

**The Mūkapaṅgu Story in the Madras Government Museum:
The Problem of the Textual Affiliations of the Narrative Reliefs
in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda**

Among the Amaravati reliefs in the Madras Government Museum there is a medallion which is not particularly badly damaged but the bottom right part of which is missing. The relief (pl. Ia and fig. 1)¹ presents a story in three scenes of various sizes. In the central scene in the bottom part, on the left side, the king is shown surrounded by his court. The court apparently consists entirely of women. The king's hands are together in a gesture of respect. He is sitting opposite four Brahmins with their hair piled high. The index fingers of the two Brahmins sitting in the front are raised as if in motion. Buildings can be seen in the background of this central scene. They are simple village buildings, a plain wall and some huts among trees. They separate the scene at the bottom from the two depicted in the upper part of the relief. In the upper left scene a boy is lying on a platform surrounded by three men; one of them is pulling the boy's leg or possibly pointing a weapon at him; the condition of the relief makes it very difficult to establish what he is doing. Burgess (1887: 51) writes: «a short sword, as if about to murder the youth». The boy does not make any effort to protect himself. On the upper right, three men (the same men?) can be seen; one of them is holding a hoe above his head.

The relief was identified by Sivaramamurti (1942: 230-31) as Somanassa-Jātaka.

The *Somanassajātaka* (*Jātaka*: IV, 444-54, no. 505; Cowell 1895-1907: IV, 275-80) tells the story about Reṇu, the king of Kuru, who hosts some hermits in his park. One day they bid the king farewell and set off for the Himalayas. One of them, a virtuous ascetic named Mahārakkhita, foretells the birth of a long-awaited heir to the throne. He is overheard saying this by a man who only pretends to be an ascetic and who then tells it to the king, as if it were his own prophecy. The grateful king honours him and allows him to live in his park. When the king's son Somanassa (the Bodhisatva) is seven, the king goes

¹ Burgess (1887: pl. 19.2); Sivaramamurti (1942: III B, 19; pl. 27.2).

to war and tells him to serve the ascetic. Prince Somanassa finds the ascetic working in the garden and thus discovers that he is not a hermit but a swindler, so he refuses to pay homage to him. The sham ascetic speaks to the king as soon as he comes back from war and accuses Somanassa of having no respect for him. Not waiting for any explanations, the king sends his servants to kill his son. Eventually Somanassa manages to convince the servants first to hold an investigation, which then reveals that the sham ascetic is actually a gardener who sells vegetables grown in King Reṇu's garden.



Fig. 1 – Relief from Amaravati depicting the Mūkapaṅgu story.

Madras Government Museum, Acc. no. 148.

(Drawing by the author).

- According to Sivaramamurti the medallion depicts the following:
- the central scene: the king is talking to the virtuous ascetic Mahārakkhita and other hermits before their journey to the Himalayas;

- the upper scene on the right: the king's son observes the sham ascetic digging in the garden;
- the upper scene on the left: the servants go to kill the king's son who is lying in his bed.

Sivaramamurti's interpretation is not convincing even though he seems to be absolutely certain that it is correct. According to this interpretation, the central scene does not relate to the scenes above it. Sivaramamurti says it shows King Reṇu saying goodbye to the good ascetics. But in that case, according to the story, the prophecy of the birth of the king's son was not articulated.

One detail which Sivaramamurti apparently missed completely contradicts his interpretation; although the Brahmins' faces are damaged, one can still see beyond any doubt that the three men are not looking at the king but at something in the part of the relief that is missing. Thus it cannot be a farewell scene in which the king is simply saying goodbye to the ascetics. The Brahmins are evidently looking at something, comment on it and give the king instructions with their fingers. Sivaramamurti's interpretation of the scenes in the upper part is also far from perfect, as these depictions do not precisely correspond to the text. It is incomprehensible why in the scene on the right the sham ascetic is represented as having curly hair while in the text he is called *jaṭila* («matted»), or why there is someone else standing beside the king's son and looking at the sham ascetic, or, finally, why the sham ascetic himself is digging, since the text says that Somanassa finds him watering the vegetable patch.² The other scene does not correspond to the text either: the servants who go to kill the boy find him playing with his mother,³ not in bed; nor does he defend himself against the servants but endures the assault without any resistance – which does not correspond to the text at all.⁴

Another interpretation of this scene explains the events presented in the relief in a more convincing way: the boy who submits to the assault without any resistance is Prince Mūkapaṅgu (Mūgapakkha), 'dumb-stiff'.⁵

² *ath' ekadivasaṃ kumāro jaṭilaṃ passissāmīti uyyānaṃ gantvā kūṭajaṭilaṃ ekaṃ gaṇṇīhikakāsavaṃ nivāsetvā ekaṃ pārupitvā ubhoti hatthehi dve udakaghaṭe gahetvā sākavathusmiṃ!* (*Jātaka*: IV, 446); «One day the prince went out to see the ascetic. He found him with both yellow robes, upper and under, knotted up, holding a water-jar in each hand, and watering his plants» (Cowell 1895-1907: IV, 277).

³ *mātucca aṃkasmai ahaṃ nisinno/ ākaḍḍhito sāhasā tehi deva!* (*Jātaka*: IV, 451); «Where I was sitting by my mother's side They found me, dragged me cruelly away» (Cowell 1895-1907: IV, 279).

⁴ *sa rājaputto paridevayanto/ dasaṅgulīṃ añjalīṃ paggaḥetvā/ aham pi icchāmi janinda daḍḍhum/ jīvaṃ panetvā paṭidassayetha!* (*Jātaka*: IV, 447); «There the prince lamenting stands, Craving grace with folded hands: 'Spare me yet awhile, and bring Me alive to see the King!'» (Cowell 1895-1907: IV, 278).

⁵ After Schlingloff (2000: I, 180), the story is preserved in the following sources: Pali: *Jātaka* no. 538 (cf. fn. 7), *Nidānakathā* (*Jātaka*: I, 46; Jayawickrama 1990: 60), *Cariyāpiṭaka* III.6.11 (Jayawickrama 1974: 29; Horner 1975: 37); Sanskrit or its translations: *Bodhisattvāvadāna-*

The oldest depiction of this story is to be found in a relief from Bharhut. The medallion, identified by Cunningham (1879: 58) (fig. 2),⁶ presents the story according to the version given in the verses of the *Mūgapakkhajātaka*; its interpretation is guaranteed by the inscription *mugaphak[iya] j[ā]tak[am]* (Lüders 1963: 150-53) on the right edge of the medallion. The verses of the *Jātaka*⁷ tell the story of the royal Prince Temiya (the Bodhisatva) who remembers his previous incarnation and accepts suffering in order to avoid his previous fate. In the past he had been a king who condemned people to death or torture and then had to suffer extreme torture in hell. As a little child the prince is taken to the courtroom by his father where he hears how the judgements are passed and people are sentenced.⁸ It is then that he decides to remain still and silent – that is why he is called *Mūgapakkha*, ‘dumb-stiff’ – in order not to be forced to become a king in the future. The king sends a charioteer to get rid of the dumb prince in the forest. In the face of death, Prince Temiya stands up and speaks to the charioteer.⁹ Temiya explains his behaviour to him and refuses to return to the city. He stays in the forest as an ascetic, and his father, the king, visits him there.

The relief from Bharhut presents the story of *Mūgapakkha* in three scenes: on the left side of the relief the king can be seen sitting in his palace surrounded by his court and holding an unnaturally stiff child lying on his knees. It is highly

kalpalatā 38 (Vaidya 1959: I, 239-53), *Mūlasarvāstīvādavinaya*, preserved in Tibetan, 214,2,5 (Suzuki 1955-61; Panglung 1981: 46) and 285,3,6 (Suzuki 1955-61; von Schiefner 1906: 247-52; Panglung 1981: 134), also preserved in Chinese, T 1444.19 [vol. 23: 724]; Tocharian A: Sieg and Siegling (1921: nos. 1-9; Sieg 1952: 17-26); Khotanese: Dresden (1955: 432); Uyghur: Zieme (1985); Chinese: T 152.38.4 [vol. 3: 20b-21a], trans. by Chavannes (1910-34: I, 126-31), T 167 [vol. 3: 408b-409c], T 168 [vol. 3: 410a-c, T 401 [vol. 13: 522a-536b].

⁶ Ills. in Cunningham (1879: pl. 25.4), Barua (1937: pl. 90.134), Coomaraswamy (1956: pl. 31.83), Lüders (1963: pl. 41, B 59), Yaldiz (1992: 54).

⁷ *Mūgapakkhajātaka* (*Jātaka*: VI, 1-30; Cowell 1895-1907: VI, 1-19); for the translation of the Burmese version, see St. John (1893).

⁸ *ucchaṅge maṃ nisīdetvā pitā atth' ānusāsati/ ekaṃ hanatha bandhatha ekaṃ khārāpatacchikaṃ/ ekaṃ sīlasmimh accetha iccassamanusāsati//* (*Jātaka*: VI, 17); «My father took me on his lap, but midst his fondling play, I heard the stern commands he gave, 'At once this miscreant slay, Saw him in sunder, – go, that wretch impale without delay'» (Cowell 1895-1907: VI, 11).

⁹ *kin nu santaramāno va kāsuyṃ khaṇasi sārathi/ puṭṭho me samma akkhāhi kiṃ kāsuyā karissasati// taṃ sutvā sārathi āvāṇaṃ khaṇanto uddhaṃ anoloketvā va catutthaṃ gātham āha/ rañño mūgo ca pakkho ca putto jāto acetaso/ so 'mhi raññā samijjhittṭho puttam me nikkhaṇaṃ vane ti//* (*Jātaka*: VI, 12); «'Why in such haste, O charioteer? and wherefore do you dig that pit? Answer my question truthfully, – what do you want to do with it?'. The charioteer went on digging the hole without looking up and spoke the fourth stanza: 'Our king has found his only son crippled and dumb, – an idiot quite; And I am sent to dig this hole and bury him far out of sight'» (Cowell 1895-1907: VI, 9) – the prose sentence can be easily deduced from the plot included in the verses.



Fig. 2 – Relief from Bharhut depicting the Mūkapaṅgu story.
Calcutta, Indian Museum, Acc. no. 290.
(Drawing by the author).

probable that the scene is a depiction of the turning point in the life of the prince when he observes his father passing judgements. The bottom part of the relief presents another scene, in which one can see an empty chariot on the left and a charioteer digging a grave with a mattock on the right. Prince Temiya is standing in the middle. The composition of this scene corresponds to the verses of the Jātaka: the prince gets off the chariot and speaks to the charioteer, who initially keeps digging without paying any attention to the king's son. The right upper quarter of the medallion presents a later scene, in which the king with his attendants visits his son, an ascetic, in the forest.

In the Pali version the scene with the chariot and the charioteer – or rather with a cart and a cart driver (as in later times, it is not a chariot but a plain cart) – makes it possible to identify the story. In Polonnarua, Ceylon, one can see Temiya lying in the cart (fig. 3), and in Thailand an excerpt from a text (which is not included in the verses of the Jātaka but only in the prose) was used



Fig. 3 – Painting in Polonnaruwa, Tivanka Temple, vestibule, 12th-13th cent.
(Drawing by G.P. Perera, in Bandaranayke and Jayasinghe 1986: fig. 45).

to interpret the iconography of the story: while the cart driver is digging a hole, Temiya decides to check whether he is strong enough to defend himself in case he is forced to lie in the grave.¹⁰ He does so by lifting up the cart (Wenk 1975: pl. 182) (fig. 4).

The Sanskrit version of the story is – with the exception of the late poetic adaptation in Kṣemendra's *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* – preserved only in translations. Although these 'northern' versions are different in many respects, they contain adaptations of verses 3 and 4 of the Jātaka. These verses recount the beginning of a conversation between the king's son and the charioteer, including the question why the latter is digging a grave.¹¹ The charioteer is, however, of minor importance in Sanskrit and is mentioned only in the adapted verses. In all this texts it is not the charioteer but the executioners who are

¹⁰ ... *sace sārathī mayā saddhiṃ virujjheyya atthi nu kho me tena saha paṭivirujjhituṃ balan ti upadhāretuṃ rathaṃ pacchimantaṃ gahetvā kumārānaṃ kīlayānakaṃ viya ukkhipitvā aṭṭhāsi ...* (*Jātaka*: VI, 12); «'If the charioteer were to set against me, should I have the power to contend with him?' So he seized hold of the hinder end of the chariot and lifted it up as if it were a toy-cart for children...» (Cowell 1895-1907: VI, 9); for the Burmese version, cf. St. John (1893: 376).

¹¹ «'Wherefore, O waggon-driver, dost thou deliberately dig a hole? Wherefore do ye dig a hole? Answer the question quickly'. The waggon-driver replied, 'Because the king's son, dumb and a cripple from birth, does not speak, therefore will he soon, according to our commands, be put into the hole in the forest'» (von Schiefner 1906: 249).

dragging the prince to the place of execution outside the city.¹² The fact that in the Sanskrit versions, after consultations with a number of doctors, the king sends his son to the forest not with one charioteer but with several executioners constitutes a major difference between the Sanskrit versions and the Jātaka.



Fig. 4 – Painting in Wat Nā Phrā Thāt, Pak Thong Chai (Northern Thailand), 19th cent.
(Drawing by the author).

The depictions of the story that correspond to its 'northern' versions are to be found in paintings in Ajanta and in Central Asia. The painting in Ajanta (identified by Schlingloff 1977a: 472-76) depicts the Mūkapaṅgu story according to the version of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (fig. 5).¹³ In this version the prince is called Udaka, «Water», which refers to the place of his birth (von

¹² «In obedience to the king's commands, the executioners set the prince on a cart, and took him out of the city» (von Schiefner 1906: 248).

¹³ Copy: Griffiths 16M; photography of the copy held at Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 82-1887 and in India Office, vol. 73, nos. 6060-6061. Ills. in Yazdani (1930-55: III, pls. 50-51); Singh (1965: pl. 50); Schlingloff (1977a: 475-76, drawing; 1987: 381, drawing; 2000: I, 179, drawing).

Schiefner 1906: 247).¹⁴ In accordance with this detail of the story the painting



Fig. 5 – Painting in Ajanta, Cave XVI, front transept, left side wall. (After Schlingloff 2000: I, 179).

depicts (upper left) a carriage, followed by a horseman (the king?), in which the newborn prince is being brought from the river palace (once probably painted to the left of the cell door). The digging of a grave is not depicted in Ajanta. The prince is driven in a cart to the place where he is to be scared to death (bottom right). The presence of a demon indicates that the location depicted is the place of execution. The executioners grab the boy's limbs; and one of them is holding a sword over him. The scene corresponds precisely to a version preserved in the Tocharian language (but based on the Sanskrit version of the Vinaya of Mūlasarvāstivādavins), in which the king orders the executioners to kill his son with a sword.¹⁵

In Ajanta, the next scene shows a conversation between the prince and the executioners.

The paintings of the Mūkapaṅgu story in the monasteries on the northern Silk Road in Central Asia, identified by Grünwedel (1912: 74), look different. Like the majority of the Jātaka depictions in Central Asia, they are reduced to the single most dramatic scene. One can see here (fig. 6)¹⁶ how two executioners close the coffin containing the prince.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Udakākhyah sa bālo 'bhūt samjātaḥ salilāntare/ vardhamānaḥ pituḥ tulyaṃ yauvarājya-manorathaiḥ/* (*Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* 38.26; Vaidya 1959: I, 240).

¹⁵ [The king commands]: «Ergreift ihn. Wenn er gar kein Wort spricht, [so] nehmt ihm das Leben mit dem Schwert» (Sieg 1952: 18).

¹⁶ Ills. in Waldschmidt and von Le Coq (1928: 18, fig. 32) and Xu Wanyin (1983-85: I, fig. 63).

¹⁷ Further depictions in Kizil: Cave 38 (Musikerhöhle), barrel vault (ills. in Waldschmidt and von Le Coq 1928: 18, fig. 33, drawing; Xu Wanyin 1983-85: I, fig. 129; Yaldiz 1987: fig. 28, drawing); Cave 206 (Fusswaschungshöhle), plinth: Berlin, Museum für Indische Kunst, Acc.

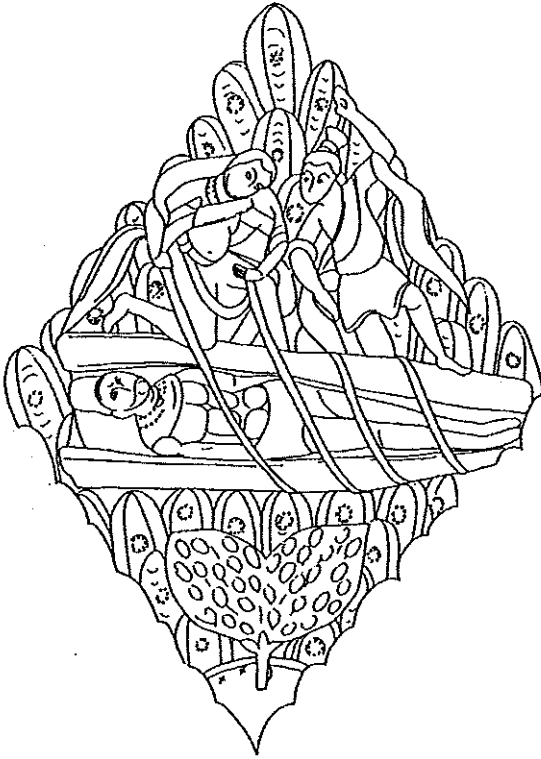


Fig. 6 – Painting in Kizil, Cave 17 (Bodhisattvagewölbehöhle), barrel vault.
(After Schlingloff 2000: II, 34, no. 39[1]).

As far as the relief from Amaravati (pl. 1a and fig. 1) is concerned, the presence of a reclining boy means it can be positively identified as the story of prince Mūkapaṅgu. The upper right scene, in which a person is digging with a mattock (just like in the relief from Bharhut) confirms the accuracy of this interpretation. We will never know what the central scene depicted, since its most important part (*i.e.* what the Brahmins are looking at) has not been preserved. It most probably depicted the reclining prince, perhaps lying on the cart, and the Brahmins, looking at him are giving the king instructions regarding the boy's future.

The question that arises here is, which version of the story does the relief from Amaravati depict? The central scene does not provide the answer to this

no. 445 (ills. in Waldschmidt and von Le Coq 1928: pl. B.7; Xu Wanyin 1983-85: III, fig. 207; Schlingloff 2000: II, 34, drawing). For a similar depiction in one Uyghur manuscript, cf. von Gabain (1977: pl. 27).

question since it is compatible with all the versions except the one to be found in the verses of the Jātaka. In the prose of the Jātaka the king receives advice from the soothsayers (*lakḥhaṇapāṭhake*), who call the prince *kālakarṇi*, i.e. they see him as a person whose presence brings misfortune (Zin 2003), and advise the king to drive him out of the city and to bury him alive.¹⁸ In the northern versions the king asks Brahmins, doctors or ministers for advice (*Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*: minister and physician;¹⁹ Tocharian: ministers;²⁰ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*: physicians;²¹ T 152: Brahmins²²). The depiction of the Brahmins in the relief thus corresponds most closely to the Jātaka and to the Chinese version.

The scenes in the upper part of the relief permit a more precise identification of the corresponding textual tradition. At the very least they make it possible to rule out the Pali version. In Pali – both in the verses and in the prose of the Jātaka – it is only a charioteer who takes the prince to the forest. The presence of two other people in both scenes corresponds only to the versions of northern Buddhism in which there are several assassins (*Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*: execu-

¹⁸ *tato rājā vipphaṇṇasārī hutvā lakḥhaṇapāṭhake pakkosāpetvā ... mahārāja ācariyahi aditṭhakan nāma n' atthi api ca kho rājakulehi patthetvā laddhaputto kālakarṇiṇi vutte tumhākaṃ domanassaṃ siyā ti na kathayimhā ti/ idāni kiṃ kātuṃ vāṭṭaṭṭi/ mahārāja imasmiṃ kumāre imasmiṃ gehe vasante tayo antarāyā paññayanti jīṭassa vā chātassa vā mahesiyā vā tasmā avamaṅgale rathe avamaṅgale asse ca yojetvā tattha naṃ nipaṭṭāpetvā pacchimadvārena nīharāpetvā āmakasusāne taṃ nikhaniṭṭuṃ vāṭṭaṭṭi/ (Jātaka: VI, 9-10); «Then the king, being full of vexation, summoned the fortune-tellers and said ... 'Great king', they replied, 'nothing is unseen by your teachers, but we knew how grieved you would be if we told you that the child of so many royal prayers would be all ill-luck; so we did not utter it.' 'What must be done now?' 'O king, if this prince remains in this house, three dangers are threatened, viz. to your life or your royal power, or the queen; therefore it will be best to have some unlucky horses yoked to an unlucky chariot, and, placing him therein, to convey him by the western gate and bury him in the charnel-ground'» (Cowell 1895-1907: VI, 7).*

¹⁹ «The ministers consulted the doctor, who declared that the prince was in perfect health, and was troubled by no complaint, and that he must be acted upon by threats» (von Schiefner 1906: 248).

²⁰ «'Saget [ihr] Edlen, wie soll ich [es] machen?' Darauf sprechen die Minister: 'es gibt für dieses ein Gegenmittel.' Erfreut spricht der König: 'Wie geartet ist es?' Darauf ... sprechen (die Minister) ohne ... zum König: 'O Herr, es gibt hier keine andere so liebe Sache wie das eigene Leben. Deshalb wird (der Prinz nur) so (fange) ... sich (?) zu verbergen fähig sein, wie er nicht in Lebensgefahr kommt.' Als er das gehört hatte, (stimmte) der König Brahmādatta, ohne auf den eigenen Sohn zu sehen, (zu)» (Sieg 1952: 18).

²¹ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* 38.34-35 (Vaidya 1959: I, 241): *prṣṭās tataḥ kṣīṇisena vaidyās taddoṣabheṣajam/ avadan vaikalyaṃ rājan rājasūnor na drśyate// abhyāsād yadi jāto 'sya doṣo 'pi sukhasevinaḥ/ tad eṣa bhayaśaṃvegād uttiṣṭhati ca vakti call iti vaidyair ...*

²² «Le roi et la reine s'en inquiétèrent: ils appelèrent la multitude des brahmanes pour leur demander qu'elle était la cause de ce fait; ils répondirent: 'Cet enfant a une influence néfaste; s'il est beau mais ne parle pas, de quelle utilité vous est-il, ô grand roi? Si les femmes de votre harem ne vous donnent pas d'héritier, ne serait-ce pas parce qu'il vous nuit? Il vous faut l'enterrer vivant et alors aurez certainement un noble héritier'» (Chavannes 1910-34: I, 126-27).

tioners;²³ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*: servants;²⁴ Tocharian: Caṇḍālas;²⁵ T 152: grave digger²⁶).

The fact that it is the 'northern' Sanskrit version and not the southern Pali version that is depicted in Amaravati was without a doubt the reason why Sivaramamurti failed to identify the content of the relief, despite the scene with a reclining boy and a man digging a grave.

This example of the presence of the northern literary tradition in the reliefs from Amaravati is by no means an isolated phenomenon. Sivaramamurti (1942: 229) already showed that the legend of King Śibi, who cut off flesh from his own body in order to save a dove, was depicted in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in the form recorded only in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* 55 (Vaidya 1959: II, 334-37) of Kṣemendra (11th century, Kashmir) as the story of King Sarvaṃdada.²⁷ There the dove begs the king to protect him not from a falcon but from a hunter (*naiṣāda*). The story is depicted in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda at least 13 times.²⁸ There is one painting of the story in

²³ «So king Brahmadata sent for executioners, and let them know privately that he was going to hand over the prince to them in the presence of a great assemblage, but that they were not to put him to death» (von Schiefner 1906: 248).

²⁴ *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* 38.37 (Vaidya 1959: I, 241): *sa bhartsyamānaḥ puruṣais tam uvāca rathasthītam/ api kaścid vasatyā asyāṃ Vārāṇasyāṃ na vā Janah//*.

²⁵ «(Der König) ... rief sogar in Gegenwart (einer großen Menschenmenge) die Caṇḍālas, die die zu Tötenden töten, [und] spricht: 'He, [ihr] Henker (!) Auf der ganzen Erde (wird) mein (Befehl (!)) mit (Verehrung) [und] Wohlwollen (befolgt (!)). Mit Absicht indessen verspottet dieser mein Sohn den königlichen Befehl [und] fügt sich nicht, ein Wort zu sagen, obwohl [er dazu] imstande [ist]'» (Sieg 1952: 18).

²⁶ «On revêtit (le prince) de vêtements précieux, puis on le remit aux fossoyeurs; les fossoyeurs lui enlevèrent ses beaux habits et tous ensemble se mirent à faire la fosse» (Chavannes 1910-34: I, 127).

²⁷ A second version only discovered recently, *Dvāvimśatyavadānakathā* (Okada Mamiko 1993: 164-68), which tells the story in a mixture of prose and verses, was composed at a later time.

²⁸ After Schlingloff (2000: I, 224-25; here under no. 46 = Śibi-Kapota): (1) Amaravati Museum: Acc. no. 182 (Sarkar and Nainar 1972: pl. 4a), (2) Acc. no. 184 (*ibid.*: 36); (3) Madras Government Museum: Acc. no. 238 (Aiyappan and Srinivasan 1952: 36), (4) Acc. no. 263 (ills. in Burgess 1887: pl. 14.5; Foucher 1928: pl. 8.1; Sivaramamurti 1942: pl. 28.1; Stern and Bénisti 1961: pl. 28b; Ray 1983: fig. 101; Rao 1984: fig. 209); (5) Nagarjunakonda Museum: Acc. no. 41 (ills. in Sarkar and Misra 1966: pl. 11b; Rosen Stone 1994: fig. 90), (6) Acc. no. 33 (ills. in Vogel 1932: pl. 2b; Longhurst 1938: pl. 42a; Rao 1956: pl. 33; 1984: fig. 375; Ray 1983: fig. 96; Rosen Stone 1994: fig. 216; Rama 1995: pl. 49), (7) Acc. no. 255 (Rosen Stone 1994: fig. 222); (8) London, British Museum: Acc. no. 14 (ills. in Fergusson 1868: pl. 60.1; Barrett 1954: pl. 26; Stern and Bénisti 1961: pl. 56; Rao 1984: fig. 197; Knox 1992: 62), (9) Acc. no. 69 (ills. in Stern and Bénisti 1961: pl. 43; Knox 1992: 130), (10) Acc. no. 85 (Knox 1992: 147), (11) Acc. no. 87 (Knox 1992: 151), (12) Acc. no. 90 (ills. in Fergusson 1868: pl. 82; Barrett 1954: pl. 14a; Knox 1992: 115; Rosen Stone 1994: fig. 85); (13) today lost (Fergusson 1868: pl. 83.1).

Ajanta (identified by Schlingloff 1984-86: 305-8).²⁹

A further – hitherto unidentified – example of a depiction in the south of a story known only in ‘northern’ versions is another relief from Nagarjunakonda (pl. *Ib* and fig. 7). A story is presented here in two scenes: in what has survived of the lower scene two elephants can be made out. The smaller of the two – evidently a female – is lying down. The upper scene, which is in a better state of preservation, depicts a king making a meaningful gesture with his forefinger and an elephant standing in front of a pot full of round objects. The elephant reaches out with its trunk to pick up one of the objects. The story presented here can be identified without problem if it is compared to its depictions in the paintings of Central Asia (Borromeo 1992) (fig. 8).³⁰ It is the story



Fig. 7 – Relief from Nagarjunakonda.
Nagarjunakonda Museum, Acc. no. 19.
(Drawing by the author).

²⁹ Ajanta, Cave XVII, front transept, left side wall. Copy: Griffiths 17S; photography of the copy held at Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 93-1887 and in India Office, vol. 73, nos. 6093-6094. See ills. in Griffiths (1896-97: I, pl. 64a); Yazdani (1930-55: IV, pl. 15); Singh (1965: pl. 50); Schlingloff (1984-86: 305-8, drawing; 1987: 89, 366, fig. 12, drawing; 2000: I, 232, drawing).

³⁰ Ills. in Waldschmidt and von Le Coq (1928: pl. A.1); Xu Wanyin (1983-85: III, fig. 210); Borromeo (1992: fig. 1). Further depictions in Central Asia: (a) Kizil, Cave 178 (Schluchthöhle), barrel vault, Berlin, Museum für Indische Kunst, Acc. no. 8449 (war loss); ills. in Grünwedel (1920: fig. 42, 44 drawing); von Le Coq (1924: pl. 10); Waldschmidt and von Le Coq (1928: fig. 1, drawing), Borromeo (1992: fig. 3, drawing); Schlingloff (2000: II, 47[5], drawing); (b) Kirish (Ritterhöhle), right side wall, Berlin, Museum für Indische Kunst, Acc. no. IB 8917; ills. in Waldschmidt and von Le Coq (1928: pl. C); Xu Wanyin (1983-85: III, fig. 210); Schlingloff (2000: II, 47[9], drawing). Other paintings from Central Asia show only the escape of the King Prabhāsa (Borromeo 1992: figs. 4-9).

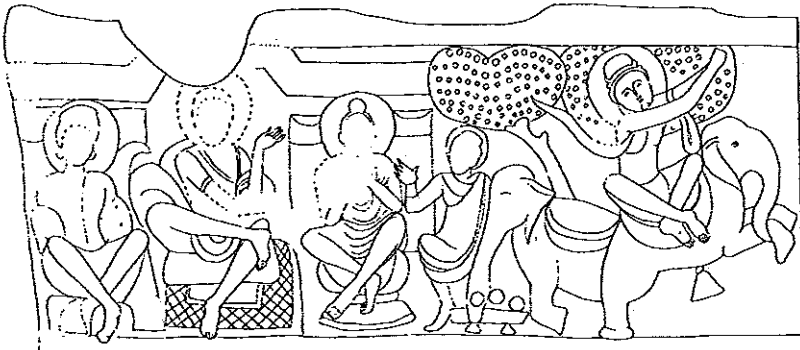


Fig. 8 – Painting from Kizil, Cave 186 (Mittlere Höhle), plinth.
 Berlin, Museum für Indische Kunst, Acc. no. IB 8851.
 (After Schlingloff 2000: II, 47, no. 53[7]).

of King Prabhāsa,³¹ depictions of which have also been preserved in at least one and perhaps even in three paintings in Ajanta:³² Cave I, identified by Schlingloff (1977b; 2000: I, 244-46), Cave II, identified by Schlingloff (2000: I, 249), Cave XVII (fig. 9), identified by Foucher (1921: 218, no. 28).³³ During an excursion King Prabhāsa has to save himself when his elephant suddenly runs off into the jungle. It turns out that the bull had smelled a female there. After several days the elephant is brought back to the palace and the king keeps complaining to the mahout that the elephant has not been properly tamed. The mahout, however, continues to claim that while the animal has been perfectly trained its powerful passion cannot be kept in check. In order to demonstrate the animal's absolute obedience the mahout requires it to pick up

³¹ After Schlingloff (2000: I, 247), the story has been preserved in the following sources: *Jātaka-mālā* of Haribhaṅga I (cf. Hahn 1977; 1981); *Kalpanāmaṇḍitika* (Lüders 1926: 166), preserved also in Chinese T 201.53, trans. by Julien (1860: 115-17); *Mahajātakamālā* 7 (Hahn 1985: 86-100); *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* 1 (Vaidya 1959: I, 1-11) and 100 (*ibid.*: II, 545-46); the *Mūla-sarvāstivādaḥinaya*, preserved in Tibetan (Suzuki 1955-61: XLI, 221,2,2; Panglung 1981: 49-50; Panglung's trans. in Schlingloff 1977b: 139-52); preserved in Chinese T 1448.15 [vol. 24: 72]; in Tocharian B (Lévi 1925: 305-7; Pinault 1988); for Khotanese cf. Dresden (1955: 423); for Uyghur cf. Zieme (1985); in Chinese T 202.21 (see Lévi 1925: 314-16) and T 202.49 (*ibid.*: 316; Takakusu 1901).

³² Cave I, right side wall: ills. in Goloubew (1927: pls. 37-39), Yazdani (1930-55: I, pl. 10c, drawing, and pl. 36b), Ghosh (1967: pl. 84), Schlingloff (1977b: fig. 2, drawing; 2000: I, 246, drawing); Cave II, veranda, right side chapel, front wall: ills. in Yazdani (1930-55: II, pl. 14), Schlingloff (2000: I, 249); Cave XVII: cf. the following fn.

³³ Copy: Griffiths 17N1; photography of the copy held in the India Office, vol. 73, nos. 6063-6065. Ills. in Schlingloff (1977b: fig. 1, drawing; 1987: 373, drawing; 2000: I, 250, drawing).

red-hot iron balls with its trunk. The relief of Nagarjunakonda (pl. I and fig. 7) depicts this story in two scenes: the lower scene shows the bull elephant and the female elephant lying on the ground; the upper part depicts the test with the red-hot iron balls.

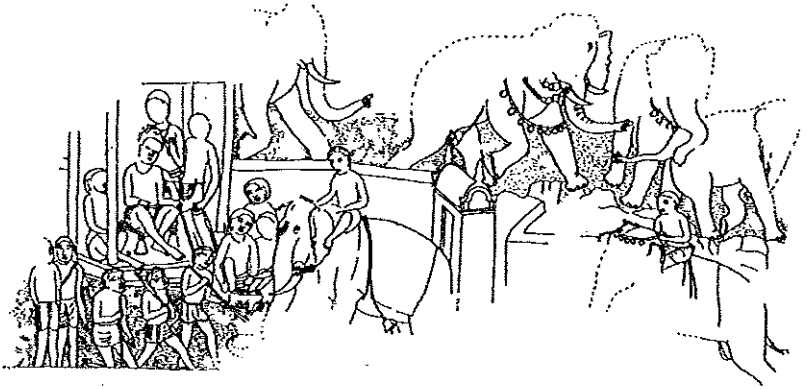


Fig. 9 – Painting in Ajanta, Cave XVII, rear transept, right side wall.
(After Schlingloff 2000: I, 250).

As the above examples show, the question of the affiliation to a particular school of texts that served as the literary background for the reliefs at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda is highly complicated. The identification of that affiliation will require a lot of effort and case studies of particular reliefs. Nowadays the complete identification of the corresponding literary tradition is only possible with regard to a small number of reliefs. For instance, the relief in Nagarjunakonda³⁴ which depicts the story of Prince Sudhana includes elements which correspond only to the version of the story from the *Mahāvastu* but also differs from it (Vogel 1937: 120-21).³⁵ Some elements of the Buddha legend depicted in ‘southern’ reliefs correspond only to descriptions in ‘northern’ literature. For example, a representation of the ‘Miracle of Śrāvastī’ in Amaravati³⁶ does not include details from the Pali story such as a mango tree, but instead an Aśoka-tree and the youth Uttara floating in the air described in the text of *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (Schlingloff 2000: I, 503-4). The depic-

³⁴ Nagarjunakonda, Site 6, Nagarjunakonda Museum. Ills. in Longhurst (1938: pl. 27c); Vogel (1937: pl. 36); Ray (1965: fig. 14); Rosen Stone (1994: figs. 119-21).

³⁵ The relief shows Sudhana riding on the back of the monkey king together with two companions while the text mentions three (Vogel 1937: 121).

³⁶ Relief from Amaravati, Madras Government Museum, Acc. no. 130; ill. in Sivaramamurti (1942: III A,21; pl. 38.2); also in Burgess (1887: pl. 7.1) and Schlingloff (2000: II, 100[4], drawing).

tions of the story of the murderer Aṅgulimāla³⁷ converted by the Buddha indicate that the original texts have not survived and that the story had been established in the literature long before the creation of the texts that are known nowadays (Zin 2005). The legend of Aṅgulimāla is depicted with all the details that Bareau (1985-86) considers to be later additions (because they are known only from later literary sources) in reliefs from the 2nd century A.D. in Amaravati and Gandhāra, places that are geographically very far apart. It seems, therefore, that there must have existed an older text that told the story with all these details which has not survived.

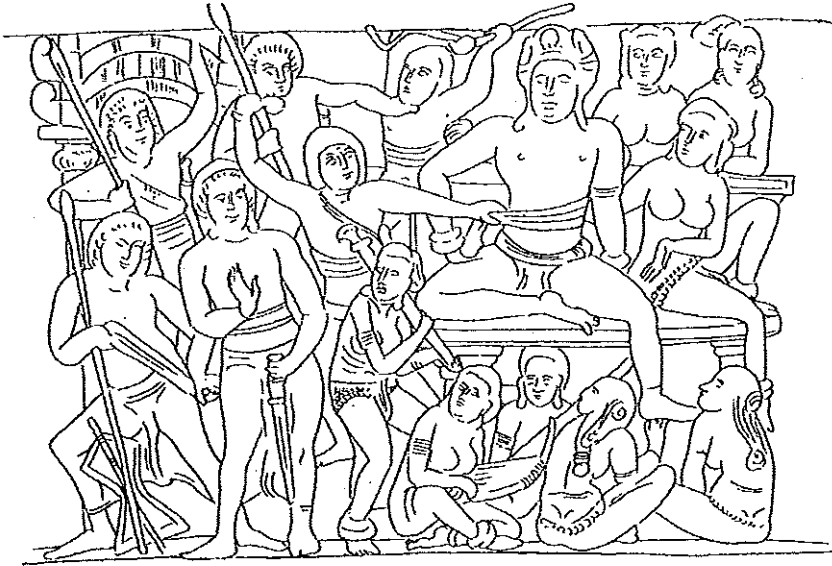


Fig. 10 – Relief from Amaravati. Madras Government Museum, Acc. no. 105.
(Drawing by the author).

Numerous reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda have been wrongly identified. We can take as an example a relief showing a king being attacked by several aggressive armed persons (fig. 10).³⁸ Sivaramamurti's interpretation (1942: IV A,3) – «Prince Siddhartha lives in three pleasant palaces carefully guarded from the ills of life» (*ibid.*: pl. 59.1c, opposite page) –

³⁷ Two reliefs from Amaravati held in Madras Government Museum. For the first one, see Burgess (1887: pl. 48.4) and Stern and Bénisti (1961: pl. 9b); for the second one (Acc. no. 80), Sivaramamurti (1942: III A,18; pl. 40.2) and Burgess (1887: pl. 23.4).

³⁸ Ills. in Sivaramamurti (1942: pl. 59.1c); Burgess (1887: pl. 42.4); Stern and Bénisti (1961: pl. 45a); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 70); Roy (1994: fig. 126).

is absolutely impossible. Many reliefs have been identified in a rather unconvincing manner, since the interpretations correspond only vaguely to the adduced texts. As a typical example we can take the interpretation of a story that is depicted in three reliefs, two from Amaravati³⁹ and one from Nagarjunakonda⁴⁰ (figs. 11-13). All these reliefs show a (holy) tree, in which lives



Fig. 11 - Relief from Amaravati. Madras Government Museum, Acc. no. 58. (Drawing by the author).



Fig. 12 - Relief from Amaravati. Amaravati Museum, Acc. no. 433. (Drawing by the author).

a tree spirit (*vykṣadevatā*). In front of the tree an elephant with a driver is taking a bath in a pond. A king (?) with his retinue is approaching the pond. The background of the reliefs shows among other things children and a couple carrying babies in a rural landscape. Sivaramamurti (1942: 219-20) explains the relief in Madras Museum as a depiction of the story of Mittavindaka, the Unfortunate One, from *Losakajātaka* (*Jātaka*, no. 41). He claims that the elephant in the water represents drought and that the children are a detail that is important for the interpretation. As another relief shows (fig. 14)⁴¹ the same story can be depicted without children; there the most important detail is a procession arriving at the pond with the elephant in it. The subject of the reliefs is thus unknown.

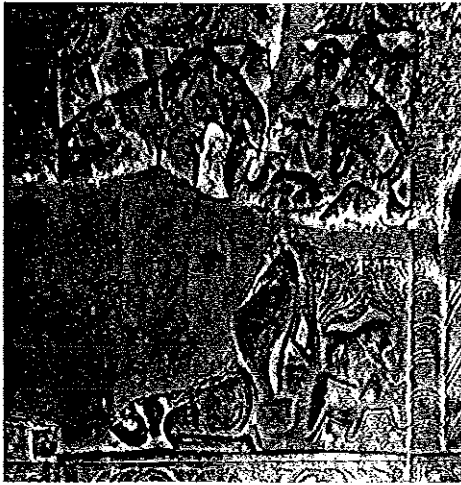
³⁹ Ills. in Burgess (1887: pl. 49.2, drawing); Bachhofer (1929: pl. 127b); Sivaramamurti (1942: III B,12; pl. 46.2; 1979: fig. 17); Stern and Bénisti (1961: pl. 24b); Parimoo (1995: fig. 11).

⁴⁰ Ills. in Ray (1965: fig. 17, detail); Krishna Murthy (1977: pl. 34); Parimoo (1995: fig. 13); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 226).

⁴¹ Ills. in Barrett (1954: pl. 100); Knox (1992: 135); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 150).



a) Relief from Amaravati. Madras Government Museum, Acc. no. 148.
(Photo by the author).



b) Relief from Nagarjunakonda. Nagarjunakonda Museum, Acc. no. 19.
(Photo by the author).

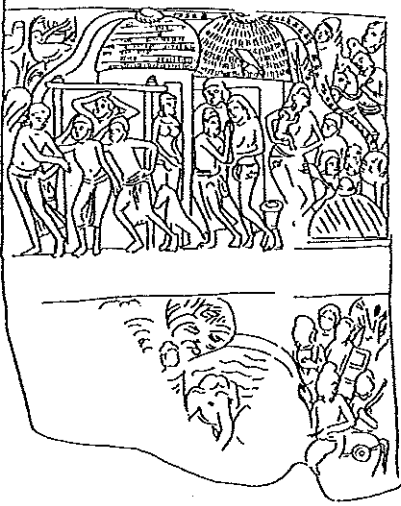


Fig. 13 – Relief from Nagarjunakonda, Site 2. Nagarjunakonda Museum, Acc. no. 67. (Drawing by the author).

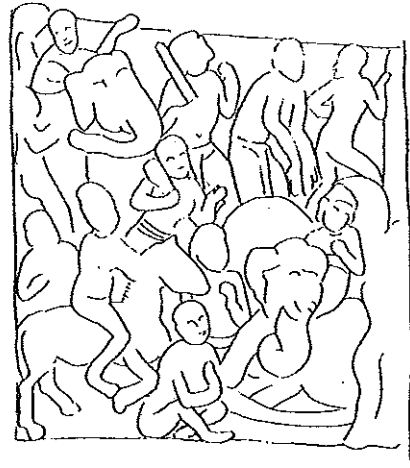


Fig. 14 – Relief from Amaravati. London, British Museum, Acc. no. 70. (Drawing by the author).

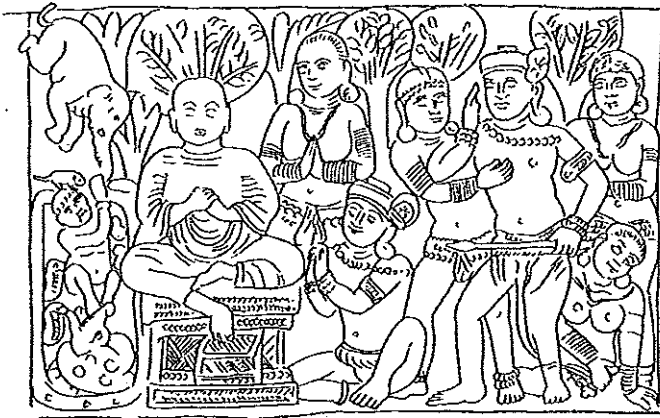


Fig. 15 – Relief from Nagarjunakonda, Site 9. Nagarjunakonda Museum, Acc. no. 24. (Drawing by the author).

Concerning the interpretation of the narrative reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda on the basis of literary sources, it must be noted that in all the reliefs that have been positively identified (as for instance in the case of the

stories of Viśvantara, Śaḍdanta, Śaśa, Māndhātara, Aṅgulimāla or Nanda) there are no significant differences between the texts and the corresponding reliefs. It has been shown that in a number of cases these reliefs correspond closely to the versions of the stories found in the literary tradition of 'northern' Buddhism. However, it is uncertain whether all the original sources have survived to the present day and, therefore, whether it will ever be possible to find a literary explanation of the reliefs. As an example we can take the depiction of the famous parable about the 'Man in the Well'⁴² – known from *Mahābhārata*,⁴³ several Jaina sources⁴⁴ and many versions in the Christian literature (Kuhn 1888; Lang 1966: 77-78) – which we meet several times in the reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda (identified by Vogel 1937: 109-13; fig. 15,⁴⁵ fig. 16,⁴⁶ fig. 17,⁴⁷ fig. 18⁴⁸).



Fig. 16 – Relief from Nagarjunakonda, Site 6, Paris, Musée Guimet.
(Drawing by the author).

⁴² «A Brahmin loses his way in a dense forest full of beast of prey ... in the middle of the forest, covered by underwood and creeper plants, there is a well. The Brahman falls into it and is caught on the intertwined branches of a creeper ... and yet another even greater danger threatens him there. In the middle of the well he perceived a great, mighty dragon, at the edge of the lid of the well he saw a ... giant elephant slowly approaching. In the branches of the tree which covered the well, swarmed all kinds of dreadful-looking bees, preparing honey. The honey drips down and is greedily drunk by the man hanging in the well. For he was not weary of existence, and did not give up hope of life, though white and black mice gnawed the tree on which he hung» (Winternitz 1927: 408).

⁴³ *Mahābhārata* XI.5, 19-22; Roy (1884-96: VII, *Stree Parva* 7-8).

⁴⁴ *Yasudevahiṇḍi* (Caturvijaya and Punyavijaya 1930-31: I, 8); Jain (1977: 560-61); Mette (1991: 55-56). For further Jaina sources, cf. von Glasenapp (1925: 469, n. 22).

⁴⁵ Rao (1956: pl. 18); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 81).

⁴⁶ Hackin (1931: pls. 6-7); Deneck (1970: pls. 82-85); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 113).

⁴⁷ Longhurst (1938: pl. 49b); Rosen Stone (1944: fig. 223).

⁴⁸ Deneck (1970: pls. 55-56); Knox (1992: 130); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 68).



Fig. 17 – Relief from Nagarjunakonda, Site 2. Nagarjunakonda Museum, Acc. no. 18.
(Drawing by the author).



Fig. 18 – Relief from Amaravati. London, British Museum, Acc. no. 69.
(Drawing by the author).

The reliefs which have been linked to the parable of the 'Man in the Well' depict a story about a king who attacks with a weapon an ascetic (not the Buddha) who is sitting under a tree. In the next scene we see the same king adoring the ascetic. The oldest depictions of this story do not contain the par-

able (fig. 19).⁴⁹ All Buddhist sources that are known today⁵⁰ belong to northern Buddhism, none of them connects the parable with a story depicted in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Vogel (1937: 113-14) explains the reliefs as illustrations of the unknown version of the story of King Udena (Udayana) and his

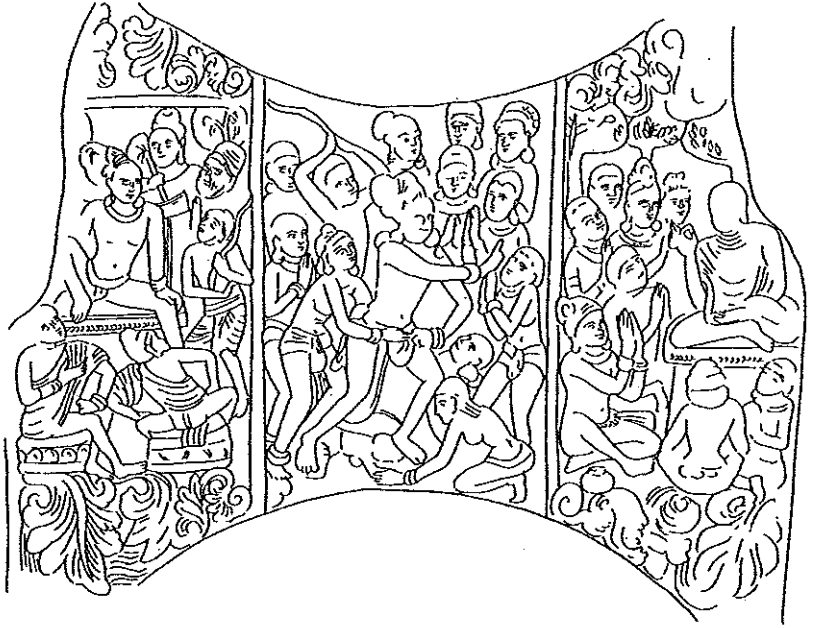


Fig. 19 – Relief from Amaravati. London, British Museum, Acc. no. 11.
(Drawing by the author).

conversion by the arhat Piṇḍola. The problem with this identification is not only that we do not know of any such story but also the fact that the ‘Man in the Well’ would in that case be understood as a depiction of the content of the sermon of Piṇḍola – which would make it the only example of a ‘depiction within a depiction’ in Indian Buddhist art. In light of all these difficulties, we must assume that the literary source of the reliefs that contain the parable of the ‘Man in the Well’ will remain unknown for ever.

⁴⁹ Ills. in Barrett (1954: pl. 29); Stern and Bénisti (1961: pl. 57a); Knox (1992: 61). For further examples, cf. Burgess (1887: pl. 34.2, on the stūpa, on the right side and pl. 39.2, on the stūpa, on the left side).

⁵⁰ Survived only in Chinese; for translations cf. Julien (1860: 131-34), and Chavannes (1910-34: II, 83-84; III, 257-58).

Indeed, the effort to crush and squeeze the Amaravati and Nagarjuna-konda reliefs into the Procustean bed of Pali texts is the main reason for misinterpretations.

Monika Zin
Institut für Indologie und Iranistik
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1
80539 München

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