rear wall, story of the conversion of the Kāśyapas, illustration records in Schlingloff, *op. cit.*, no. 67(6), p. 397; Fig. 3b: Ajanta II, left side wall, the birth of the Buddha, cf. *ibid.*, no. 65(9), p. 382; Fig. 3c: Ajanta XVI, front transept, right front wall, depiction of the Kumbha narrative, cf. *ibid.*, no. 62(4), p. 294. A complete list of the illustrations of Indra in the Ajanta paintings: *ibid.*, vol. 2, 'Index of Pictorial Elements', p. 122.

⁽²⁶⁾ Vogel, 'Paintings', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁽²⁷⁾ Fig. 4a: a detail of the Bagh painting; Fig. 4b: a detail of a relief in Nagarjunikonda (ill.: Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, Delhi 1994, fig. 218); Fig. 4c: a detail of a relief from Kanheri XL (ill.: S. Soto, *The Cave Temples of India*, Tokyo 1985, fig. 124 [mirror-inverted]).

For Vajrapuruṣa as Vajrapāṇi's escort cf. G. Bhattacharya, 'The Buddhist Deity Vajrapāṇi', *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, 4, Kamakura 1995-96, pp. 323-54.



Fig. 4a-c.

Viśvakarman, probably about how they could test the virtue of a mortal, King Śibi⁽²⁸⁾ for example, or it is a conversation between Indra and a mortal himself.

For the first proposal the painting offers us no further clues, which could be connected to known narrative material, so that here one would have to revert to speculations which cannot be proven. In order to avoid such speculations, the interpretation should be based on an observation which provides the key to the comprehension of the painting: more than half of the preserved painting shows a procession moving from right to left, which implies that the scenes of the painting should be read from right to left and not, as the common descriptions of the scenes since Impey have assumed, from left to right.

This means, therefore, that the two scenes of the army procession take place before the Indra conversation and that this scene takes place in heaven, because in the scene beside it we see gods flying through the clouds.

The number of stories in which mortals enter heaven and speak to Indra is, as the texts themselves tell us⁽²⁹⁾, very small; indeed, in connection with the royal army procession⁽³⁰⁾ there is only one story by which the painting can be identified and, in addition, this identification is confirmed by numerous parallel portrayals: the earthly king, who goes to Indra's heaven and sits there in conversation with the king of the gods at the same height and of the same rank, is the ideal ruler Māndhātara.

⁽²⁸⁾ Ajanta I, front transept, left front wall, redrawing and sources of illustrations in Schlingloff, *op. cit.*, no. 46 (1), and Ajanta II, front transept, right side wall, cf. *ibid.*, no. 47(1).

⁽²⁹⁾ According to *Milindapañha* I. 4 (ed. p. 115; transl. vol. 1, p. 161) and VIII. 3 (ed. p. 291; transl. vol. 2, p. 119) only four people went to heaven while alive: Guttila, Sādhina, Nimi and Mandhātara.

⁽³⁰⁾ Of those listed above, Guttila (Jātaka, no. 248) was not a king, and the kings Sādhina (Jātaka, no. 494) and Nimi (Jātaka, no. 541) went to heaven not accompanied by a procession, but in Indra's chariot, driven by Mātali.

Overview of the Narratives about King Māndhātara

The narrative about Māndhātara/Māndhātara/Māndhātara/Māndhātara/Māndhātara is known from numerous literary sources and is presumably very old. Already in Vedic literature Māndhātara was linked with the figures who later appeared in the narrative, even though his story is not recounted. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* ⁽³¹⁾ calls him Māndhātara Yauvanāśva – descendant of Yuvanāśva, who in the whole of the epic tradition is held to be Māndhātara's father; *Ṛgveda* I ⁽³²⁾ links Māndhātara with the Aśvins, who are supposed to have helped him gain possession of land (*ḷṣatra*). Although this story is not found in the later tradition, the Aśvins are later still mentioned as those who provided surgical aid at Māndhātara's birth out of his father's body ⁽³³⁾. This motif of such an unnatural birth, which is common in the relevant literature, possibly originates from the attempts to give the name Māndhātara an etymological explanation: only if Māndhātara had no mother to feed him, could the others – the gods with Indra in the Brahman tradition and the women in the Buddhist version – call out *mām dhātu* 'he should suckle on me!'; a call which is supposed to be the reason for giving him this name ⁽³⁴⁾. In the Brahman tradition Māndhātara emerges from his father's, Yuvanāśva's, side at his birth ⁽³⁵⁾, the Buddhists, who also called him Mūrdhāta and Mūrdhaja, have him emerging from his father's, here called Upoṣatha ⁽³⁶⁾, growth head ⁽³⁷⁾. Where the events which led

⁽³¹⁾ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, I. 2, 10, ed. p. 43.

⁽³²⁾ *Ṛgveda* I. 112.13 (ed. p. 490): *yābhiḥ Sūryam pari-yātabḥ parāvati Māndhātaram ḷṣaitrapatyēṣu āvatam/ yābhir vipram pra Bharadvājamāvatam tābhir ūṣu ātibhir Aśvināgataḥ //*

⁽³³⁾ *Mahābhārata* VII, App. I. 8 (529), p. 1101; transl. vol. 6 as chapter 62, p. 120: *yaṃ devāv Aśvinau garbhāt pituḥ pūrvam cakaraṣatuḥ/*

⁽³⁴⁾ *Mahābhārata* III. 126.28 (ed. pp. 415-16; transl. p. 464): *mām ayaṃ dhāsyatīty evam paribhāṣṭaḥ sa Vajriṇā/ Māndhāteti ca nāmāsyā cakruḥ sendrā divaukasah//* Similarly in *Mahābhārata* VII (App. I. 8 (535), ed. p. 1101; transl. p. 120) and XII. 29.77 (ed. p. 118; transl. vol. 8, p. 58): *mām eva dhāsyatīty evam Indro abhyavadyata/ Māndhāteti tatas tasya nāma cakre Śatakratuḥ//*

In the Buddhist versions the newborn child is taken to the women's chambers: *ekaikā strī kathayati mām dhāya mām dhāya iti/ tasya Māndhātā Māndhāteti saṃjñā saṃvṛtā/* (*Gilgit Mss*, III. 1, ed., p. 93, exactly the same in *Divyavadāna* XVII, ed. p. 210), similarly in *Bodhisattvavadānakalpalatā* IV, 15 (ed. p. 39): *mām dhārayiṣyati śiśuḥ ślādhyo 'yaṃ jananīpade/ iti tāsām mitho vākyaḥ Māndhātābhūn nṛpātmaḥ; T 165*, the text which mentions Māndhātara as 'the king born from the head', says only that the king's 60,000 female servants got milk after seeing the newborn child (p. 393b).

⁽³⁵⁾ *vāmaṃ pārśvam vinirbhīdya* – *Mahābhārata* III, 126, 25 (ed. p. 415; transl., p. 464), the child is born after a pregnancy lasting 100 years.

⁽³⁶⁾ In some Buddhist references lists of Māndhātara's genealogies can be found, e.g. in *Mahāvastu*, ed. vol. 1, p. 348.

⁽³⁷⁾ The child is born from a pure and painless ulcer: *Upoṣadasya rājño mūrdhni piṭṭako jāto mṛduḥ sumṛḍus tadyathā tūlapicur vā karpāsapicur vā na kaṃcid ābādham janayati* (*Divyavadāna* XVII, ed. p. 210, *Gilgit Mss*, III, 1, p. 92; *Bodhisattvavadānakalpalatā*, IV. 13-14, ed. p. 38; *T 165*, p. 393b; *T 202* = *Der Weise und der Thor*, transl. I.J. Schmidt, St. Petersburg 1843, p. 370). The motif is only told in Sanskrit tradition. Māndhātara is also mentioned in lists of extraordinary births, as having been born from the head: *Buddhacarita* (Chinese) I. 10 and I. 29 (transl. pp. 2-3, 6).

to this unusual pregnancy are recounted, we are told about the water prepared by ascetics ⁽³⁸⁾, or, respectively about the butter ⁽³⁹⁾, which was actually meant for his wife and which the king only drank by mistake.

The version of the story in the epics emphasises the figure of Māndhātara as the ideal ruler, who only did good in his life and was equal to Indra ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The Ṛṣis, who made the water to create the pregnancy, had already intended to create a child that would be capable of fighting against Indra ⁽⁴¹⁾. After the birth, Indra gives the new-born child his finger to suck, thus giving him great growth and strength ⁽⁴²⁾. As an adult, Māndhātara takes over half of Indra's throne and conquers the whole earth in one night ⁽⁴³⁾. When a 12-year drought occurs on earth, Māndhātara makes it rain, thus saving the earth ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

At another place in epic literature, we are told of fabulous offerings which the king gave to the Brahmans: golden fish one *yojana* (mile) long, mountains of food and ponds of soup, milk and honey ⁽⁴⁵⁾. The epics report that the ideal king did not eschew taking drastic steps to protect justice ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In some epic versions the story serves the purpose of demonstrating that even a life as successful as Māndhātara's came to an end ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Two places in the epics also tell of an open rivalry between Māndhātara and Indra. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* it is recounted that Māndhātara, who conquered heaven and was on the point of defeating Indra, was cunningly reminded by Indra in his state of fear, that there was still one part of the earth unconquered, whereupon Māndhātara returned to earth. The part of earth still

⁽³⁸⁾ In *Mahābhārata* III. 126.10 ff. (ed. p. 414, transl. pp. 463-64) Bhārgava prepares water which the thirsty king drinks during the night and throws away the rest, in *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV (8-12, ed. p. 38) too, the tired and thirsty king drinks the holy water.

⁽³⁹⁾ In *Mahābhārata* VII (App. I. 8.530-531, ed. p. 1101; transl. p. 12) the exhausted king chances to find a hermitage, where he eats the sacrificial fat *ājya*, while on a hunting expedition.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Māndhātara is listed among the 'just', e.g. in *Mahābhārata* I. 50.13 (ed. p. 219; transl. p. 118) V. 88.19 (ed. p. 355; transl. p. 368) III. 43.37 (ed. 147; transl., p. 308) or III. 92.20 (ed. p. 329; transl. p. 408).

⁽⁴¹⁾ *Mahābhārata* III. 126.19-20 (ed. p. 415; transl. p. 464; the Brahmin Bhārgava recounts): *mayā by atrābitam brahma tapa āsthāya dāruṇam/ putrārtham tava rājarṣe mahābalaparākrama// mahābalo mahāvīryas tapobala samanvītaḥ/ yaḥ Sakram api vīryeṇa gamayed Yamasādanaṃ //*

⁽⁴²⁾ *Ibid.*, v. 29 (ed. p. 416; transl. p. 464): *pradeśinīm Sakradattām āsvādya sa śīśus tadā/ avarbhata mahīpāla kiṣkūṇām ca trayodaśa//*

⁽⁴³⁾ *Ibid.*, vv. 35-36 (ed. p. 416; transl. p. 465): *citacaityo mahātejā dharmaṃ prātya ca puṣkalam/ Sakrasyārdhāsanaṃ rājām labdhavānam itadyutiḥ// ekāhnā pṛthivī tena dharmanityena dhīmatā/ nirjīta śāsanād eva saratnākarapattanā//*

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, v. 39 (ed. pp. 416-17; transl. p. 465): *tena dvādaśavārṣikyām anāvṛṣṭayām mahātmanā/ vṛṣṭam sasyavivṛddhyartham miṣato Vajrapāṇinaḥ//*

⁽⁴⁵⁾ *Mahābhārata* VII. App. I. 8 (550-56), pp. 1102-03; transl. p. 121.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ *Rāmāyaṇa* IV. 18.31 (ed. p. 112; transl. p. 93, Rāma recounts): *āryeṇa mama Māndhātara vyasanaṃ ghoram īpsitam/ śramaṇeṇa kṛte pāpe yathā pāpaṃ kṛtam tvayā//*

Otherwise, the episode is unknown.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Māndhātara narrative is told in *Mahābhārata* VII (App. I. 8, ed. pp. 1101-03) and XII. 29.74-86 (ed. pp. 117-19) as a comfort after the death of Śṛṅjaya's son.

unconquered by Māndhātara belonged to the demon Lavaṇa, who killed Māndhātara with his magic weapon ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

In the *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, it is said at one point that Māndhātara defeated Indra at the Nāga town of Gomatī ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The Buddhists, too, discovered Māndhātara's story for themselves; however, they emphasized different aspects compared with the epics. The ideal king is equipped with seven jewels ⁽⁵⁰⁾: a wheel, a jewel, an elephant, a horse, a wife, a general, a citizen (or a son) ⁽⁵¹⁾, but the story serves as an example for the ever-growing, but never satisfied desire to possess and to conquer ⁽⁵²⁾. In the oldest Buddhist version, the three gāthās of Jātaka no. 258, it is first said (gāthā 1) that all creatures under the sun and the moon serve King Mandhātara ⁽⁵³⁾, in the following two verses it is

⁽⁴⁸⁾ *Rāmāyaṇa* VII. 59, ed. p. 355, transl. p. 1773.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ *Mahābhārata* XII. 343.2-3 (ed. pp. 1989-90): *yatra pūrvābbisargeṇa dharmacakramṇa pravartitaṃ/ naimiṣe Gomatī tīre tatra nāgāvayama puram// samagrais tridaśais tatra iṣṭam āsīd dvijaṣabha/ yatrendrātikramam cakre Māndhātā rājasattamaḥ//*

⁽⁵⁰⁾ The seven jewels of a cakravartin are not only a feature of Māndhātara. One of the oldest Buddhist texts that list and describe them is *Dīghanikāya* XVII. 1.7-17 (ed. vol. 2, pp. 172-77; transl. pp. 202-8) – in the story of the world ruler Mahāsudarśana. For the prebuddhist development of the idea cf. J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden 1966, p. 37 ff.

⁽⁵¹⁾ In the Sanskrit tradition the seven jewels appear after Māndhātara's coronation (*tasya sapta ratnāni prādurbhūtāni tadyathā cakraratnaṃ hastiratnaṃ aśvaratnaṃ maṇiratnaṃ pariṇāyakaratnaṃ strīratnaṃ gṛhapatiratnaṃ evaṃ saptamam – Divyāvadhāna* XVII, ed. p. 211; exactly the same in *Bodhisattvāvadhānakalpalatā* IV. 20, ed. p. 39; T 152, cf. É. Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues*, Paris 1910-35, vol. I, p. 138; T 165, p. 393c; T 202, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 107 = *Der Weise und der Thor*, transl. p. 371). In the Pāli tradition Māndhātara is named as the owner of the seven jewels (prose of *Mandhātujātaka*, no. 258, ed. vol. 2, p. 311), but they are not listed. The fact that the tradition was generally well known is proved by the statements in the text, where, exactly as in the Sanskrit tradition, the dramatis personae are called *ratnas*, z.B.: *tato rājā pariṇāyakaratanam pucchi...* (*Dīghanikāyaṭṭhakathā* XV. 1, ed. vol. 2, p. 481).

While the texts speak of *pariṇāyaka* and *gṛhapati*, in the pictorial tradition one of these persons is portrayed as being much smaller, so that one must think of one of them as being the son, cf. supra Figs. 5 and 6. In the commentary to *Dīghanikāya* XVI. 1.17 (ed. vol. 2, p. 628) Buddhaghosa makes *pariṇāyaka* equal to the eldest son of the king.

⁽⁵²⁾ Paccuppannavattu of the *Mandhātujātaka* (no. 258, ed. vol. 2, pp. 310-11; transl. p. 216) gives as the reason for the master telling the story of the past the monks' report about a brother who saw a beautiful, rich woman and was later dissatisfied with monastic life. In the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (ed. vol. 3, pp. 239-40; transl. vol. 3, p. 62) the story is told in order to instruct a greedy monk. In *Der Weise und der Thor* (transl. pp. 369-70) the Buddha instructs greedy monks, who are striving for fame, with this story. *Mahāprajñāparāmitāsāstra* (É. Lamotte, *Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Louvain 1944-80, vol. 2, p. 931) says explicitly that in spite of his riches etc., Māndhātara did not attain the right way.

⁽⁵³⁾ Jātaka, no. 258 (ed. vol. 2, p. 313, transl. p. 217): *yāvatā candimasuriyā disā bhanti virocamaṇā/ sabbe va dāsā Mandhātu ye pānā paṭhavinissitā//*

The saying that Māndhātara conquered everything that the sun shines on, also appears in *Mahābhārata* VII (App. I. 8.547, ed. p. 1102; transl. p. 121: *udeti ca yataḥ Sūryo yatra ca pratitiṣṭhāti*) and XII (29.83, ed. p. 118; transl. p. 58: *yataḥ Sūrya udeti sma yatra ca pratitiṣṭhāti*).

demonstrated that even a rain of coins does not satisfy the desires⁽⁵⁴⁾, which is recognised by the pupil of the Buddha, for where desire is lost, joy is born. Whether the rain of gold, unknown in the orthodox tradition in connection with Māndhātara, was linked to him in the Buddhist version from the very start or entered it possibly from a saying about unsatisfied desire is not important. What is significant is that the magic rain plays an essential role in the later versions of the theme, as well as the integration into the history of Buddhist geography and cosmology.

While the later Pāli tradition in Jātaka prose⁽⁵⁵⁾ and in the commentary to the *Dhammapada*⁽⁵⁶⁾ only briefly tells about Māndhātara's ability to let it rain jewels and about the conquest of the heaven of the Four Mahārājas and the Thirty-three Gods, the texts of 'northern' Buddhism go into much more detail. Fundamental for the later tradition, as illustrated for example in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*⁽⁵⁷⁾, is the version in the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, also integrated into *Divyāvadāna*⁽⁵⁸⁾ and preserved in the Tibetan *Tanjur*⁽⁵⁹⁾. It reports that Māndhātara, in order to save his subjects from work, first gets a deity to make it rain 27 types of grain⁽⁶⁰⁾, then cotton, cotton yarn and clothing⁽⁶¹⁾. Then he makes it rain money, first in his own palace and then in the whole land, in order to prove that this happened through his merit and not due to the piety of his subjects⁽⁶²⁾. Next, Māndhātara begins his

⁽⁵⁴⁾ The two verses of the Jātaka (ed. p. 313, transl. p. 217) correspond to verses 186 and 187 of *Dhammapada* (ed. p. 53): *na kabāpaṇavassena titti kāmesu vijjati/ appassādā dukkhā kāmā itī viññāya paṇḍito// api dibbesu kāmesu ratiṃ so nādhigacchati/ taṇhakkhayaṇato hoti sammāsambuddhasāvako//*

⁽⁵⁵⁾ *Māndhātujātaka*, no. 258, ed. vol. 2, p. 311.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* XVI, 5, ed. vol. 3, p. 240.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV, ed. pp. 38-45.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. pp. 210-28. The version contained in the *Gilgit Mss* (ed. vol. III, 1, pp. 92-97) is shorter. Fragments of the story are also preserved in Mss remains found in Turfan, cf. E. Waldschmidt et. al., *Sanskriithandschriften aus Turfanfunden*, Wiesbaden 1965, no. 558, vol. 1, pp. 248-49; vol. 4, pp. 244-46; no. 982, vol. 3, pp. 243-44.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Tib. ed. vol. 41, 183.3.7, 188.1.3, analys. in J.L. Panglung, *Die Erzählstoffe des Mūlasarvāstivādin-Vinaya analysiert auf Grund der tibetischen Übersetzung*, Tokyo 1981, pp. 35-36; transl. A. Schiefner, *Mélange Asiatique*, 8, St. Petersburg 1877, pp. 449-72 = *Tibetan Tales*, A. Schiefner, Engl. W.R.S. Ralson, London 1905, no. 1, pp. 1-20.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ The text repeatedly uses the same phrase, e.g.: *yataś ca sa rājā kathayati/ mama rāje manuṣyāḥ kṣiṣyanti/ tatas tenoktam/ saptāvīṃśativijajātīnāṃ devo varṣatu/ sabacittotpādād eva rājño Mūrdhātasya saptāvīṃśativijajātīr devo vṛṣṭaḥ/* (*Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 212).

Similarly in T 165, pp. 393c-94b and T 202 = *Der Weise und der Thor* (p. 372) the range of magical apparitions is extended to include a rain of musical instruments.

⁽⁶¹⁾ *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 212, *Tibetan Tales*, p. 5; T 165 (p. 394a) speaks of silken robes.

⁽⁶²⁾ *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. pp. 213-14, *Tibetan Tales*, pp. 5-6.

All Buddhist texts emphasise that Māndhātara owed his happy life to his previous merits. The Sanskrit tradition explains explicitly what merits they were: in the time of a previous Buddha called Sarvābhīhūta, Māndhātara as the son of a merchant is supposed to have strewn the gems in front of the Majestic One and in the time of Vipāśyin, Māndhātara as a corn merchant threw the ears of corn into Vipāśyin's bowl (*Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 227; Panglung, *op. cit.*, p. 36). *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* changes the ears of corn to beans *mudga* (IV. 114-16, ed. p. 45).

conquest of the world. The Yakṣa Divaukasa gives him the ideas for his military campaigns⁽⁶³⁾. First Māndhātara conquers the regions of the world⁽⁶⁴⁾ which were not yet his subjects, including Uttarakuru with its wishing-trees; from here he takes possession of the seven mountains around the world mountain Sumeru⁽⁶⁵⁾ and then approaches the seat of the gods. Here he is obstructed by 500 Ṛṣis and their curse, under the leadership of Durmukha⁽⁶⁶⁾. Māndhātara had banished these ascetics from his land, because they had cursed the birds, so that their wings fell off⁽⁶⁷⁾. Although curses otherwise always inevitably come true, Māndhātara made the curse of the opposing Ṛṣis harmless and he began to conquer heaven by first subjugating the five armies protecting the Trayastriṃśa gods, namely the Nāgas, Karoṭapāṇis, Mālādharas (Māyādharas), Sadāmattakas and Cāturmahādevas⁽⁶⁸⁾. Each of these

(63) In the Jātaka prose the ministers answer the king's questions, in the Sanskrit tradition the person of Yakṣa Divaukasa appears, who performs services for Māndhātara (he obtains all the necessary utensils so that the coronation ceremony can take place) (*Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 211; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 3; *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 18, ed. p. 39; T 195, p. 393b) and answers the king's questions regarding the targets for conquest. The name of the Yakṣa, literally 'the inhabitant of heaven', is most peculiar and does not appear in any of the Yakṣa lists, as far as I am aware. In one place in the *Mabābhārata*, which describes Māndhātara's birth, it is said that the inhabitants of heaven including Indra gave Māndhātara the name (III. 126.28, cf. n. 33).

In the Tibetan and in the *Divyāvadāna* Divaukasa is called Māndhātara's 'usher' (p. 211: *Divaukasa nāma yakṣaḥ purojaval*). The king's constant companion reminds one strongly of Vajrapāṇi, like Divaukasa Māndhātara, Vajrapāṇi constantly accompanies the Buddha.

In T 165 and T 202 = *Der Weise und der Thor* the Yakṣa has no personal name, in the latter text he calls out the targets for conquest without being asked.

(64) Pūrvavideha, Aparagodāniya and Uttarakuru (*Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 64; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, pp. 214-15; *Tibetan Tales*, pp. 6-10; T 152, in Chavannes, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 140; T 165 [394b-395a names the continents 'South of Sumeru' etc.]; T 202 = *Der Weise und der Thor*, transl. p. 373).

(65) Nimidhara, Vinataka, Aśvakaṛṇa, Sudarśana, Khadiraka, Iṣādharma and Yugandhara (*Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 94; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, p. 217; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 10; T 165, p. 397c).

(66) *Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 94; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, p. 217; *Tibetan Tales*, pp. 10-11; T 165, p. 397c; T 202 = *Der Weise und der Thor*, transl. p. 374; *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 53-66, ed. pp. 41-42). The Ṛṣi Durmukha takes water in his hand (*tena gr̥hyodakasyāñjalih̄ kṣiptaḥ/ viṣkambhitaṃ bhaṭabalāgram*, *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 217; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 11, *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 62, ed. p. 41), in order to stop the army. Māndhātara makes the ascetics' *jaṭās* fall off and makes them march in front of his army, carrying bows and arrows. Only at the request of the *strīratna* does he set the ascetics free (*Gilgit Mss*, III. 1, p. 94; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 11).

(67) *Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 93; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, pp. 211-12; *Tibetan Tales*, 3-4; *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 25-45, ed. pp. 39-40; T 165 (393c) adds that the king of the birds complained in the palace, enraging the king and leading to the banishment of the ascetics.

(68) *Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 65; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, pp. 218-19; *Tibetan Tales*, pp. 11-13; *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 72-74, ed. 42; T 165 (398a-398c) only names Nāgas and 'the other deities'.

These deities are also named in other places. The verse of *Kulāvaka-jātaka* (no. 31, ed. vol. 1, p. 204) mentions the fivefold guard of the gods – *antarā dvinnam̄ ayujjhapurānaṃ/ pañcavidhā ṭhapitā abhirakkhā* – this consists of: *uragakarotiḥ payassa ca hāri/ madanayutā caturo ca mahantā ti*. The commentator explains these as Nāgas, Garuḍas, Kumbhāṇḍas, Yakṣas and Catur Mahārājas – an

groups of deities wanted to stop the conqueror, but they were incorporated into his army. Finally, the Thirty-three gods were informed that Māndhātara's army was approaching. The gods welcomed the king with great honours⁽⁶⁹⁾ and granted him entry to Sumeru, where the gods abandoned themselves to the five sensual pleasures under the dark Pārijātaka-trees⁽⁷⁰⁾. In the heavenly assembly hall the king of the gods, Śakra, gave king Māndhātara half of his throne⁽⁷¹⁾. According to Pāli tradition, Indra divided his deities into two halves and gave one half to Māndhātara⁽⁷²⁾.

The continuation of the story, which, in the orthodox tradition, ends at this point, proceeds to a surprising turning point: after Māndhātara had ruled beside Indra in heaven for an infinite length of time, during the rule of 36 Indras⁽⁷³⁾, his fate changed. Māndhātara won a war against the Asuras and in his arrogance, the

explanation which is not to be supported, since Nāgas, Kumbhāṇḍas and Yakṣas are led by the Catur Mahārājas and Garuḍas are never counted as belonging to them. A reference in the Sanskrit tradition of the Sarvāstivāda school, the description of the inhabitants of Meru in *Abhidharmakośa* (III. 62-64, ed. pp. 520-21; transl. vol. 1, p. 159) does not name the Nāgas, but Karoṭapāṇis, Mālādhāras, Sadāmatas and Mahārājikas – thus only four groups. The descriptive names of the deities 'Bowl-in-hand', 'Garland-holder' (*Gilgit Mss*, call them Māyādhāras!) and 'Constantly drunk' were probably used for Cāturmahārājas (i.e. the deities of the Catur Mahārājas). What is meant must be the subjects of Kubera, because he is elsewhere also depicted with a wine bowl. The interpretation of the descriptive names as sovereign groups of deities had probably led to the unusual division into five groups.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ The descriptions of the reasons which motivated the deities to their actions are possibly ambiguous. Each group thinks that Māndhātara was of very great merit and announces him without reservations to the next group, who welcomes him with even greater honours for the same reasons: *Catvāro Mahārājāṇaḥsamlakṣayanti/ puṇyamabeśākyo 'yaṃ sattvo nāsya śakyaṃ viroddhum iti/ tatas taiḥ Caturbbhir Mahārājais Trayastriṃśānāṃ ārocitam/ eṣa bhavanto manuṣyarājā Mūrdhātā āgacchati/ Trayastriṃśā devāḥ samlakṣayanti/ puṇyaviṭṭakamabeśākyo 'yaṃ sattvo nāsya viroddhavyam/ arghenāsya pratyudgacchāmah/ tatas te Trayastriṃśā devā arghena pratyudgatāḥ...* (*Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 219).

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Detailed descriptions of heaven are to be found in *Divyāvadāna* XVII, pp. 219-22, *Tibetan Tales*, pp. 13-16 and *T 165*, 398c-402b.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Many texts repeat this statement, in Pāli, in the commentaries to *Digha-* (ed. vol. 2, p. 482) and *Majjhimanikāya* (ed. vol. 1, p. 225 but also in *T 165*, p. 403b) it was said that Māndhātara sat on Indra's throne *paṇḍukambalasilā*. The Sanskrit references, *Gilgit Mss* (ed. III. 1, p. 95); *Divyāvadāna* XVII (ed. p. 222); *Tibetan Tales* (p. 16); *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 88 (ed. p. 43); *T 202 = Der Weise und der Thor* (transl. 375) and *Buddhacarita* XI. 13 (ed. p. 87; transl. p. 113) and Chinese II. 10.817 (transl. SBE, 19, p. 118) tell that Māndhātara got half of the seat *devendrenārdhāsana*. The *Divyāvadāna* comments that before the seat was divided, in the hall of assembly Sudharmā there were 32 seats for Upendras, a throne for Indra and a seat at the end of the row prepared for Māndhātara. Upon Māndhātara's mere thought whether the last seat was meant for him, Śakra gave him half of his own throne.

⁽⁷²⁾ *Jātaka* prose, ed. vol. 2, p. 312.

⁽⁷³⁾ All text references agree on this statement, cf. *Jātaka* prose (ed. vol. 2, p. 312); *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (ed. vol. 3, p. 240; transl. vol. 3, p. 62); *Dighanikāyaṭṭhakathā* (ed. vol. 2, p. 483); *Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā* (ed. vol. 1, p. 226); *Divyāvadāna* XVII (ed. p. 222); *Tibetan Tales* (p. 16); *T 202 = Der Weise und der Thor* (transl. p. 375). *Divyāvadāna* XVII (ed. p. 225) and the Tibetan translation of the story (*Tibetan Tales*, p. 20) explains additionally how long Māndhātara's whole life lasted and how long the divine days, years etc. last.

thought occurred to him to depose of Indra, the king of the gods, and to rule alone (74). This arrogance brought his happiness to an abrupt end and he fell down from heaven to his hometown, where he became seriously ill. Before he died, he instructed several people about the ruin that results from arrogance (75).

From what has been said, it should have become apparent that the Buddhists not only re-designed the story of Māndhātara and enriched it with new motifs, but that they also altered the king's character and thus changed the moral of the story itself. Little remains to be seen of the impeccable ideal ruler of the epic tradition. The Buddhist tendency aims to condemn arrogance, greed and the lustful striving for sensual pleasures and to demonstrate their negative, disastrous consequences. If the story did not conclude with the virtuous deeds of the dying king, instructing his fellow men on the negative consequences of desire, it would hardly be possible to declare Māndhātara as being Bodhisatva.

Portrayals of the Māndhātara Story in Art

The Indian artists could choose from many different ways to visually present the Māndhātara story. In pre-Christian art, the king was portrayed together with his seven jewels. The fact that the portrayals show not just any world ruler, but Māndhātara himself, is proved by the streams of coins raining from heaven (76) (Fig. 5) (77) as well as the fact that in later art such hieratic portraits of the king were incorporated into the multi-scene portrayals of his story.

(74) The war against the Asuras, which Māndhātara wins immediately, because they flee at the mere sound of him drawing his bow, is reported in some places in the Sanskrit tradition (*Gilgit Mss*, ed. III. 1, p. 95; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. p. 223; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 17; T 165, 403b-405a; T 202 = *Der Weise und der Thor*, transl. p. 375). Other references give no reason, apart from increasing greed, why Māndhātara wanted to seize all the power.

T 165 (405a) and T 152 (Chavannes, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 141) discuss that when Māndhātara had sinful thoughts, all his supernatural abilities disappeared; all other versions emphasise the immediate effect of these evil thoughts.

(75) Jātaka prose, vol. 2, p. 313; *Divyāvadāna* XVII, ed. pp. 223-24; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 19; T 165, 405b.

(76) The identification of the reliefs is from T.N. Ramachandran, 'The Identification of a Buddhist Sculpture from Jaggayyapeta', in *Proceedings of the 7th All-India Oriental Conference*, Baroda 1933, pp. 763-72.

Jātaka prose (ed. p. 311) exactly describes the procedure by which Māndhātara produced the coins flowing from heaven: in doing so, he had touched his lowered left hand with his right hand. This is not shown in the pictures; the king stands with his right hand raised in a gesture of greeting. The left hand, clenched to a fist at his chest, however, does seem to have a certain significance and is presumably symbolic for 'rain-making' – an ability of the cakravartins, cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'A Royal Gesture and Some other Motifs', in *Festbundel Kon. Bataviaasch Genootschap*, 1929, pp. 57-61. The Nāgas, who are responsible for rainfall, are depicted with the same gesture.

(77) Jaggayyapeta, Madras Government Museum, ill.: L. Bachhofer, *Die frühindische Plastik*, München-London 1929 (repr. New York 1972), pl. 107; H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, Princeton



Fig. 5.

a scene which reproduces precisely one moment of the narrative: Māndhātara, accompanied by his minister, steps over a Nāga deity, here portrayed in anthropomorphic form emerging from the polycephalic snake, presumably representing all the classes of deities who submit to Māndhātara in the course of his campaign of conquest of heaven. Māndhātara is surrounded by five ascetics, who obviously represent the 500 ascetics, whom Māndhātara had banished from the earth for crippling the birds and who are now trying to block his entry

One relief in Amaravati (Fig. 6)⁽⁷⁸⁾, for example, shows the following events in six scenes grouped around the central medallion (the contents of which do not belong to the story): the middle scene below it portrays Māndhātara standing surrounded by his seven jewels; the picture to the left of this shows him seated on a throne, surrounded by his court, without implying a specific situation for the story. On the right-hand side, however, we have

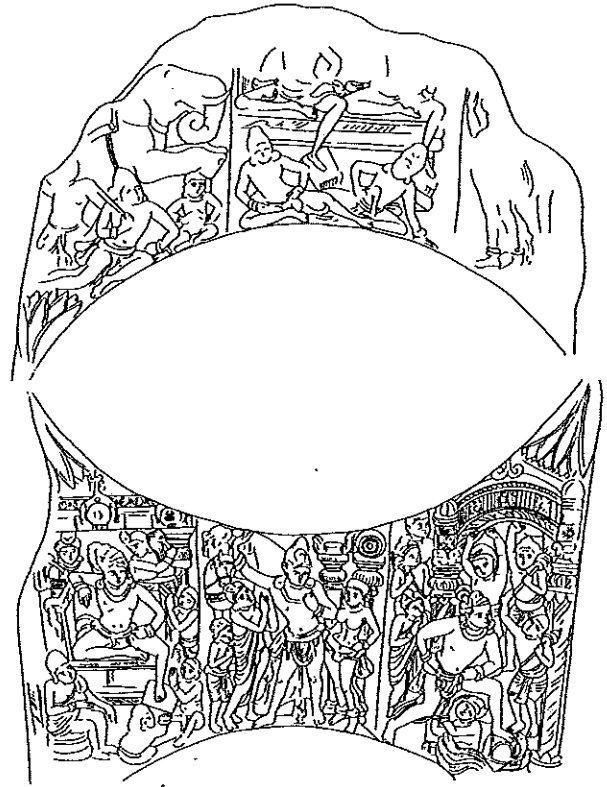


Fig. 6.

1955, p. 37. A very similar, presumably somewhat more recent example of a cakravartin picture is to be found in the Musée Guimet (cf. D. Barrett, 'Two Unpublished Sculptures from the Āndhradeśa', *Artibus Asiae*, 3, Ascona 1956, pp. 287-92, fig. 3). The top of the relief has been broken off, so that the streams of coins which were possibly depicted there are not preserved, which in turn makes the identification of the monarch as Māndhātara uncertain.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Amaravati, Madras Government Museum, ill.: Bachhofer, *op. cit.*, pl. 115; C. Sivaramamurti, 'Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum*, n.s. 4, Madras 1942, pl. 33.1, pp. 222-24.



Fig. 7a-b.

through the gates of heaven. The upper part of the relief shows the events in the world of the gods, firstly, on the left, the procession of Māndhātār's army, represented here by a flying elephant with Māndhātār flying to heaven. The middle scene contains the portrayal which allowed the whole story to be recognised, namely two equal kings seated on one throne. In the scene on the right, only fragments of women's' figures can be seen.

Portrayals of the story in a similar form were not unusual in Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, as, in particular, the 'pictures of the pictures', i.e. the panels with depictions of the stupas surrounded by reliefs, show us. The tiny scenes in these stupa show only a few or often even only one scene of the series (Fig. 7a-b)⁽⁷⁹⁾ and thus prove that the individual scenes were comprehensible, even if the whole series of scenes was not displayed.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Amaravati, British Museum, Fig. 7a: BM, no. 85, ill.: R. Knox, *Amaravati*, London 1992, fig. 76; the scene to the left of the worship of the Buddha's footprints shows Māndhātār on the throne together with Indra, the scene to the right is not identified (identifiable!), further right there was presumably a depiction of Māndhātār's campaign of conquest, the frieze below has nothing to do with the narrative material and shows the story of Śyāmāvati and Udayana; Fig. 7b: BM, no. 83, ill.: *ibid.*, fig. 75, in the tiny reliefs there are three scenes of the Māndhātār narrative: on the left the cakravartin with seven jewels, further to the right the campaign of conquest and, to the other side of the worship of the Buddha's footprints, the king with Indra. For further similar depictions cf. Knox, *op. cit.*, figs. 68 and 69 (only the throne scene), fig. 77 (campaign of conquest and the throne scene) and fig. 78 (cakravartin with jewels and the throne scene).



Fig. 8.

In elaborate reliefs too, the story could be shown reduced to one single scene. Thus, a medallion from Amaravati shows Māndhātara and Indra sitting together on one throne, surrounded by a large number of heavenly women, who embody the joys of sensual pleasures with music and dancing (Fig. 8) ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

The portrayals of the Māndhātara story in the Nagarjunikonda school are very similar to those in Amaravati ⁽⁸¹⁾. Some of these reliefs show yet another picture. One relief (Fig. 9) ⁽⁸²⁾ portrays the following: between the typical scenes of Māndhātara seated with Indra on the same throne above and

of Māndhātara with his seven jewels below (only the upper border of this picture is preserved, which, however, clearly shows the jewel ⁽⁸³⁾, the elephant and the king's hand), is yet another scene, which apparently takes place after Māndhātara's fall to the earth: the seriously ill king is lying on a sofa and is being attended to by several women. Behind his death-bed one can discern the women of his court crying.

As far as I am aware, depictions of the Māndhātara story in India have, with the exception of Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, not been recognised ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Amaravati, British Museum no. 12, ill.: Bachhofer, *op. cit.*, pl. 117; D. Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, London 1954, pl. 36; P. Stern & M. Benisti, *Évolution du style indien d'Amarāvati*, Paris 1962, pl. 28a; Knox, *op. cit.*, fig. 23.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Nagarjunikonda, site 2, ill.: Rosen Stone, *op. cit.*, fig. 198 (cakravartin and his seven jewels); side 9, ill.: *ibid.*, figs. 64, 202 (cakravartin with jewels and the campaign of conquest).

⁽⁸²⁾ Nagarjunikonda, Nagarjunikonda Museum, ill.: A.H. Longhurst, *The Buddhist Antiquities of Nāgārjunikoṇḍa*, Delhi 1938, pl. 43, pp. 47-48.

⁽⁸³⁾ The portrayals of the gem *maṇi* or *ratna* appear very conventionally in the reliefs and remind one of cows' horns. However, this impression arises due to the weathering of the stone, where the surface of the stone is well preserved, the details of the depiction come to light: *ratna* has the form of an oval object or one consisting of small pearls, from which flame-shaped rays emanate on both sides.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ The identification of the so-called Sūrya and Indra reliefs in Bhaja as Māndhātara is most dubious. This identification was first published by R.G. Gyani, 'Identification of the So-called Sūrya and Indra Figures in Cave No. 20 of the Bhājā Group', *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum*, 1,

Among the paintings of Central Asia, there is, however, a section of a frieze, which, to all appearances, illustrates our narrative⁽⁸⁵⁾. In one scene, on the left, the king is shown sitting in a pavilion with his wife. He is portrayed with raised hands and above him hangs a cloud from which pieces of jewellery are falling. In the scene to the right, the royal couple is kneeling before an ascetic; the artist was presumably trying to portray Yakṣa Divaukasa in the form of the ascetic.

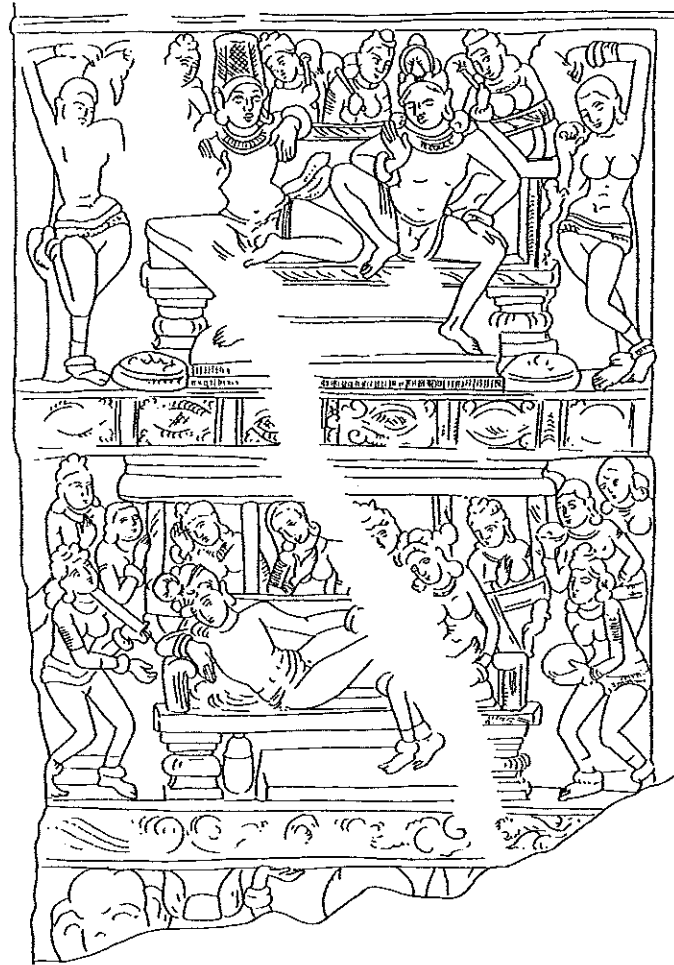


Fig. 9.

The interpretation of the Kizil painting substantiates the same illustration of Divaukasa in a relief in Borobudur⁽⁸⁶⁾, where a developed portrayal of the Māndhātara narrative according to the versions of the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* and the *Divyāvadāna* is to be found⁽⁸⁷⁾. The identification of the reliefs was made on the basis of the three unmistakable scenes, taken most exactly from the text, showing the magic rain: ears of corn, pieces of clothing and jewels are falling from

Bombay 1950-51, pp. 15-21, and then repeated by V.S. Agrawala, *Indian Art*, Varanasi 1965, pp. 191-92. The identification attempts to bring the known reliefs into accord with the text in *Divyāvadāna* XVII. In some aspects, however, this is impossible: the text mentions, for example, the Asuras or wishing-trees, but does not tell of their destruction.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Kizil, Cave 186, middle cave of the small gorge, plinth, Berlin, Museum für Indische Kunst, IB 8851, ill.: E. Waldschmidt & A. LeCoq, *Die buddhistische Spätantike im Mittelasien*, 6, Berlin 1928, pl. A 5; Xu Wanyin, *Kizil Grottoes*, Tokyo 1983-85, 3, pl. 209; M. Yaldiz, *Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte Chinesisch-Zentralasiens (Xinjiang)*, Leyden 1987, fig. 39.

A portrayal of the seven jewels on the arch of a side passage in Cave 123 (cave with the pigeons carrying the ring, now in Berlin, no. 9061, ill.: A. Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan*, Berlin 1912, figs. 270-275; Xu Wanyin, *op. cit.*, pl. 204) has nothing to do with the Māndhātara story.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ N.J. Krom, *Barabudur*, The Hague 1927, Ib, pl. 45. Cf. vol. 1, pp. 261-75.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Identified by A. Foucher (in *BEFEO*, 9, 1909, p. 1 ff.; English in *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, transl. L.A. Thomas, London 1918, repr. Varanasi 1972, pp. 225-30).

heaven⁽⁸⁸⁾. The Borobudur panels also contain the scene found in India of the two kings on the throne⁽⁸⁹⁾, as well as scenes which, although they correspond to the narrative, do not appear specifically in the textual tradition. For example, in one of the last panels one king is turning away from another⁽⁹⁰⁾ – it must be Indra, who has recognised Māndhātār's sinful thoughts. In one of the first panels a man is approaching an ascetic, while, just to the side, he (?) is handed a pot – it must be the illustration of the motif of the beginning of the father's pregnancy (Fig. 10)⁽⁹¹⁾.

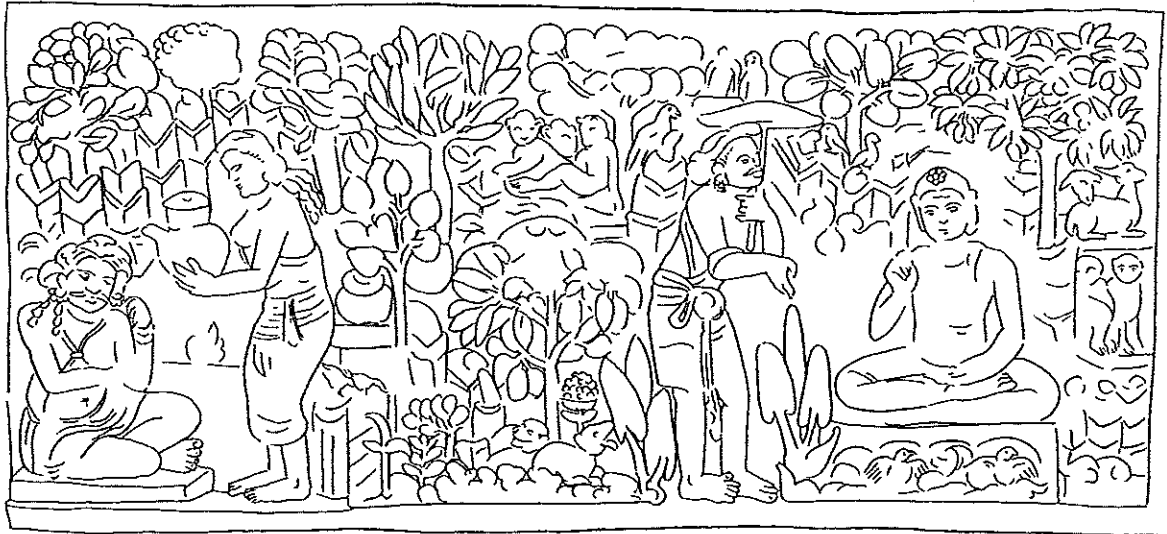


Fig. 10.

The giving of the water and beside it two other scenes, which show the child, first inside his father, and then at his side, are also to be seen on a Tibetan tanka, which, amongst other things, depicts Indra and Māndhātār sitting beside each other on the palatial Sumeru, the depiction is based on the version of the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*⁽⁹²⁾.

Identification of the Māndhātār Story in the Bagh Painting

In the Bagh painting too, Māndhātār is seated at the same level as Indra, i.e. as an equal; here, however, they are seated on the floor instead of on a shared throne,

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Krom, *op. cit.*, Ib, pls. 41, 42, 43.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, Ib, pl. 46.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, Ib, pl. 49.

⁽⁹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, Ib, pl. 34.

⁽⁹²⁾ G. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Rome 1949, pp. 446-48, Tanka 66, pl. 102.

each king accompanied by his minister. Māndhātara is portrayed here without a crown, just as in the two depictions of the campaign of conquest, one showing him on a horse and the other on an elephant, he is portrayed without any headwear. The king's triumphant campaigns to conquer the regions of the world unarmed seem to do more justice to the tendency of the textual tradition than the suppression of the Nāgas as shown in Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, for the cakravartin conquers the regions of the world without the use of weapons, solely through the power of his Dharma.

As well as this, the participation of women in this peaceful campaign of conquest conforms to the textual tradition; in the war campaign of a king, the entourage with the royal court is always present⁽⁹³⁾, which is also stated literally in the texts of the Māndhātara narrative⁽⁹⁴⁾.

Whilst the depiction of the deities hovering in the clouds to the right of Indra's conversation with Māndhātara in heaven blends into the series of scenes running from right to left, the two scenes to the right again, i.e. the previously almost identical scenes, demand an explanation. The image of the gods in heaven enjoying dancing and music, and of Indra, the leader of the Gandharvas, as the creator and organiser of the heavenly theatre performances, is fairly common⁽⁹⁵⁾ and is also expressed in the southern Indian depictions of Indra's heaven, as we have seen. When the artist in Bagh portrayed this scene twice with only a few insignificant variations between the two, the duplication was intended to express something else too: the Pāli tradition states literally that Indra divided his empire and the deities subordinated to him into two halves and gave one half to Māndhātara⁽⁹⁶⁾; in harmony with this, the artist showed the pleasures of heaven in duplicate. The representation of these heavenly joys as duplication of a heavenly dance is also to be found in literature: in the commentaries to the *Dīghanikāya*⁽⁹⁷⁾ and to the *Majjhimanikāya*⁽⁹⁸⁾

⁽⁹³⁾ *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 10.2.4 (ed. p. 234; transl. p. 435, description of the disposition of troops:) *madhye kalatranṇ swāmī ca.*

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Jātaka prose (ed. vol. 2, p. 312): *Mandhātā cakkaratanam abbhukkiritvā attano parisāya parivuto Tāvatiṃsābbhimukho pāyāsi...* Further it is said that Māndhātara continued to be surrounded by people and that in his divine rule he had a human entourage. In the commentary to the *Dīghanikāya* (ed. vol. 2, p. 482) and the *Majjhimanikāya* (ed. vol. 1, p. 226) it is recounted that the inhabitants of the subjected regions of the earth came to Jambhudvīpa after Māndhātara's death and were allocated their destinations by Parīṇāyaka, e.g. those from Uttarakuru lived in Kurukṣetra from then on.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ Cf., for instance, the portrayal of heaven in the painting of the possible ways of reincarnation of a human in the wheel of existences (*bhāvacakra*) in a painting on the veranda of Cave XVII in Ajanta (ill.: Griffiths, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pl. 56; Yazdani, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pls. 4-7) where the gods are displayed dancing and playing.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ Jātaka prose (ed. vol. 2, p. 312): *Sakko... devatā dve koṭṭhāse katvā attano rajjam majjhe bbinditvā adāsī/*

⁽⁹⁷⁾ *Sumaṅgalavilasīnī, Dīghanikāyaṭṭhakathā*, ed. vol. 2, p. 482.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ *Papañcasūdanī, Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā*, ed. vol. 1, p. 226.

Buddhaghosa says literally that Indra divided the dance into two parts: *saddhīm nātakehi rajjam dve bhāge katvā ekaṃ bhāgaṃ adāsi*.

The scene adjoining the conversation of the two kings on the left, i.e. the next following scene can be easily explained by the parallel depictions in the Nagarjunikonda reliefs. Just like in these, Fig. 9, we see here the mourning women, mourning the death of the king who was thrown back down to earth. The dying king himself, who in Nagarjunikonda appears in the same picture, was probably portrayed in the painting in an adjoining, final scene. According to the textual tradition, we can assume that the king was here portrayed dying and instructing his subjects who were crowding around him ⁽⁹⁹⁾.

Thus, in the preserved parts of the Bagh painting we have the following series of scenes running from right to left:

– The first two pictures show the triumphant procession of King Māndhātara to the heavenly worlds, in the first scene on his elephant-jewel, in the second in his horse-jewel.

– The following picture with a portrayal of a heavenly dance performance in duplicate indicates the division of heaven into two areas, one ruled by Indra, and one ruled by Māndhātara.

– A group of Apsaras and deities hovering in the clouds point to the heavenly regions, where:

– in the scene on the left Indra is sitting in conversation with Māndhātara, each accompanied by his minister,

– (the king who has been ejected to earth and is dying), is mourned by the women of his court.

The immediately adjoining scenes to the right, i.e. the first scenes of the painting, of which no copies exist, still remain to be identified. From Impey's description as corrected by Vogel, it follows that here at least two scenes were depicted. The scene on the left is supposed to have portrayed several horses as well as elephants, of which the back of the animal standing furthest to the left is still visible in the copy. The people acting in this scene are supposed to have dismounted from the animals and gathered around the central point of the scene, namely a holy tree, under which vessels with water were placed on stands. In the adjacent scene on the right, that is, the previous scene, an ascetic is assumed to be instructing a man.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Jātaka prose (ed. vol. 2, p. 313) tells that the king, who fell from heaven into his own park, was found by his gardener, who informed the family. In *T 152* (Chavannes, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 141) the seriously ill king appeals to his successor not to repeat his mistake. After his death this warning is repeated. In *T 202 = Der Weise und der Thor* (transl. p. 375) the king, having fallen down in front of the dilapidated gate of his former palace, instructs many people. All Sanskrit versions emphasise his repentance and his willingness to instruct people (*Divyāvadhāna* XVII, ed. p. 224; *Tibetan Tales*, p. 19) or to give away his property (Panglung, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

The key to the identification of these first two scenes is to be found in depiction of the vessels with water and the ascetic. We can assume that these scenes portrayed the events leading up to Māndhātara's unnatural birth: in the first scene (on the right) the childless king asks the ascetic for a son and in the following scene (on the left) he gets the magic water. Or, possibly, the scenes were to be read the other way around: in the scene on the left, the king has drunk of the magic water and then (on the right) he is instructed by the ascetic on the consequences of his deed. The panel of Borobudur (our Fig. 10) probably portrays the same events.

This motif, often repeated in Brahman texts, of Māndhātara's father drinking the magic water by mistake, is unknown in most texts of Buddhist tradition or else is ignored by them, in order to avoid acknowledging that the ascetic has any power. Apart from the Pāli tradition, which does not mention Māndhātara's extraordinary birth at all, in most Buddhist sources it is recounted that Māndhātara was born out of the soft growth on his father's head, without, however, giving any reason for this 'pregnancy' ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾.

However, the motif of the magic water does appear in the Buddhist tradition in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* collection of stories of the poet Kṣemendra ⁽¹⁰¹⁾, originating in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. In this version it is told that King Upoṣadha undertook a journey, in order to visit various different ascetic settlements in his country. He came to a place where the Ṛṣis had just prepared the water that causes pregnancy. The king, thirsty after his journey, drank the water before anyone could stop him and was then instructed by the ascetics about the special quality of this water.

Thus one can assume that the first two scenes at the right-hand end of the Bagh painting, known to us only from their descriptions, depicted these events. The monastery complex of Bagh with the common veranda in front of Caves IV and V, supported by no less than 20 pillars and over 70 m in length, must have been one of the most impressive cave monasteries of its time. For the longest continuous wall, the one between the entrances to the two caves, one of the most famous and most meaningful stories of a world ruler, who finally is destroyed because he yields to the temptation of absolute power, was chosen. Greed and the desire for power can never lead to contentment and the right way of life is to be found inside a monastery:

Not though a rain of coins fall from the sky
 Could anything be found to satisfy.
 Pain is desire, and sorrow is unrest:
 He that knows this is wise, and he is blest.

Where longing is, there pleasure takes him wings,
 Even though desire be set on heavenly things.
 Disciples of the Very Buddha try
 To crush out all desire eternally. ⁽¹⁰²⁾

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Cf. n. 36.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* IV. 2-11, ed. p. 38.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ *Māndhātara-jātaka*, no. 258, transl. vol. 2, p. 218 = *Dhammapada* 186-187.

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