

PERENNIAL ENCOUNTERS:
DOES TECHNOLOGY SHAPE THE MIND?

THE SIMILE OF THE PAINTER, THE IRRUPTION OF REPRESENTATION,
AND THE DISCLOSURE OF BUDDHISM IN EARLY AND CLASSICAL INDIA

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The XVIth Conference that opens today celebrates the 35th anniversary of the foundation of the *International Association of Buddhist Studies*. In the Presidential Address which he gave to the first Conference of the IABS, which took place at Columbia University, New York, the 15–17 September 1978, the late Professor Gadjin M. Nagao praised the impressive results achieved by the preceding generation of scholars referring, among other things, to fundamental data-bases and masterpieces, which are for the most part accessible nowadays in digitized form. While emphasizing the fact that “Buddhist Studies had by that time gained recognition as an independent field in the humanities,” Gadjin M. Nagao suggested two ways to be followed in the future

By means of analysis, we will be able to establish as facts the information gleaned from the data – be they textual, archaeological, or in any other form – transmitted to us by our forerunners. The Buddhist texts, which have come down to us through various traditions and which have been found in various areas must be ever more critically and thoroughly analyzed, so that we can gain the information hidden deep therein. I would even go so far as to say that the best-known and best-studied texts still await further investigation. (...) [T]he method of synthesis is necessary to bring together the facts that we have accumulated through analysis and to reconstruct, as far as possible, the history of Buddhist thought. This second method of research must be emphasized because it seems to be unduly neglected and almost disregarded at present. (...) *Those who use analytical tools without synthetic visions are just as blind as those who possess synthetic visions but lack analytical tools.* (Nagao 1979: 82)

¹ Grateful thanks go to Paul Harrison who kindly corrected the English. Errors however are our own sole responsibility.

The vision of Buddhist Studies presented by the first president of the IABS, despite being expressed in classical terminology, is still valid, while the conditions of its effectiveness have totally changed. In the last three decades, several cultural, political and economic factors have produced new approaches in the field of humanities instigating the removal of frontiers that previously separated disciplines, cultures and communities of scholars. In the field of Buddhist Studies the encounter of East and West, of academics and representatives of the Saṃgha, has a respectable pedigree that can be traced back to modern history, if not before, and which experienced a notable upswing in the second part of the 19th century. The exchanges established among scholars from all parts of the world, that, in many cases, instituted *paramparās* or lineages continuing to date, tend to demonstrate that prior to the upheaval of the present mondialisation, a genuine reciprocal listening nourished by salutary criticism, was at work, a listening which has certainly influenced and modified the intellectual life of East and West.

I. Encounter with the present: the perceptibility of intellectual practice and related questions

Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as an infantile piece of science fiction. And as our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside. So, unless unaware of this dynamic, we shall at once move into a phase of panic terrors, exactly befitting a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed co-existence.

Marshall McLuhan (1962: 82)

Considering the irritating side-effects caused by the use of the computer that we all experience when consulting a digitized text wrongly transcribed, or working with new (imposed) software just *approximatively* performant, it is tempting to assent to McLuhan's maxim: *We shape our tools, and afterwards our tools shape us.*² While McLuhan has been the target of strong and, at time, justified critics he has also been in some respect a

² See *Understanding Media. The Extension of Man*. Douglas Coupland cites a number of McLuhan's maxims in his stimulating book that we repeat here not without inviting the reader to (re-)read McLuhan, see Coupland 2010: 87.

visionnaire, and it would be unwise, I think, to reject the essential along with the inessential. All the more and interesting though, that the inquiry into the cultural models that takes form in our times presents an occasion to investigate the cultural models of the past. We could start with the present and focus upon the tidal wave from those *flickering little screens* that flows into and out of our lives, and ask ourselves what the *searchable digitized text*, the *bitmapped display*, the *hypertext*, and the *multimedia virtual reality* bring to our reading, analysis, and understanding of a fragmentary manuscript in the Kuṣāṇa Brāhmī of Central Asia from the early centuries CE? The answer is, quite a lot, in fact. Three identified words (and even fewer!) may suffice to locate the fragment in a known canonical text, to relate it to an epigraph, to record a possible unusual spelling of a particular word, and *ipso facto* include it in a virtual open compendium of phonetic history. In the process, the virtual scholar that we are observing, still continues to command the way of research, and construes the material in the conspectus of his own scientific and cultural background, of his intellectual history: he knows where to search. However the case scholar in question may also search for the information via a Google-ized data-base that permits him to trace a word without knowing in advance where the word comes from, or he may be just satisfied with the result, without reading the sources. In this case, the search may be interpreted by the scholar or his readers as a discovery, thus taking as new what may or may not be a simple remake. But even this case existed before the introduction of the digitized world, and remakes if not plagiarisms, under the cover of discovery, are an invariant characteristic of the mercantile artistic or intellectual universes, less prosaically of the world *tout court*.

The vexing questions seem to lie elsewhere: competence instead of competitiveness, and ethics. For instance the case of the social/educational culture or *paideia* that, unless its agents abdicate responsibility, will be primarily concerned with the problematic of literacy versus illiteracy, that naturally may be and is investigated from several perspectives, as the abundant literary production on the subject amply illustrates. In an incisive and pregnant ‘afterword’ to the contributions to a conference held at the Center for Semiotic and Cognitive Studies at the University of San Marino in 1994, the late lamented *maestro* Umberto Eco who, together with Patrizia Violi, directed the Center, with his usual humor

gave a short and clear description of illiteracy versus literacy, specifically pointing to the role of intellectuals

Today the concept of literacy comprises many media. An enlightened policy of literacy must take into account the possibilities of all these media. Educational concern must be extended to the whole of media. *Responsibilities and tasks must be carefully balanced.*

Then, with regard to the illusory poncif, or stereotyped idea, pretending that communication is nowadays mainly visual Eco added:

Even if it were true that today visual communication overwhelms written communication the problem is not to oppose written to visual communication. *The problem is how to improve both.* In the Middle Ages visual communication was, for the masses, more important than writing. But Chartres cathedral was not culturally inferior to the *Imago Mundi* of Honorius of Autun.³ Cathedrals were the TV of those times, and the difference from our TV was that the directors of medieval TV *read good books, had a lot of imagination, and worked for the public benefit* (or, at least, for what they believed to be the public benefit).⁴

And while we could now, twenty years after Eco's words, introduce quite a number of other mass-media that are tendentially limiting the horizon of their users, Eco's humorous example points to the ethical engagement that the intellectual is expected to exercise *also* in the use of new technologies. Illustrative to the extreme is the case where the intellectual is invited to consider the possible consequences inherent to the application of artificial intelligence to the "system of autonomous lethal arms" (SALA),⁵ a question whose investigation could derive considerable benefit from, among others, arguments raised by Indian Buddhist scholars of the past.

³ *De imagine mundi* of Honorius of Autun (12th century), whose name was Honorius Augustodunensis, is an amazing book accessible to the general public of his time, a "cosmographie du monde visible," including passages on Asia, Japan or India that, says Honorius, "counts 44 regions and numerous peoples." As the title may suggest and as Étienne Gilson (1962 [1944]: 326) notes *De imagine mundi* may be counted among the works that are like "'miroirs' des connaissances moyennes du temps qui les a vu naître," and that may thus be compared with 'our' Wikipedia.

⁴ See Eco 1996: 298.

⁵ This question has been raised by Stuart Russell (University of California at Berkeley, EECS and CITRIS) at various occasion, and made known to the French public as "Non aux robots de combat," see the rubric "Débats," *Le Monde* (August 8, 2015). Stuart Russell and his team are raising important questions that could possibly profit from a vigorous debate taking into account a much larger conspectus.

It may also be said that our scholar, whom we have seen at work and whom we call the ‘in-between-scholar,’ because he stays in between the outer digitized searching and the inner, personal and inventive mind elaborated by his own experience, sees in his little tiny screen a tremendous saving of time. Surreptitiously then the *vidūṣaka*, the facetious jester, asks in a stage whisper “what will you do with the time you have saved?” Why indeed should the intellectual save time? Does this have something to do with technological change, or is something else at stake? Apparently the non-contractual mode of thinking is a solitary practice and as such it is not essentially concerned with time. Time intervenes when the activity is displayed to that group there where competition becomes essential, since the appropriation of the result is vital for the competitor with all that this may imply in terms of subjection to economical constraint and disregard of elegant scientific scholarship. Or time is also important when the activity is performed in the frame of a private or institutional contract. However, the jester intrudes again “What is the result of fast-thinking?”

The question related to the possible changes in the intellectual, cultural and social spheres that new technologies are bringing, particularly in the case of mass-media, may be traced back to the introduction of the first *materially mediated* mode of communicating/transmitting information, the support of various systems of code that may be subsumed under the term ‘script.’ From this point of view the question appears as mere rhetoric since we could indeed go even further and include oral expression that equally relies upon a material (though extremely subtle) support. And so on – the support of mind indeed appears to be the corporeal matter, whose ‘existential status’ will be interpreted by the various Buddhist philosophical schools (and their modern interpreters) according to their own tenets; and yet, as will be seen, the question remains heuristically productive.

The stimulating presence of the *flickering little screen* that with a single gentle click of the finger will extend the field of activity of the mental faculties to the cyberspace, *a closed and oriented field* despite its being a mine of infinite possible combinations of data, from where images and words, sounding images and imagined words are bursting that inform and integrate the mind, tells us that through a series of *materially mediated supports* the outer world is interacting with the inner world and vice versa, something of which the philosophers of Antiquity, in India as

well as in Greece, were aware very long ago, discussing the role of the ‘image’ in the cognitive process that regarded ethic, meditation, and knowledge as compulsory factors for the achievement of the goal.

Incidentally, and returning to the *materially mediated support*, the model does not vary from the previous one where we saw our scholar moving from his desk to his library. What may change is the fact that his ‘gross body’ does not move to a physically perceptible data-base. One may wonder why it is so often said that the network of digitized information is *dematerialized*. The stored artificial memory, despite the use of the poetic term ‘cloud’, is amazingly solid and occupies a tremendous space even if its user does not directly perceive its ‘solidity’, – let alone the energy consumed by that storage, though this is another question. Possibly the term is inaccurately used instead of saying ‘not having gross or mass consistence,’ that is less visible to the eye than a stele or a papyrus may be. The interesting and in some respects relatively frightening question of the durability of the new supports of digitized information poses crucial socio-political problems for the future, and the future of the future, that go far beyond the concern of preserving the culture of the past.

But were the intellectuals of the past immune from questioning their world? Some particular Buddhist sources of the time tell us that the intellectual and cultural horizon of early and classical India seems to have been very much concerned with the production of the ‘mass-media’ of that epoch, and that the problematic centered upon the ‘*image*’ did indeed structurally color spiritual praxis, philosophical discussion, and artistic representation. And this did not happen without provoking controversial responses to, if not virulent attacks upon, the promoters of the new media.

II. Words, images, and the artificial

It is true that from the invention of metal tools stone-working has remained, up to quite modern times, essentially the same. But it is equally true that what may appear at first sight just as minor changes in tools and techniques may, at times and not least today, testify significantly to important dimensions of culture and context.

Carl Nylander (2006: 121)

Something must have changed, when, in some regions of India, the traditional technique, making use of “brick and plaster, wood and bamboo” as building-material, introduced the use of “the permanent and lasting medium of stone.” Vidya Dehejia (1992) places this “major innovation” “in the centuries immediately before and after Christ, when Buddhist sacred monuments were constructed on a hitherto unprecedented scale.” She notes that “for over 2000 years, builders and artists in India had worked in the perishable mediums of bricks and wood,” and goes on to say that in those times, the presumed Aśokean *stūpa* at Sāñcī (the ancient Kākaṇava)⁶ was conspicuously enlarged and “four elaborately sculpted stone gateways were added to the monument.” Again however, the idea of durability as such was not something new, since for instance the bronze statuettes of Mohenjo-Daro show that the casting of metal was known in pre-Vedic time, though the artefacts might have continued to be unknown till the time of their discovery. Marshall and Foucher noted that this process started at the epoch of Aśoka when his sculptors

had shown how stone could be substituted for wood (...) [W]hen these things had happened, the whole outlook for art in the Buddhist Church changed; within a little time it came to be recognised as a valuable means of instructing and edifying the Faithful (...) And thus a new hieratic art came into being, in which the *stūpas* and pillars erected by the emperor took place among the most conspicuous and frequently repeated emblems of the Buddhist faith...⁷

Situated to the north of Bhopal, in Madhya Pradesh, the monument of Sāñcī attracted artisans from various regions, including the Andhra region, Ujjain and the Deccan. The famous inscription, mentioned already by Cunningham and Lüders, and attesting the presence of “Ānanda son

⁶ Various spelled, namely as Kākaṇava/Kākaṇāva or Kākaṇaya, according to the inscriptions of Sāñcī, dated BC 2 and 1, see Tsukamoto LIV: Sāñcī 3 and 375/380.

⁷ Marshall & Foucher 1982 [1940], vol. I: 93. A similar pattern may be observed in China where according to Wu Hung (1995: 121–141) the beginning of the use of stone in funerary architecture may be dated to the 2nd century BC. In this case and following the extremely interesting article of Tiziana Lippiello the concept of durability is linked to longevity while the use of wood “fragile e vulnerabile all’azione degli elementi naturali, evocava la caducità della vita.” See Lippiello 2006: 110–112, 110–111.

of Vāsiṣṭhī, the foreman of the artisans of the King Śrī Śātakarṇi,”⁸ poses interesting questions. In this inscription Ānanda bears a metronymic that is relatively famous at the turning point of the Common Era.⁹ On reconsidering the chronology of the Sātavāhana in light of new finding, the late Ajay Mitra Shastri noted that “there was only one early Sātavāhana king named Sātakarṇi” and that he “flourished from the end of the I century BC through the first half of the I century AD,” and suggested dating the architrave in question to this period.¹⁰ That Ānanda, the artist/artisan of Śrī Śātakarṇi, could have come to Sāñcī from one of the ateliers flourishing under the Sātavāhana could very well be, albeit the fact that tangible evidence of sculptor’s activity comes from a later period. Archaeological excavation at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa have revealed that a vast room oriented from west to east, juxtaposed to the monastery, should have hosted a “sculptor’s studio,” as evidenced by the variety of narrative motifs and form (fig. 1) of 61 limestone slabs founded *in situ*.¹¹

⁸ Tsukamoto I.IV: Sāñcī 384: *rāño siri-Sātakaṇisa (2) āvesanisa Vāsiṣṭhiputrasa (3) Ānaṃdasa dānaṃ*. Tsukamoto quotes Hemacandra’s *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* who gives to the term *āvesāna* the alternative meaning of *śilpiśālā*, that would permit one to translate “[the artist] of the workshop/atelier [of Śrī Śātakarṇi].” Cf. Sircar IEG s.v. *āvesānin*, “the chief artisan, the foreman of artisans,” following Marshall & Foucher 1982 [1940], vol. I: 297, whose translation was after them more or less universally adopted. We may note that here, following a common usage, the artisan affiliates himself / is affiliated to the king. Cases like this are not infrequent, for instance at Kaṇaganahalli where a *śramaṇa* is said to be of the Sātavāhana, and this under Vāsiṣṭhīputra Śrī Śātakarṇi on his fifth regnal year, see Poonacha 2011: 451–452 and pl. cxxxi. Cf. Tsukamoto I.III: Kanheri 16 (dated CE 2): *[Vā]siṣṭh[ī]putrasya śrī-Sāta[karṇ]i[s]ya devyā[h] Kārddamaka-rājavamśa-pra[bha]v[ā]v[ā] mahākṣatra[pa]-Ru.....[p]utry[āh]*.

⁹ See Tsukamoto I.II: Nāgārjunakoṇḍa 16 (dated CE 3): the term is here the metronymic of General Pūkiya; Tsukamoto I.III: Ajañtā 27 (dated BC 2) metronymic of Kaṭanādina; but also Tsukamoto I.IV: Bhārhut 204 (dated BC 2–1) where it directly designates the name of the wife of Velimita of Vedisā; again as metronymic Tsukamoto I.III: Nāsik 26: *Vāsiṣṭhiputa-sāmi-siri-Pulumāi / Vāsiṣṭhīputra-svāmin Śrī-Puḷumāvi*, cf. Nāsik 1. The metronymic “Vāsiṣṭhīputra” appears in the royal titulare of seven Sātavāhana kings, Puḷumāvi included, see A.M. Shastri 2008: 345. Incidentally Vāsiṣṭhā and Vāsiṣṭhī are well known in Buddhist literature, as a name of a Vedic *ṛṣi*, of a *gotra*, of a Brahmin etc.

¹⁰ See A.M. Shastri 2008: 348. Among other arguments, Shastri advances the fact that “[n]obody any longer dates the Hāthīgumphā inscription in the 2nd century BC and Khāravēla is commonly placed in the I. century BC or AD.” See A.M. Shastri (2002) “Khāravēla and the Sātavāhana.”

¹¹ See T.N. Ramachandran 1953: 19, and 8 (fig. 2 with the sculptor’s studio marked by G).

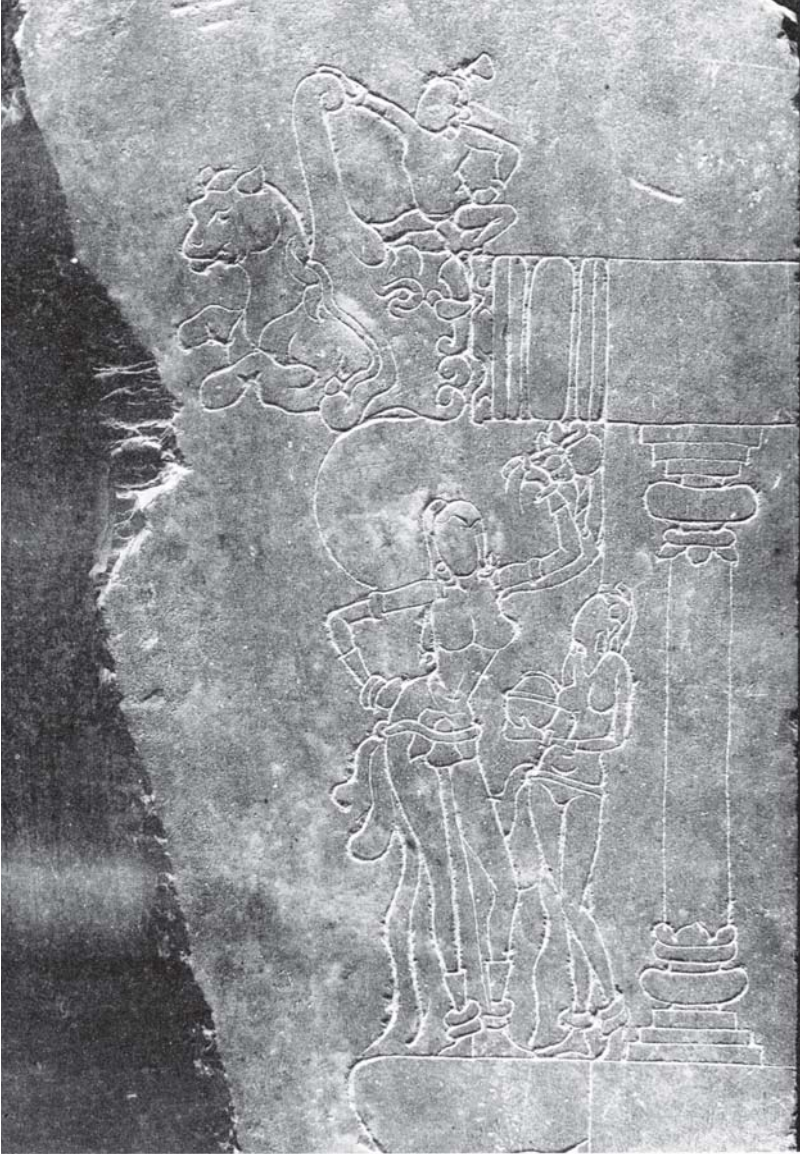


Fig. 1: Sculptor sketch of *vrkṣa devatā*. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, Site 3.
Rosen Stone 1994: 70, and Fig. 187.

It is well known that at Sāñcī, the labels appearing on cross-bars (*torāṇa*^{Sāñcī Tsul.IV.382.2}), railings (*vedikā*), or pillars (*thabho*^{Sāñcī Tsul.IV.383}) tell us that they were the object of personal donation on the part of various persons, including quite a number of religious and several *bhikkhū*, indicating their name, their religious status, and their place of origin or provenance. Though Sāñcī is more often cited as an example illustrating that donations to the Buddhist institution were also made by individuals,¹² the practice was rather common and is evidenced at several sites, starting with Bhārhut, Kanaganahalli, Kārli, etc. Taking the example of Sāñcī and considering that the rest of the donors were bankers (*sethi*^{Sāñcī Tsul.IV.383}), merchants (*vāñija*^{Sāñcī Tsul.IV.292.2}) and artisans, we may reasonably admit that a large part of the society of the time did indeed know what masonry, architecture and plastic work was. The artistic or artefact production was most likely highly appreciated, and the artistic motifs in their turn were certainly not exclusively addressed to the religious, far from it, they were possibly and primarily addressed to the society at large. And these artistic motifs were – as some of them still are – interpreted according to the horizon of the interpreter and not necessarily in terms of a *sui generis* reconstructed *nikāyic* perspective. An intriguing example of this is given at Sāñcī where we find an imprecatory phraseology addressed to

He who dismantles or causes to be dismantled, an arch or a rail of this Kākaṇāva, or cause it to be transferred to another Church (*ācariya-kula*), (shall incur the sin) of the murderers of mothers, murderers of father, murderers of Arhats, of those who creates schism in the Community, and of those who cause bloodshed...

[yo] ito Kākaṇā[vā]to torāṇa vedikā vā upādeyā upāḍā[peyā] vā ānaṃ vā ācariya-kulaṃ saṃkāmeyā so mati-ghātina piti-ghātina arahanta-ghātina rudhir 'upāyakāna sagha-bhe(dina)..... te du.cita..nasa pāpākārina sav[e] ma. paṭipae¹³

¹² See Foucher 1910, extrait: 11–12: “Tout ce que nous apprenons à chaque fois dans les quelque 375 inscriptions relevées tant sur la balustrade que sur les portes, c’est que tel individu ou tel corps constitué a fait don de tel montant ou de telle traverse, bref de la pièce sur laquelle justement, afin que nul n’en ignorât, il a pris soin de faire inscrire son nom. (...) Assurément ces indications sont loin d’être entièrement dépourvues d’intérêt. Elles nous apprennent pour commencer que, sinon le monument, du moins son entourage, a été construit par souscription publique, avec affectations spéciale des cotisations, comme telle fondation religieuse moderne.”

¹³ See Marshall & Foucher 1982 [1940], vol. I: 341; cf. Tsukamoto I.IV: Sāñcī 382, pp. 788–789. The expression *upādeyā upāḍā[peyā]* (< *upa-ā-dā-*) has been interpreted by Marshall & Foucher in the sense of “to take away, remove, i.e. dismantle” with reference



Fig. 2: Naraka scenes. Left panel: two sentient beings falling down headlong to the Avīci hell. Borobudur, RMV_1403-3788-092 – Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Put in other words, disrespect of the imprecatory clause will hurl the culprit headlong into the Avīci hell (fig. 2).¹⁴ Besides, the text demonstrates that the monuments and artefacts were so to speak ‘interchangeable’ since they could be adopted by other *nikāyas*, telling us once again that categorisation may at time and in some specific context be misleading.

From as early as Bhārhut we may see that captions are accompanying the plastic representation of figures and narratives, thus suggesting that

to the physical action to “transport or deliver (*saṁ-kram-*) the arch and rail to another ‘parish’ (*ānaṁ vā ācariyakulam saṁkāmeyā*).” Possibly if not certainly the text equally hints at the illegal “appropriation” and subsequent “transfer” of propriety, as the imprecatory clause suggests.

¹⁴ Cf. the expression *padyet saśarīrah* in the Senavarman inscription, Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-a: n. 42: “The expression *padyet saśarīrah* is here translated as ‘may [they] be precipitated,’ the verb ‘precipitate’ meaning in its turn ‘throw down headlong,’ French ‘tomber la tête la première’ which is the usual case with the Avīci hell, nicely represented for instance on a bas-relief of the Borobudur (fig. 1).” Cf. the expression *adhaśira*, *Mahāvastu* III 455.3; and the explicit gloss of *Dharmasamuccaya* XVI.7ab: *etān patanti narakān ūrdhvaṣṭā avānmukhāḥ*.

script and oral performance did coexist with images and that visitors were possibly instructed in guided-tours.¹⁵ Borrowing the words of Peter Brown we would equally prefer “to part company from certain aspects of that potent construct” relating the questions of art and writing/written with the “problem of democratization of culture.” The first reason being that the term seems to be inapplicable. The second one shows concern with what the present time has done (and persists in doing) to *that* terminology precluding the use of the term. Not least because we would prefer to raise less questioned aspects of the problematic. For instance, if the captions at Bhārhut could have been helping the ‘tourist-guide’ they came also to control and contain the meaning.

One did not have to be an illiterate to draw conclusions from pictures – and frequently, to draw the wrong conclusions. (Brown 1999: 22)

An interesting case that may serve to illustrate the interplay existing in matter of art between the *inner* and the *outer* society, the aspect that is of primary concern for us here, as well as elsewhere, is represented by the motif of human figures in amorous embrace (*maithuna*) that appear on early Buddhist monuments. Scholars noticed that at Kārli, for instance, the carved veranda of the majestic cave, excavated between 50 and 70 CE,¹⁶

displays eight sets of magnificent *mithuna* couples, sculpted over life-size,

and

inscriptions inform us that the two couples flanking the right end wall are the gift (*deyadhamma*) of a monk named Bhadasama,¹⁷

a fact that was obviously bound to intrigue the scholars. At the same epoch, human figures in amorous embrace were also carved at Saidu Sharif (40–130 CE) and, again, a century later or so the *maithuna* scenes

¹⁵ As it is illustrated in the archy-famous episode of the *Divyāvadāna*, mentioning the guided reading of the *bhavacakra* painted at the entry door of the monastery, see Scherrer-Schaub 1987: 104 and n. 11.

¹⁶ A.M. Shastri 2008: 349 referring to the rock excavating of the *caityagr̥ha* notes “We feel that it must have been executed in the latter half of the I. century AD.”

¹⁷ Dehejia 1992: 40. See Tsukamoto I.III: Kārli 28 (BC 60–100 AD): *Bhadasamasa bhikhusa deyadhama mithūna ve [//]* “A couple in amorous embrace, the religious gift of *bhikhu* Bhadasama.”



Fig. 3: Vertical panel with Buddha in *abhayamudrā* and couple in amorous embrace (*maithuna*). Butkara I (B3215, MNAR 1163, photo IsIAO), D. Faccenna 1962, Part 2, pl. CCLXXXIX.

are relatively abundant in the Andhra region, at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa for instance and even later at Ajaṅṭā.¹⁸ If we follow the visual *parcours* suggested by the vertical panel of Saidu Sharif (fig. 3) we may imagine that the intention of the artist was to offer a reading from bottom to top (or in reverse order?) a sequence that may be partially compared with the *āyaka* panels 1 and 2 at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa.¹⁹

At Saidu Sharif the Buddha is standing in *abhayamudrā*, as if one would insist on his function as protector in the context of the mundane life. Above him the couple in amorous embrace seems to respond in a contrastive mode. Various interpretative hypotheses may be constructed and the intention of the artist and/or *commanditaire* may have *knowingly* played with this. Among the possible sources reflecting *l'air du temps*, Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita*, stands out as the favorite. The poem stages Udāyīn, the skilled Nītiśāstra scholar whom the king had specially asked to act as a friend and instructor to his son in mundane life and particularly in the art of love. Udāyīn, the son of the king's *purohita* (IV.8cd) invites the prince not to disdain the pleasures of the senses that are but rarely met with, and illustrates this with a series of *upamās* (IV.72–80), gleaned from the Āgamas, and beginning with

Knowing that love is the highest good (*kāmaṃ param iti jñātvā*) even the god, even Purāṇḍara, for instance, of olden time, fell in love with Ahalyā, the wife of Gautama. IV.72 (J)²⁰

¹⁸ For Ajaṅṭā see Vogel 1954: 811 referring to cave XVII “[R]emarkable for the profuse and varied paintings. Above the central entrance to the inner court there is a well preserved frieze showing eight figures seated cross-legged with heads marked by aureoles and hands held in various symbolical attitudes. They evidently represent the seven Buddhas of the present age and Maitreya the future saviour. (...) In strange contrast with the hieratic row of solemn Buddha figures we notice under it a frieze of eight panels, each containing an amatory couple. The *mithuna* is a favourite decorative motif frequently found not only on Buddhist monuments but also, from the Gupta period all through the Middle ages, on Brahmanical temples, especially above and at the sides of the doorway.”

¹⁹ See Rosen Stone 1994: 44 (and fig. 64): “While the center of *āyaka* panel 1 bears a Buddhist tale (fig. 81) the near center of *āyaka* panel 2 bears a *mithuna* couple. Peculiarly, in this case, the dividing device is a figure of a standing Buddha in *abhayamudrā* (figs. 66 and 86).”

²⁰ Johnston's translations of the *Buddhacarita* and the *Saundarananda* quoted in the text are marked with (J). If not, the translations are slightly modified by the present author.

After listening, the prince replies to Udāyin (IV. 84–85) “in a voice like the thundering of a cloud”

Your words make plain your friendship for me and befit you; and I shall satisfy you on the points wherein you misjudge me. It is not that I despise the objects of sense and I know that the world is devoted to them (*nāva-jānāmi viṣayān jāne lokam tadātmakam*); but my mind does not delight in them, because I hold them to be transitory (*anityaṃ tu jagan matvā nātra me ramate manaḥ*). (J)²¹

We may thus gather that both discourses, textual and plastic, play with a motif central to tradition (*āgama*): love (*kāma*) or the strenuous desire for felicity, a favourite poet’s motif in the first century CE,²² suggesting thus that the *maithuna* scenes appeal also to the society at large. And the contrastive effect (and meaning) of pairing these scenes with the image of the standing Buddha in *abhayamudrā*, the gesture of the absence of fear (*bhaya*), is obliquely disclosed in the Eleventh Canto (*sarga*) where the prince reveals (XI. 8–9a)

For I am not so afraid of venomous snakes or of thunderbolts that fall from the sky or of fire allied with wind, as I fear the objects of the senses. For the passions are ephemeral... (J)²³

*nāśviṣebhyo hi tathā bibhemi naivāśanibhyo gaganāc cyutebhyaḥ /
na pāvakebhyo ’nilasaṃhitebhyo yathā bhayaṃ me viṣayebhya eva //
kāmā hy anityāḥ...*

Both the poet and the panel of Saidu Sharif speak to the religious or religious to be. This is not to say that we have to interpret the case in point by compulsory matching of textual and visual narrative. Simply that this tells us much about the context of the time. In referring to “Dionysian”

²¹ Johnston 1972 [1936]: 33, 39, 41. On the date of Aśvaghōṣa see Hildebeitel 2006: 234–235: “[A]lthough there are those who lean toward a second century dating there is good weight of varied scholarly considerations favoring the first century.” And n. 14 names Olivelle who assigns Aśvaghōṣa “to the 1st–2nd century C. E.,” and Strong in favour of “second century” with question mark.

²² See Giuliano Boccali, quoted in Hildebeitel 2006: 234–235, and notes 12–13.

²³ The fear (*bhaya*) that is aroused by the desire (*kāma*) of sensuous emotions, and where the woman is at its centre, vividly resurfaces in a passage close to the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, appearing in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (T. 25, k. 14, 166a) translated by Étienne Lamotte (TGVS II: 884–885), a fear that the *bodhisattva* acutely experiences here.

scenes “nel contesto gandharico,” Anna Filigenzi (2002: 105–106) notes this fact with much acuity.

L’attribuzione di queste scene al contesto “narrativo” é quantomeno dubbio, se intendiamo come arte narrativa quella peculiare invenzione gandharica di una biografia istoriata, eppure esse vi convergono, o vi si giustappongono, strettamente contingue come sono ad essa, con quella significativa eppur analogica differenza nella scansione di quadri in successione. La loro presenza non é occasionale, né, evidentemente, immotivata, per la dimensione pubblica, didascalica, fortemente simbolica del monumento cui appartengono. A noi che guardiamo ad esse dalla distanza di un mondo oramai estraneo, sfugge il criterio che ne giustificava l’esistenza agli occhi dei loro contemporanei. Non sappiamo cosa essi vedessero nelle scene dionisiache, davanti alle quali noi proviamo invero un qualche sconcerto. Nell’erotismo di figure seminude che si abbracciano, nell’atmosfera edonistica del banchetto, nella giocosa agitazione di putti che lottano o offrono da bere ai leoni, nei vasi potori e *nei tralci di vite*,²⁴ essi certo dovevano leggere i segni di un codice ben noto, forse la promessa, o la consapevolezza, di una felicità ultraterrena ...

For its part, the *inner perspective* indicates that at some point, the issue did integrate the ecclesiastic juridical casuistry as evidenced by some Vinayas and, supposedly later on, as will be seen, it equally contributed to drawing a marked line between two opposing attitudes on the part of the religious community. Paul Demiéville in his article on *buddhapratimā*²⁵ cites the testimony of three Vinayas discussing the rules for decorating religious monuments that, very likely, were dictated by the constraints of specific social circumstances. In the passage dealing with the foundation of the first *stūpa* by Anāthapiṇḍika, the *Sarvāstivādinaya* (T. 1435 xlviii, 351c–352a) states that the Buddha granted permission to Anāthapiṇḍika to adorn

le *stūpa* de toutes images peintes, sauf celles qui représenteraient les hommes et les femmes en union sexuelle,

²⁴ Filigenzi 2002: 106. The allusion to vine shoots (*tralci di vite*) recalls the MSāVin, see herewith p. 19, and p. 17 (fig. 4).

²⁵ See Hōbōgirin III 1974: 210a–215a, s.v. *butsuzō*.



Fig. 4: Drinking scenes, separated by grape-vine shoots.
Panr I, Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (photo IsIAO), Anna Filigenzi 2002: 106.

laconically adding that the gift of painting of *maithuna* scenes does not lead to happiness. The general idea expressed here by the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* is evoked in a similar tone in Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* (XI.10ab)

For those subdued by passion find no shelter in Indra's heaven, still less in the world of mortals.

kāmābhībhūtā hi na yānti śarma tripiṣṭape kiṃ vata martyaloke /

One of the aspects underlying the problematic to which the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the *Buddhacarita*, and the plastic panel concisely allude to here, recalls the famous though remote *vyākaraṇa* rule raised by Pāṇini, commented on by Patañjali (ca. 150 BC) and later authors. Most important to our concern here is the fact that Pāṇini makes a clear distinction and speaks of the image (*pratīkṛti*)²⁶ that grants subsistence and is not an article of merchandise (*jīvikārthe cāpaṇye*), a very inspiring rule that could be felicitously applied to the present times in the matter of intellectual practices. Filliozat (1996: 203) cites Haradatta (12th century) who

²⁶ The question of likeness, or model, embedded in the reproduction (*pratīkṛti*) of something, takes its origin in Pāṇini's rule 5.3.96, in relation to the dropping of a phoneme in the case of a suffix peculiar to words that refer to the reproduction of something, see Filliozat 1996: 200–206, where the rule is analysed in the light of the commentarial grammatical Indian tradition (Filliozat 1996: 200): “[The rule Pāṇini 5.3.96]: Ive pratīkṛtau (prātipadikāt kan) ‘(Après un *prātipadika*), quand il y a (le sens de) *iva*, en référence à une reproduction (apparaît le suffixe *kan*). Le suffixe est *ka* et le marqueur *n* que lui donne Pāṇini indique que le dérivé porte le ton sur sa première syllabe. *Iva* ‘comme’ est la particule qui marque la comparaison par excellence. Elle implique la compréhension d’un comparant et d’un comparé. *Pratīkṛti* signifie précisément la reproduction ou la ‘contre-façon’ de quelque chose.’” On likeness in Medieval India, see the inspiring article of Granoff 2001.

explains the meaning of *jīvikārtha*. These are mendicants who are going from house to house in order to offer

une image divine à l'adoration (*Padamañjarī* II.131; *PraudhaM.* II 274; *Nārāyaṇīya* MPV. VIII 219). Un culte est alors rendu dans chaque maison et une offrande est faite à la divinité montrée par le mendiant. Le mendiant tire sa subsistance de l'offrande résultat du culte. En ce sens l'image sert de moyen de subsistance.

As to the image that is worshipped in a temple, Haradatta's comment (Filliozat 1996: 206) is particularly interesting in its wording, since, notwithstanding the fact that it is conspicuously later than the Vinayas, the *Padamañjarī* makes use of a similar phraseology

yās tv āyataneṣv abhyudayaniḥśreyasārthaṃ pratiṣṭhāpyante pūjyante ca tāsv arcāsu pūjārthāsv iti vakṣyamāṇena lu[b] bhavati / Padamañjarī II 131 (ed. Ramachandrudu & Sarma, 1981, ad *sūtra* 99)

Mais dans le cas des objets de culte qui sont installés et vénérés dans les temples pour la prospérité et le bien suprême, l'amuïssement lup a lieu par la formule qui sera dite "*arcāsu pūjanārthāsu.*"

In all this we see that the tradition of the grammarians gives evidence of the fact that at the time of Patañjali, if not before, the distinction between the usage of secular/*outer* and non-secular/*inner* images was seen and treated differently, a model that we saw currently used in the Vinaya rules for decorating monuments.²⁷

On the other hand, the prohibition against decorating the *stūpa* with couples in amorous embrace (*maithuna*) tells us that the redactors of this Vinaya did know that such representations were current in their day. The *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T. 1425 xxxiii, 496c–497a) that in the matter of decoration appears to be the most liberal of the Vinayas analyzed by Demiéville while prohibiting *maithuna* scenes permits all kinds of painting

²⁷ This problematic finds a new application in the following centuries, in discussion about the painter, sculptor etc. who paints, carves etc. an image which is destined for worship, and that will lead, step by step, the *balaprthagjana* toward the goal while, at the same time, it will grant to the artist a felicitous future life in the deva-realms, cf. e.g. the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, in Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 33, see herewith.

[D]es peintures de toute sorte, à l'exception de celles qui représenteraient des hommes et des femmes unis: peintures de Moines, de vigne, de Makara, de poissons, d'oies, de cadavres, de paysages.

But for decorating the *stūpa* the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* allows one to represent the Buddha. However, according to Demiéville the *Dharmagup-takavinaya* (T. 1428 1–li) seems to have no opinion about the *maithuna* scenes, nor about the Buddha image, though it intriguingly permits

[D]e faire des images de Maheśvara, entre autres marques ou signes permettant de reconnaître les couches individuelles des moines,

while prohibiting

d'orner les portes d'images de serpents, de soldats à pied ou à cheval, etc.

Where and why were images of snakes, of walking or riding soldiers,²⁸ etc. (figs. 5a, b, c and fig. 6) prohibited?

For its part, the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra* (Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 33) details the motifs painted on the *vihāra*'s edifices, and considers the destiny of

The painter who lives on wage (*ri mo mkhan la gla za ba*) but whose mind does not shake / remains firm / keeps unmoved (*sems la g-yo med gañ gis*) and paints with the beautiful and various “colours of the painter” / paints (*tshon rtsi, rañga*) an image, a garden, a park, and who with blue colour, yellow, red, or with a mixed colour / gray (*'dres pa*) [paints on / a] wall-surface / mural (*rtsig ños, *bhitti-tala*), a *vihāra*, or in the internal chamber of a *stūpa*, and who, with the Buddha blessing lives on wage, paints a tree, a bird, a man, a tiger (*stag*), a horse, a town, a park, a small park (*ñe bu 'i tshal, upavana*), a pond (*lteñ ka*), a grove (*skyed mos tshal*), a lotus garden, a lake, a *śramaṇa* or a *brāhmaṇa*, a village, a caravanserai / merchants quarter (*tshoñ rdal*), a palace (*g'zal med khañ*) and so on, and [the painter who,] with the blessing of the Buddha and the Dharma, and under the authority (*luñ bzin du*) of a dispenser of gifts (*yon bdag, dakṣiṇā°* or *dāna-pati*), makes this on account of living on wage of arts (*bzo bo gla ba las byed pa nas*), and who works with precious material, gold, silver, brass or anyone whatsoever precious material, and draws other forms

²⁸ See Tissot 2002 [1985]:112–115, and fig. 263–269. That serpents (*nāga*) were prohibited could perhaps be the consequence of some sort of hostility on the part of the Buddhist institution toward the local *nāga* cult, cf. Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-a: n. 20.



a



b



c

Fig. 5a, b, c: Armour's items. Fig. 5a: Kuṣāṇa's sword and sheath, Fig. 5b: cataphract with spear, Fig. 5c: soldiers with shield, one of them holding a *gorgoneion*. Gandhāra, Lahore Museum. F. Tissot 2002: Fig. 266, 268, 269.



Fig. 6: The war of the relics. Sāñcī, Western *torāṇa*, scene of the middle architrave. Marshall & Foucher 1982, vol. I: 112-114; II, Pl. 61.

(*gzugs*) with the beautiful colors of the painter, once separated from his body, he will be reborn according to the wholesome paintings he has painted in the wholesome destinies of the gods ...

As seen in this way, the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra* implicitly admits that the image may function as the support of devotion, and for the merits accumulated by his indirect implication, the artist will be reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. From the cited sources we may thus gather that in the first centuries, and possibly even before then in India, some admitted no restriction as to the corporeal representation of the Buddha, and of divine beings. *The image is thus not banished as such, it is its usage, its role in the cognitive act that is open to question and must be analyzed*, and will indeed become an important tenet in the philosophical tradition. It is here that we find the construction of a speculative and argumentative type of religious thought, whose momentum will see its full blossoming, in the following centuries.

But this also tells us that, apart from those regions where secular and/or monastic archives where carefully kept, as for instance in China, Tibet, and particularly in Dunhuang or, apart from those cases where epigraphical records contrive to partially rescue a lost memory it may be, at times, desperately vain to measure the full historical import of some Vinaya rules.

And yet, if we take into account the variety of literary sources we see that *the questions posed by the image* – be it the image of a plastic object, the reproduction of oral performance in written form, the painting on cloth that was in ancient India a common medium to advertise special events, but also to teach, were central to that epoch. An interesting case of the use of cloth is illustrated in a mural painting at Qizil in which we see the minister of King Ajātaśatru, at the news of the death of the Buddha, unrolls

[A] scroll with the life of the Buddha painted as a narrative focusing on the four major events of his life, Birth, Enlightenment, First Sermon then slowly lead the king's eyes to the scene of the *parinirvāṇa*.²⁹

Media such as cloth and so on were also in use to write letters, to trace sacred figures or frames. Even images spontaneously projected, like the

²⁹ See R. Ghose 2009: 129 and fig. 15.4.

shadow, or the image (*pratibimba*) of an object reflected (*bimba*)³⁰ into water, crystal, or the mirror, etc. were conspicuously present in the theoretical as well as in the practical development of Buddhist thought. Furthermore, as shown elsewhere, there is a phenomenon of reciprocal attraction between art and meditation. Both practices share, to some extent, a common terminology, as they share photic and visual experience. Indeed, the practice of meditating, like the practice of painting in the specific case when the artistic motif is a faithful reproduction or copy (*pratikṛti*) of the original item,³¹ begins with gazing the object, and grasping its features (*nimitta*) in due order, and as faithfully as possible; since the object in the process of meditation that aims at leading the practitioner to the supreme goal, which coincides with vision and insight, must be seen according to its form or appearance (*yathārūpa*), and must finally be seen “as it is” (*yathābhūta*).³²

It thus appears that in the centuries immediately preceding and following the Common Era, at Bhārhut or Sāñcī, the daily increasing presence of a marked and constructed type of memory may be perceived in the artistic representation and public presence of the Buddhist narrative. Some authors, following Alfred Foucher, even suggested that the plastic representation of particular scenes might possibly have influenced their record in literary sources.³³ As a matter of fact the existence of literary sources contemporary

³⁰ The terminology denoting the ‘image’ is relatively fluctuating and synonyms are frequently interchanged. Here we refer to the terms as used by Candrakīrti (7th century) in his *Yuktiśaṣṭikāvṛtti*, see Scherrer-Schaub 1991: notes 505–506.

³¹ Both art and meditation create artificial images, that is, images that are not spontaneously projected. On the phenomenon of reciprocal attraction between art and meditation, see Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 33–34. Lambert Schmithausen (2007: 87–77 = 224–235, § 1.3. 224–230, and 225, n. 45) in analysing the preparatory practices to the path, follows Bretfeld, and distinguishes among the variety of spiritual practices that appear in the *Śrāvakabhūmi*, the “visualization,” the “imagination,” and the “vision.” On likeness in portraits and on the relationship between art and reality, where we equally found a striking similarity with the Buddhist tradition, see Granoff 2001: 66: “The dramas and stories in which portraits appear concur that a portrait is an exact likeness of an individual.”

³² While it is well known that the various schools differ in their conception of the path and the goal, we have here deliberately chosen a ‘loose’ terminology that can be understood more or less by the representatives of the various persuasions.

³³ Cf. Foucher 1905, vol. I: 518–519 who imputes a possible wrong reading of artistic motifs on the part of the written tradition. Maurizio Taddei instead harbours hesitation, see 2003: 172, n. 26.

to particular artistic and architectural productions, clearly shows that some authors were very familiar with the plastic representations of their time. Exemplary in this respect is a verse of the fabulous Fifth Canto of Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* in the passage describing the sleeping women

Another lay, leaning against the side of a window with her beautiful necklaces dangling, and seemed with her slender body bent like a bow as if turned into the statue of a *śāla*-plucker on a gateway. (J)

*avalambya gavākṣapārśvam anyā śayitā cāpavibhugnagātrayaṣṭiḥ /
virarāja vilambicāruhārā racitā toraṇaśālabhañjikeva // V.52*³⁴

Johnston cited Vogel noting that

The verse is an exact description of the statues below the crossbars on the Sanchi gateways.

The Sāñcī *śālabhañjikā* (fig. 7) is however not the sole candidate, Bhārhut (fig. 8) could also have been known to Aśvaghōṣa.³⁵

Another example evoking figurative representation is given in Aśvaghōṣa's *Saundarananda*. In this passage we find the description of

³⁴ Johnston 1972 [1936]: 52, tr. 71. Prolific as it is, the example of the sculpted *śālabhañjikā*, could have been the remote source of inspiration of Rājaśekhara, the late 9th century poet who among others composed a *Vidhaśālabhañjikā*. Phyllis Granoff notes that “[f]ew philosophers ... explored the relationship between falsehood or imitation and reality in as dramatic and immediate a manner as Rājaśekhara did in his drama.” Possibly influenced by the philosophical treatise *Yogavāsiṣṭha* where indeed, as indicated by Granoff, we find the following verse (ch. 47.11): *yad asti tac citi śilāśarīre śālabhañjikā / yan nāsti tac citi śilāśarīre śālabhañjikā //*, see Granoff 2001: 83–85, 85. In light of the abovementioned antecedent we could possibly translate this as “Everything that exists is [like] the *śālabhañjikā* [that the mind sees] in the stone-body (*śilāśarīre*). Everything that does not exist is [like] the *śālabhañjikā* [that the mind sees] in the stone-body (*śilāśarīre*).” That is a simulacrum, an image and not the real woman. And the motif of the “imagery of the form sculpted out of consciousness” (Granoff 2001: 85) looks like a variant of the simile of the painter that we find in early Indian Buddhist texts. See infra p. 39–41 and notes.

³⁵ Slightly later Sonkh (Andhreae 2008: 54 and fig. 6), and Eran (Sagar Dist. MP). See R.N. Misra 1981 [1979]: 140–141, and fig. 90, p. 141: “An example of pre-Gupta *śālabhañjikā* is known from Eran in the Sagar District of Madhya Pradesh. It was first reported by Cunningham [n. 1 = Cunningham Report X, 1880, p. 83ff., pl. XXVIII], who also noticed the remains of a ruined *toraṇa*, ‘gateway,’ in the vicinity. The bust of *śālabhañjikā* has a tenon at the top which was meant for being inserted in the beam of the *toraṇa*. The figure is carved on both the sides indicating thereby that both front and back views were meant to be seen. The lower half of the sculpture is broken. The female figure stands on one leg, leaning outwards with one arm passed round a tree for support.”



a



b

Fig. 7a, b: Fig. 7a: Sāñcī śālabhañjikā, East toraṇa. Private collection.
 Fig. 7b: Sāñcī śālabhañjikā, East toraṇa. Quintanilla 2007, Fig. 117
 [ca. 50–20 BCE]



Fig. 8: Bhārhut *śālabhāñjikā*.
Quintanilla 2007, Fig. 5 (= Cunningham Pl. XXIII): Culakoka *devatā*.
[ca. 150 BCE]

the *kṣatriyas*, sons of the Ikṣvāku (an epic ‘transposed’ motif current in different *milieux* of the time), who came to be known as Śākya (I.24cd), and who settled at Kapilavastu.

Tall they were, like golden columns, lionchested, strong in the arm, distinguished for their great fame, majesty and good conduct. (J)

*suvarṇastambhavarṣmāṇaḥ siṃhoraskā mahābhujāḥ /
pātraṃ śabdasya mahataḥ śriyāḥ ca vinayasya ca // I.19.*³⁶

A character like this seems to be illustrated at Bhārhut, where we see a splendid ‘hero-stele’ (fig. 9) dated to 2nd–1st centuries BC, that could have inspired the poet.³⁷

Finally, Anālayo in a recent instalment of his prodigious production, while commenting upon the *Devorohaṇavatthu*, refers to the artistic motif of the stairs appearing in the episode of the descent from the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, where the Buddha went to teach the *Abhidhamma* to his mother, in his words “one of the favorite motifs of Indian iconography,” and mentions one of the earliest representations of the scene at Bhārhut.³⁸ Anālayo notes that “some versions of this tale appear to have been influenced by Indian art.” It could be argued however that the question of the precedence of one *medium* over the other is after all insignificant, since both modes of expression/communication present *structural affinity and scope*: art as *sign of a form*, and writing as *sign of a letter/phoneme*. Quite a different thing is the *meaning conveyed by both media to the recipient*. As a matter of fact indeed significant factors are missing in the question: the role of story-tellers (a long tradition!) and the imperceptible agency of orality (that never ceases!), as well as the existence of regional traditions that might have been transmitted at the time, despite being nowadays lost.

Returning to the technical aspect of the question, apart from possible contingent factors that may have determined the use of new (and costly) material (the existence of quarries in close proximity, as is indeed the

³⁶ Johnston 1975 [1928]: I.18–27: 3–4, tr. 3, I.19. Cf. the expression *suvarṇa-yupa*, the *upamā* applied to the beauty of Subhūti in *Saddharmapundarīka* VI.19cd.

³⁷ The inscription says that it is the “pillar gift of *bhadanta* Mahila” (*bhadanta-Mahilasa thabho dānaṃ*), see Tsukamoto I.IV, Bhārhut 81.

³⁸ See Anālayo 2015: 424–429, 595 pl. 3.



Fig. 9: «Hero-stele», *vedikāstambha?* Bhārhut.
Cunningham 1879: 32–33, and Pl. XXXII.1.

case at Sāñcī, or of skilled artisans, etc.), this type of construction contributed to perpetuating the monument, and enhancing the prestige of the person who commissioned the work. This is splendidly illustrated at Kārli (60–100 CE) in an epigraph praising the *śailagrha*, [commissioned] by the banker Bhūtapāla of Vaijayantī, “as the most accomplished [*śailagrha*] in Jambudvīpa.”³⁹

The change came also to subtly modify the perception of the inner institutional memory. Stone did in a way fix the image, as writing fixed the words, and transmitted the memory as long as the support perdured. But if it fixes it also transmits, and in that regard a written text or a carved image, after having been lost and silent for centuries, may contribute to reactivate the process of interpreting history. Again, at Kārli or Betse for instance, the monument construction clearly shows that technology was progressively adapting to the new building material. This may be seen in the fluidity of the structures of the stone architecture which, even if unnecessarily and as Fergusson and Barth noted, retained the structure that the wood required in order to assure the stability of the monument. And this modality and fluidity in the process of change appear as an invariant in the history of technology as well as in practices.⁴⁰ Moreover, and as in other cultural models, ‘oral and written’ for instance,⁴¹ the fact that for various reasons monuments and artefacts were constructed in imperishable material didn’t obviate the use of the perishable.

As seen, in the early centuries of the Common Era, the bursting of plastic representation and drawing, reproducing fictitious, legendary, epic, historic, and quotidian motifs, provoked a series of questions centered upon the role of the image, questions that, for their part, were not unknown in the past, nor in other cultural spheres. Again Aśvaghōṣa, depicting the women of the palace, despondent at the departure of the prince.

The poet compares their stupefaction and numbness to that of figures artificially reproduced

³⁹ Tsukamoto I.III, Kārli 1: *Vejayantito sethiṇā Bhutapālen[ā] selaghara pariniṭhapi-ta[m] Ja[m]budipamhi ūtama[m]*. Cf. A.M. Shastri 2008: 348b–349a, 348b. Citing Lüders, Shastri identified the locality of Vaijayantī with Vanavāsi/Banavasi in Karnataka. We thank Anand Kanitkar who at Kārli drew our attention to this inscription.

⁴⁰ See Scherrer-Schaub 2016.

⁴¹ For an illustrative case, see Scherrer-Schaub 2012: 239–240.

Some of the other women, bereft of their brightness and with drooping arms and shoulders, seemed to become unconscious they wailed not, they dropped no tears, they sighed not, they moved not, there they stood like figures in a picture. (J)

hatatviṣo 'nyāḥ śithilāmsabāhavaḥ striyo viṣādena vicetanā iva //
na cukruśur nāśru jahur na śaśvasur na celur āsur likhitā iva sthitāḥ //
Buddhacarita VIII.25⁴²

In this particular case, the criticism of ‘inauthenticity’ that we see here addressed to the image, is not the exclusive fact of its being a simulacrum but it is rather seen as the extension or *translatio* (in the sense of ‘transferral’) of the ordinary active mundane (and human) dimension into an extraordinary, inactive one, something that we may equally note as implicitly expressed in Canto V.52 (supra p. 23); that is the fact that the image reproduced in writing/painting (*likh-*) is deprived of the conditions of life, as if ‘inanimate’ (*na ... celur āsur likhitā iva sthitāḥ*).

This traditional literary theme appears some centuries earlier in an oft-cited passage of Plato (427–347 BC)’s *Phaedrus*, whose problematic resurfaces nowadays in discussions about the new systems of communication.⁴³ While talking with Phaedrus about the vices and virtues of writing Socrates observes

Writing (*graphé*), Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting (*zographía*); for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words: you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is banded about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it: for it has no power to protect or help itself.

⁴² Johnston 1972 [1936]: I 81, tr. 109; cf. n. 25 where according to Johnston *Raghuvaṃśa* 3.15 did ‘utilize’ this verse: *ariṣṭaśayyāṃ parito visāriṇā sujanmanas tasya nijena tejasā / niśīṭhādīpāḥ sahasā hatatviṣo babhūvur ālekhyasamarpitā iva*, translated by Louis Renou 1928: 24: “Autour du lit de l’accouchée se propageait la splendeur propre à l’illustre enfant; les lampes de la nuit, perdant soudain leur éclat, se figeaient comme en une peinture.” We thank Dominic Goodall for his kind help.

⁴³ Cf. Eco 1996: 295–296.

Socrates contraposes here inanimate (*graphé*) and animate discourse (*lógos*). Plato who in this dialogue raises the question of truth and verisimilitude, leads Phaedrus to notice that

[T]he living and breathing word of him who knows, of which the written word may justly be called the image ...⁴⁴

III. Poetics, aesthetics, and the Śilpin's Skilful Means:⁴⁵ society, culture and the opening of 'some' Buddhist circles in the first centuries CE

ko 'laṃkaroti ? –

arthajñāḥ kam alaṃkāram alaṃkaroti ? – arthavibhāvanām kurute.

kena vācā padaiḥ cāmalaiḥ ? – amalayā vāceti pauraṣayā amalaiḥ padair yuktaiḥ sahitair iti vistaraḥ sahitair iti vistaraḥ / na hi vinā vācā pada-vyañjanair artho vibhāvayituṃ śakyataiti /

kasmāi? ...

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra ad I.1

Qui ornemente [le sens]?

Quel ornement celui qui connaît le sens orne? — Il met en évidence/ développe le sens.

Au moyen de quoi? — Avec des paroles et des mots brillants / immaculés. [Autrement dit] “paroles” d'une personne immaculée [par lesquelles le sens] est développé par des mots appropriés/justes et bien agencés. En effet on ne peut pas développer le sens sans que les paroles [ne soient développées] par les mots et les syllabes. —

Pourquoi? ...

Poetry (*kāvya*) and dramatic performance that we see flourishing in the Buddhist milieu at the beginning of the Common Era offer an instrument to convey to a larger audience the educational program of those centuries, and the rhetorical means (*śleṣa*, *upamā* etc.) have the power to add force to the communication, they favor “le didactisme religieux.”⁴⁶ All the

⁴⁴ Plato, tr. Fowler & Lane 1913: 564–567.

⁴⁵ Incidentally, Candrakīrti in his *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti* applies the sobriquet *śilpin* ès-*upā-yakauśalya* to his Teacher Nāgārjuna, see Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 236 and n. 452.

⁴⁶ See Renou 1947: § 888: “Le théâtre. Le *didactisme religieux* a trouvé aussi sa place au théâtre. La forme privilégiée est l'allégorie, qui se trouve avoir une assez haute tradition,

more so because the polysemic power of rhetoric devices carries within itself the opening to a plurality of recipients, the possibility to address a message that may be read differently.⁴⁷

The findings of dramatic fragments, attributed to Aśvaghōṣa, and published by Heinrich Lüders in Berlin in 1911, revealed the existence of Buddhist ‘miracle plays,’ a form of dramatic performance of religious narrative, where characters being the embodiment of virtues are introduced together with human and non-human *dramatis personae*. These fragments were found together with others attributed by the manuscript itself to Kumāralāta’s *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā Dṛṣṭāntapañkti* or Aśvaghōṣa’s *Sūtrālaṃkāra*.⁴⁸ This extremely interesting collection of narratives bears witness to the way that figurative art was perceived, and to the role that aesthetics and poetry were playing in the Buddhist conspectus of the time. Sylvain Lévi emphasizes the portrait of Indian society that this text reveals, as an intense intellectual activity in all domains. The text, says Lévi, is familiar with the great brahmanic epics, that are recited in Central Indian villages, argues against the brahmanic philosophical doctrines, and shows antagonism directed over alternative religious movements. The art of ornamenting the sense and the sound (*alaṃkāra*) is highly appreciated, and appears to be flourishing among the ‘heretics;’ to put it in a nutshell, the arts are in full bloom.⁴⁹

s’il est vrai qu’un des fragments de drames trouvés à Turfan et remontant aux premiers siècles de l’ère a pour personnages Buddhi ‘sagesse,’ Dhṛti ‘Constance,’ Kīrti ‘Gloire,’ qui viennent tour à tour exalter le Buddha. Il est probable que les mystères de Kṛṣṇa ont joué un rôle dans le développement du théâtre classique, dont les lointains origines se rattachent, comme on sait, aux mimes légendaires du Veda.”

⁴⁷ Cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2014: 130–135.

⁴⁸ See Hahn 1983. Cf. the last article on this subject by Sylvain Lévi (1927), cited by M. Hahn and where Lévi gives essential Chinese sources concerning the attribution and title of this text, and adds precious advices on the way of interpreting sources (p. 104); finally harbouring doubts about the possible fact that the question is one for ever unresolved Lévi (p. 127) concludes: “Décidément, moins que jamais, on ne peut aujourd’hui d’un simple trait de plume rayer le *Sūtrālaṃkāra* des œuvres d’Aśvaghōṣa. Le manuscrit d’Asie centrale si soigneusement étudié par M. Lüders, pose sans doute un point d’interrogation; il est loin de résoudre la question.” Recently the late Albrecht Hanisch (2007) reanalysed the hypothesis of Lévi in the light of the Tibetan tradition.

⁴⁹ See Lévi 1908: 86–88.

So it is too with Āśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda*. Both poems show aesthetic concern and offer an interesting perspective upon the role that image and reflection (*pratīkṛti*, *bimba*, *pratibimba*) play in ordinary life; both texts are studded with metaphors illustrating the attraction caused by women's beauty, and the rejection caused by ugliness. And yet Āśvaghōṣa does not oppose them. He rather contrasts them, and his maieutics, as just seen, like *an open road* leads the reader, progressively, toward the understanding of the impermanence of life, in a way quite similar to that taken by his contemporary Nāgārjuna. The *Buddhacarita*, in a passage depicting the gynecaeum waiting the visit of the prince (V.44–62, Johnston Skt. 55–57, tr. 70–73), brings on stage the Akaniṣṭha gods (V.47), the champions of religious austerities (*surais tapovariṣṭhair akaniṣṭhair*), who intervene to help the prince to appease his passion, and in so doing “brought sleep there over the women and distorted the gestures of their limbs.” There follows a vivid description of the vulgarity of the postures assumed by the unconscious women when asleep and “laying in immodest attitudes, snoring, ... (V.59)” all attitudes that the prince found reprehensible (*vigarhya*, V.63), leading him to definitely prepare his departure and, parallel to this, Āśvaghōṣa's discourse moves, once again, from the *outer* audience to the *inner's* one. Again, this often referred to scene of the sleeping women of the *gynecaeum*⁵⁰ is

⁵⁰ Alf Hildebeitel (2006: 248–249) returns to the close interplay if not “intertextual play” between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Āśvaghōṣa, à propos the “well-known *kāvya* question of the similarities between Hanumān's viewing the sleeping women in Rāvaṇa's palace and the *Buddhacarita*'s sleeping harem scene on the night of the Buddha's great departure;” according to V. Raghavan's demonstration (1956) “Āśvaghōṣa borrows the harem scene from *Sundarakāṇḍa* 5.7–9,” at times even *verbatim*. The relevant intention of addressing to the ‘outer society’ that we see in Āśvaghōṣa is corroborated by Hildebeitel when he says “For Āśvaghōṣa however, it is not just a matter of poetic pleasure (such as might be the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s sleeping harem scene), as Johnston seems to imply. What interests Āśvaghōṣa is the opportunity Rāma's departure offers to draw a contrast between Brahmanical *dharma* and Buddhist *dharma*.” This may well be the case, as seen in the contrastive way of posing the question of *kāma* (supra p. 14–16), and Āśvaghōṣa himself says that his *kāvya* is not uniquely written “to give pleasure” (*na rataye*). On the other hand we should keep in mind that the main purpose of Āśvaghōṣa is to use *kāvya* as a powerful tool for his *enkyklios paideia* (cf. *Saundarananda* XVIII.63–64, herewith). For contrasting *dharma* and (*sad*)*dharma*, Nāgārjuna could possibly be a better example, see Scherrer-Schaub 2007: 765–777.



Fig. 10: The gynaeceum, scene of the sleeping women.
Takht-i-Bāhī, *stūpa* panel. Zwalf 1996 I: 165 § 174; II pl. 174.

beautifully represented in the same period in a *bas-relief* from Takht-i-Bāhī (fig. 10).⁵¹

Thus, beyond the didactic devices lies the *paideia*. In the *explicit* of *Saundarananda*, Canto XVIII.63–64, Aśvaghōṣa unveils his project:

ity eṣa vyupaśāntaye na rataye mokṣārthagarbhā kṛtiḥ śrotīṅnām grahaṇārtham anyamanasām kāvyopacārāt kṛtā // yan mokṣāt kṛtam anyad atra hi mayā tat kāvyadharmāt kṛtam pātuṃ tiktam ivauśadham madhuyutam ḥṛdyam katham syād iti // Saundarananda XVIII.63

This poem [lit. [poetical] composition (*kṛtiḥ*)], dealing thus with the subject of liberation (*mokṣārthagarbhā*), has been written in the figurative style of Kāvya (*kāvyopacārāt kṛtā*), not to give pleasure (*na rataye*), but to further the attainment of tranquillity (*vyupaśāntaye*) and with the intention of capturing hearers devoted to other things (*śrotīṅnām grahaṇārtham*

⁵¹ Zwalf 1996 I: 165 § 174; II pl. 174. Salomon 2008: 239–241, reproduces the bas-relief in the context of his analysis of “The recitation of Nanda.”

anyamanasām). For, that I have handled other subjects in it besides liberation (*yan mokṣāt kṛtam anyad atra hi mayā*) is in accordance with the laws of Kāvya poetry to make it palatable, as sweet is put into bitter medicine to make it drinkable (*tat kāvyadharmāt kṛtam pātum tiktam ivauśadham madhuyutam hr̥dyam katham syād iti*).

prāyeṇālokyā lokam viṣayaratiparam mokṣāt pratihatam kāvyavyājena tattvam kathitam iha mayā mokṣaḥ param iti // tad buddhvā śāmikam yat tad avahitam ito grāhyaṃ na lalitam pāmsubhyo dhātujebhyo niyatam upakaram cāmikaram iti // Saundarananda XVIII.64

Since I saw mankind mainly given over to the pleasures of the objects of the senses (*prāyeṇālokyā lokam viṣayaratiparam*) and averse from liberation (*mokṣāt pratihatam*), I have here told of the reality (*tattvam kathitam iha mayā*) under the guise of a Kāvya (*kāvyavyājena*), considering liberation to be supreme (*mokṣaḥ param iti*). After having understood this, let it be recognized in this world [as] that which leads to tranquillity (*tad buddhvā śāmikam yat tad avahitam ito grāhyaṃ*) and not that which is merely pleasurable (*na lalitam*), as only the residue of gold is taken after it has been separated from the metal dust (*pāmsubhyo dhātujebhyo niyatam upakaram cāmikaram iti*).⁵²

Aśvaghōṣa the great poet and great eloquent speaker (*mahākaver mahāvādinaḥ*), who bears the sonorous religious title *bhikṣur ācāryabhadanta*, is here showing a concern with the criticism addressed to poetry that suffuse the literature of the time, and that Aśvaghōṣa tries here to make ineffective/to neutralize in advance. The acrimony against poetry is already present in the *Samyuttanikāya*⁵³ and will become a common topos, among others, in the polemic against the Mahāyāna.

⁵² Johnston 1975 [1928]: 141–142, tr. 116–117.

⁵³ Scherrer-Schaub 2007: 760, *Samyuttanikāya* II.ix.7, SN II 267: *ye te suttantā tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā suññatapaṭisaṃyuttā // tesu bhaññamānesu na sussusissanti // na sotaṃ odahissanti // na aññācittam upaṭṭhāpessanti // na ca te dhamme uggahetabbam pariyāpuṇitabbam maññissanti // ye pana te suttantā kavikatā kāveyyā cittakkarā cittavyañjanā bāhirakā sāvakabhāsītā // tesu bhaññamānesu sussusissanti sotaṃ odahissanti aññācittam upaṭṭhāpessanti // te dhamme uggahetabbam pariyāpuṇitabbam maññissanti [...]* “[T]he *suttantas* taught by the Buddha, recondite (*gambhīrā*), of profound meaning, supra-mundanes, teaching emptiness, [there will be people who] will not preach them, who will not listening with faith to them, who will not pay attention, will not lend an ear [to these *suttantas*], who will not take them as the true teaching ... instead the *suttantas* made by the poets, following the art of poetry, with ornated syllables and phonemes (*cittakkarā cittavyañjanā*), taught by outsider-hearers

As shown, the acrimony directed towards poets not only hints at their use of ornamented rhetoric, but more subtly also at their inspired intuition, the immediate insight (*pratibhā*) from which the poem, and the poet's inspired eloquence (*pratibhāna*) bursts forth.⁵⁴

Possibly not at a great distance in time and space, the Indo-Scythian Lokakṣema, “a subject of the Kuṣāṇa Empire,”⁵⁵ translated into Chinese a group of *sūtras* that in one way or another reflect a common intellectual environment. Exemplary in this respect, is the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra* or “Samādhi of the Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present,” which rehearses accusations with those expressed in the *Samyuttanikāya*. “At some future time, *bhikṣus* and *bodhisattvas*” who have not practised as they should have practised and above all who “do not accept the precious definitive meaning (Skt. *nūtārtha*) of the True Dharma, are stupid, deficient in wisdom, overproud of their attainments of trance, ...” with bad intention they will say

The proliferation of these scriptures, this appearance in the world of the likes of the *bhikṣu* Ānanda, and the appearance of *sūtras* like this are indeed great wonders!

and in secret conversations (*Ikog tu dong nas*, lit. “gossiping, spreading rumors”)

(*bāhirakā sāvakabhāsītā*) these will be preached by them, ...” Cf. Buddhaghosa's *Sāratthappakāsinī* II.xx.7: 229: *kavikatā ti, kavīhi katā. Itaraṇ tss' eva vevacanaṇ. Cittakkharā ti, vicitra-akkharā. Itaraṇ tss' eva vevacanaṇ. Bāhirakā ti, sāsanato bahibhūtā. Sāvaka-bhāsītā ti, tesañ sāvakehi bhāsītā. [Sussūsisantī ti, akkharacittatāya c' eva savaṇasampatīyā ca attamaṇā hutvā, sāmaṇera-dahara-bhikkhu-mātugāmā-mahāgahapatikādayo 'esa dhammkhatiko' ti sannipatītvā sotukāmā bhavissanti. Tasmā ti, yasmā Tathāgatabhāsītā suttantā anuggayhamānā antaradhāyanti tasmā.]*

⁵⁴ Cf. David Seyfort Ruegg 2010 [1971]: 125 referring to Mātṛceṭa: “Le poète termine son Aśakyastava en faisant lui aussi allusion à la *bhakti*, qui fait incliner vers le Buddha les facultés des chanteurs de louange (*bhaktiprahvendriya*, 28). Au lieu de la *bhakti* Mātṛceṭa parle ailleurs, dans un contexte identique, de la tranquillité pellucide (*prasāda*) de l'esprit plein de foi qui est tourné vers le Muni; c'est le *prasāda* qui confère au poète l'inspiration (*pratibhā*) qui lui permet de créer sa bonne œuvre (Śatapañcāsatka 153). (...) Enfin le terme de *pratibhā* est intéressant à un autre point de vue, car les grammairiens, les poéticiens et les philosophes l'ont employé pour exprimer l'idée de l'intuition ou de l'inspiration, notion qui est ailleurs liée au *pratibhāna* (pāli: *paṭibhāna*) bouddhique.”

⁵⁵ See Harrison 1990: 255. Harrison gives the list of the work translated by Lokakṣema according to the *Sengyou lu*, see Harrison 1990: 256–257.

[T]hey will revile it, saying to each other: “*Sūtra* like this are fabrications, they are poetic inventions; they were not spoken by the Buddha, nor were they authorised by the Buddha!” but stupid men like that are to be known as those who have lost the precious True Dharma, as those who have rejected the precious True Dharma.⁵⁶

and in deriding and reviling they will say (Harrison 1990: 58)

These *bhikṣus* have a real nerve! These *bhikṣus* talk nonsense! It is a great wonder indeed that they should give the name *sūtra* to something which was not spoken by the Buddha, which is a poetic invention of their own fabrication, a conglomeration of words and syllables uttered merely in conversation...

Whether this indicates also a specific concern with creativity and authorship is difficult to establish. It certainly reflects the ‘conflict of tradition’ inside Indian Buddhism, which appears to have been acute in this period. It could also be suggested that the epoch shows aesthetic concern about the sensuous perception in art and in poetry, while at the same time considering them as precious tools of the *didactisme religieux* teaching the “illusory and vanishing reality of the painted or sculpted images.” Narrative recalls philosophy and philosophy alludes to narrative. Poetry and art are showing the invisible in the visible world, and some philosophers, in search of reality (*tattvagaveśin*), compare the vanishing and deceitful nature of the elements of existence (*dharma*) sensorily perceived, among others, to the reflected image (*pratibimba*).

Thus the *Pratyutpanna* didactically invites the practitioner to “paint pictures and construct images of the Unequalled One/Without Equal (*mtshungs pa med pa*),” and quotes a verse, also found in the *Samādhirājasūtra* (IX.9, Harrison 1990: 74 and n. 8.), illustrating the sequence of attachment to the image

⁵⁶ Harrison 1990: 55–56. It is interesting to note that the *Saddharmasmṛtyu-pasthānasūtra* lists the practices of associating in talking/gossiping and in poet’s circles among the prohibited activities, see Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b. Possibly ‘*bar ba* in the expression *gsung rab ’di dag ’bar ba*, may equally mean “these shiny / luminous / brilliant scriptures (*’bar ba*, **ujjvala*, *lekhahārika*, etc.)” Again, *mdo sde ’di lta bu dag ni rang gis byas pa / rang bzo byas pa*, “such *suttantas* are composed by themselves (*svayamkṛta*), are [their own] artistic production / personal innovations (*rang bzo byas pa*, **kāvya*).” The expression *Kun dga’ bo ’dra ba* refers here to the *suttanta*’s author as a simulacrum pretending to be like Ānanda, the paragon transmitter of the Buddha-vacana.

The woman observes her made-up face in a polished mirror or a vessel of oil, and having conceived a passion for it rushes around seeking her desire. The woman, deluded with regard to a non-existent dharma, is horribly tormented and afflicted by desire.

*ādarśapṛṣṭhe tathā tailapātre nirīkṣate nāri mukhaṃ svalaṃkṛtaṃ //
sā tatra rāgaṃ janayitva bālā pradhāvitā kāmagaveṣamānā //*

Here attachment to the image is but a metaphor for attachment to the world. Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda* XV. 39:

As a painter may fall in love with a woman he had himself created (in a picture), so is man attached to man by inventing affection himself. (J)

*svayam eva yathālikhya rajyec citrakaraḥ striyaṃ // tathā kṛtvā svayaṃ
snehaṃ saṃgam eti jane janaḥ //*

The injunction to fabricate images or paint pictures of the Unequalled One (*mtshungs pa'i med pa, asama*) that we meet in the *Pratyutpanna* (IV.8) recalls at once the praises addressed both by Mātṛceṭa and Nāgārjuna to the transcendent epithets of the Buddha, and the practice of reciting the stanzas that we find in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* (Scherrer-Schaub 2007: 784–785). With Mātṛceṭa, Aśvaghōṣa, and Nāgārjuna the eldest by few years, or decades, three of the major figures that stand out against the horizon of the time, poetry, eulogy, hymnology, art and an argumentative type of religious thought seem to burst forth at once. Although not necessarily unrelated to the political and social context of the time, this momentum emphasizes and establishes on secure basis the intellectual tendency that the Indian *śāstric* tradition brilliantly attests, and that Tibet continued and renewed with a highly speculative and sophisticated type of religious philosophy.

In these centuries, and in the centuries to come, the simile of the image, be it the reflection of the disc of the sun or the moon in water, the image of a woman or a man reflected in the mirror, or the image of a painter who “painted his own likeness on the door, just as if he had hanged himself” in order to make a fool of his fellow-artisan, a skilled maker of automata who had misled him the evening before with a beautiful automaton (Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 32), permeated Buddhist intellectual life, and the simile of the painter, a canonical cliché, was successively adjusted to a variety of forms according to the topic it came to illustrate.

As we have seen, the Vinaya casuists responded in their own way, and tried to resolve particular cases that were causing trouble in a specific

geographic and socio-historical context by editing general rules and, with time, as all juridical codes do, the Vinaya came to include these various cases. Some topics were faithfully and stratigraphically recorded. Others, possibly because they were still acutely felt to be problematic, were discussed again, reshaped and reformulated according to the circumstances and, in this process, their diachronic temporal dimension disappeared.

As said previously the Buddhist program of Aśvaghōṣa and Nāgārjuna is a nicely conceived and organized *enkyklios paideia*⁵⁷ that does not exclude the ancillary arts, nor the study of Indian religion and philosophy. The bodhisattva, skillful in means (*upāyakuśala*), does not disdain the mundane arts and sciences, which he shares with the crown prince. The *Sūtrālaṃkāra/Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* (Canto 61) mentions a list, slightly different from the 64 classical *kalās*, of the practical, mechanical and fine arts listed in Canto 20 (as well as in the Śaivatantra), beginning with the Veda, and mentioning among other things, archery, medicine, the celebration of sacrifices, astronomy, grammar, the study of the origin of writing, eloquence and ornate language, the art of love, the game of chess and so on (Lévi 1908: 89, 140–144). And yet as Sylvain Lévi noticed long ago the teachers and Buddhist texts that are mentioned indicate a strong Sarvāstivāda *milieu*.⁵⁸

It is exactly at this point that in the first centuries CE we see that in some particular circles and not necessarily in some particular “schools” (*nikāya*) the opening of Indian Buddhism approximates the *enkyklios paideia* leaving far behind (alas! not for ever nor everywhere ...) the enclosed and entangled model of categorization. Reaction to this, as seen, appealed to tradition and authority, if not authenticity. But as will be seen, there were also some who were averse to art and image because these obstructed the

⁵⁷ Eco 1990: 43: “Hermes trionfa nel corso del II secolo d. C. Siamo ad un’epoca di ordine politico e di pace, e tutti i popoli dell’impero sembrano uniti da una lingua e da una cultura comuni. L’ordine è tale che nessuno può sperare alterarlo con una qualsivoglia operazione militare o politica. È l’epoca in cui si definisce il concetto di *enkyklios paideia*, di educazione globale che mira a produrre una figura di uomo completo e versato in tutte le discipline.” The expression is taken here literally, since socio-political conditions during the same period in India, while sharing some aspects of the Mediterranean context, differed conspicuously in others. The global learning (*educazione globale*) is here responding to omniscience (*sarvajñāna*) as the goal to be attained. On this problematic see Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Presidential Address 2014, Forthcoming-c.

⁵⁸ Lévi 1908: 89–97. On this problematic see Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b.

practice conducive to the supreme goal, not to speak of the case of the unorthodox usage of images attested in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, where the offerings made to Piṇḍola were unduly diverted (and this was considered a theft) to the Buddha image, thus showing that if, in some cases, images and other movable monuments could be interchangeable among the various *nikāyas* (see p. 10), the flow of donations was in other cases governed by very parochial rules...

Aśvagoṣa's depiction of the secular society emphasizing the sensuous passion inspired by poetry and visual representation tells us not only that his intention was to use these arts as a device for the didactisme religieux, as he did, but it also reveals his high esteem for aesthetics. Vested in poetics, the sensuous passions are not reprehensible as such, but rather because they are ephemeral. Aśvagoṣa, knowing that the world is bewitched by sensuous objects (*prāyeṇālokyā lokam viṣayaratiparam mokṣāt pratihatam kāvyavyājena tattvaṃ kathitam iha mayā mokṣaḥ param iti* //, see supra p. 34), seems to reflect Nāgārjuna's indulgence toward the 'pagan pleasure' of seeing and touching the image of the Buddha

May all beings who are seeing me, who are touching me, or even by solely hearing my name, may they become serene and appeased and may they acquire the certainty [that they will attain] awakening (*bodhi*)!

kupitāḥ prasannāḥ svasthā darśanāt sparśanāc ca me //
nāmaśra[vaṇamātreṇa sambodhi]niyatā janāḥ // Ratnāvalī V.80⁵⁹

IV. The simile of the painter: visual distraction and visual attraction

Seyyathāpi bhikkhave rajako vā citta-kāro vā sati rajanāya vā lākhāya vā haliddiyā vā nīliya vā mañjeṭṭhāya vā suparimaṭṭhe vā phalake bhittiyā vā dussapaṭṭe vā itthirūpaṃ vā purisarūpaṃ vā abhinimmineyya sabbaṅga paccāṅgaṃ ...

Samyuttanikāya SN III 152⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Scherrer-Schaub 2007: 785 and n. 96.

⁶⁰ Cited by Étienne Lamotte TGVS III: 1534, n. 3 : “‘De même qu'un coloriste ou un peintre, disposant de couleur, de laque, de gingembre, d'indigo ou de garance, disposant d'une planche bien polie, d'un mur ou d'un tissu, dessine une image de femme ou une image d'homme avec tous leurs membres et sous-membres...’, ainsi l'acte qui est pensée (*citta*) fabrique à l'instar du peintre (*citrakāra*) toutes les destinés des êtres.”

*ekas citrakaraḥ karma kurute vividhaṃ yathā /
ekam cittaṃ tathā karma kurute vividhaṃ bhava //*

Dharmasamuccaya XI.22⁶¹

In the following centuries the contrast between image and word still continued to attract the interest of scholiasts and poets. Particularly noticeable in this respect is a passage of Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamālā* that, again, relates poetry and painting. This passage is preserved in fragments of the Schøyen Collection, and describes the horror of the infernal condition. Haribhaṭṭa, in an undertone, comments upon the reaction of an audience who sees the mural painting of the hells and listens to their description made by the poets, and suggests that the painting may be even more eloquent than the bard's words:

*āyasyām kūṇitākṣaṃ jvalitahutavahasparśasaṃtāpitāyām kumbhyām
gāḍhaṃ nadantaṃ kvathitaparicalattailapūrṇāsya kaṅṭham // ālokyālekhyā-
bhittau likhitam api naraṃ nāraṃ paçyamānaṃ himsro 'pi krūrabhāvāt
ka iva na viramed durgati prāptihetoḥ //*

Who, be he ever so mischievous, would not abstain from cruelty, the cause of falling into a lower form of existence, when he sees in a painting on a wall a man being cooked in an iron kettle, scorched up by contact with hot flames, crying heavily, his eyes contracted, his mouth and his throat being filled with boiling and bubbling sesame oil.⁶²

Gory infernal scenes are amply attested in Indian literature, including Vinaya narratives, but the prose of the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*⁶³

⁶¹ Lin Li-kouang 1969 : 328 (with minor changes by the present author) “De même qu'un peintre fait des travaux (*karman*) divers, de même la pensée fait des actes divers [au cours de] l'existence (*bhava*)”. The simile of the mind acting as a painter is treated extensively in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, see Lin Li-kouang (1949: 64, n. 2). In commenting on the simile Lin signalled some antecedents, among others *Samyuttanikāya*, XXII, 100 (*Gaḍulla*) and XII, 64 (*Atthirāgo*), *Mahāvibhāṣā* k. 72, S. xxii,3, pp. 87b–88a, Lin Li-kouang 1969: n. 3. Cf. Stuart 2012: 303, n. cli: “In the Buddhist canonical literature we find several painting and painter similes that may have served as textual precedents for the following series of similes here in the *Saddhsu*. See SĀ 267 at T II 69c17–70a3 (SN 22.100 at SN III 152); SN 12.64 at SN II 101; SĀ 377 at T II 103b18–22; SĀ 378 at T 103c7–11.”

⁶² See Hahn 2002: 328–329. Hahn on the basis of the Chinese translation situates Haribhaṭṭa ca. 4th–beginning 5th century CE, cf. Hahn 2002: 323.

⁶³ The *narakas* are the subject of chapter III, see Demoto 2009. See also the excellent thesis of Stuart 2012, a true mine of the particular doctrines and meditation practices, as well as the religious milieu of this text. On its peculiarity and history, see Scherrer-Schaub

seems, however, to surpass them in power. This monumental work depicts, among other topics, a journey through the wheel of life (*bhavadacakra*). This immense *texte pluriel* revolves round the galaxy of the cosmological texts, and presents some tenuous similarities with the so-called *samādhi*-texts. The protagonist of this amazing fresco visits or visualizes scenes representing the various *gatis* painted in mural or crystal walls of palaces and other monuments that he encounters in his cosmo-didactic spiritual journey.

In the sphere of the Yāma gods, and while entering the *stūpa* of Kāśyapa, where the best of the Munis is sitted in the teaching posture on a lion-throne made of *vaiḍūrya* stone, the practitioner sees, carved on the walls the *sūtrānta* of Kāśyapa appearing by magic, which “is taught for the benefit of men and gods, propitious in word and meaning, which indicates the path to *nirvāṇa*, and is a lamp for those who are children and profanes (*bālapṛthagjana*) and whose mind is childish (*bālabuddhi*).”⁶⁴ And underneath, one could read

Qui discipline, qui apporte le bonheur, qui est pareil à une lampe, qui instruit et qui montre [le chemin vers la] ville du *nirvāṇa*: préceptes moraux (*bslab pa'i gzhi, śikṣāpada*) qui sont comme l'Instructeur/le Maître (*mkhan po lta bur gyur pa*) de tous les *pravrajita* (*rab tu byung ba rnam cad kyi*).⁶⁵

Then follows the famous teaching on the thirteen *dharmas* (*chos bcu gsum po 'di dag rnam*), that the *bhikṣu* must avoid as, among others inconveniences, these mundane activities distract the beginner and prevent his entry into the practice of meditation (*dhyānasamāpatti*), and are thus obstacles to the attainment of the goal. The art of painting that is here included among the thirteen *dharmas* is treated in various ways throughout the text, and is proscribed to the ascetics as it stimulates desire and all sorts of passions, with all the ensuing disastrous karmic consequences. Incidentally, it is intriguing both from the point of view of the debated question of the authorship and date of *Nāgārjuna's *Sūtrasamuccaya*, as well as of

Forthcoming-b, § I: La ronde des existences: entre allégorie, éthique et didactique, notes 3, 7–8, 11 and *passim*.

⁶⁴ On the canonical cliché *bālo 'śrutavān pṛthagjanaḥ* see Scherrer-Schaub 1991: 115 and n. 39 and index s.v.

⁶⁵ Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b § IV, notes 133–139.

the reception history of the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, to note that the quotation of this passage in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* either comes from a hitherto unknown version, or it is the result of the ‘editorial policies’ of the *Sūtrasamuccaya*’s author.⁶⁶ The activities mentioned here are only ten (*bcu po ’di dag*), and they are said to constitute an intrinsic obstacle to the practice of meditation and recitation by the bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa’ rnam gyi bsam gtan dang kha ton gyi bar du gcod par byed pa, *dhyānasvādhyāyāntarāyakatva*).⁶⁷

The discourse on the prohibited activities that the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra* shares with the rules applied to the allodox *parivrājaka* knows of several resumptions in the history of Buddhism, and is widely diffused in antiquity.⁶⁸ In the case in point, the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra* makes a distinction: as seen, the activity of painting is permitted to artists,⁶⁹ and some of them will be reborn as birds and other animals in the ninth heaven of the Trāyastriṃśa, while the same activities are forbidden to ascetics who are practising the ‘mental painting’ of the *gati*. As a matter of fact, the question goes far beyond the simple frame of coenobitic rules. Spiritual practice, centered as it is upon the practice of mindfulness/concentration (*smṛtyupasthāna*) is per se antonymic to distraction. But this is also because spiritual practice directed to the goal, in its turn, rests upon certain philosophical presuppositions, that is the existential status that the practitioner instructed by the teacher attributes to the entities that are the support of meditative exercises.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ On the authorship of *Sūtrasamuccaya*, see Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b: § I, n. 14, quoting Mitsuyo Demoto 2009: 63 and n. 8, and Harrison 2007: 224 and n. 42; Harrison n.d. “On Authors and Authorities: Reflections on Sūtra and Śāstra in Mahāyāna Buddhism.”

⁶⁷ Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya* quotes three passages from the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, see Cecil Bendall 1957: 12.5, 69.13–76.5, 125.4. Cf. Demoto 2009, 63, n. 8; Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b: § IV and notes 135–142.

⁶⁸ See Scherrer-Schaub Forthcoming-b: § IV: n. 140.

⁶⁹ On a very rare fragment representing a painter with a brush in the hand, see Zhang 2007: 392–394.

⁷⁰ Cf. for instance Schmithausen 2007: 232–234. Opinions vary on this matter, and if we remember rightly Daniel Stuart harbours doubt about it. We personally tend to share the idea that the existential status attributed to the entities under consideration by the various philosophical currents may have influenced and even directed the practice of meditation. Not last because we are reluctant to separate the cognitive and the ‘meditational’ processes, but rather prefer to consider them as part of a unique ‘flow’ where they proceed

If admonitions directed toward *bhikṣus* who are thoroughly enjoying images, or the various replica of Buddha and his teaching appear here and there in early India in order to discourage their enthusiasm, the opposite attitude is equally remarkable. Gustav Roth (1987) noticed that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* takes this tendency to its highest degree, and praises the merits and the highest fruit of such practices. Both the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* contemplate the fabric of the image of the Tathāgata, the rites of its worship or the copying of texts, practices that, in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, lead to celestial destinies, while they may be conducive to enlightenment in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. For its part the *didactisme religieux* of the painting of the *gati*, attested relatively early in India, will remain a constant and favorite artistic motif in the Buddhist world as a whole till the present. This is what the production of artistic motifs (painting, sculpture, poetry, and dramatic performance) tells us.

And the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* reversing the perspective of the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna*, and to a certain extent also of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, tells us that “the concentration and/or contemplative states brought by *dhyāna*, could also provide the basis for composing correct”⁷¹ treatises (*aviparītaśāstra*), poetry (*kāvya*), scholastic and/or Vinaya lists (*mātrkā*) and literary works, that will contribute to the durability of the *saddharma*, not to speak of mundane arts and crafts. If meditation seems here to serve the artistic and intellectual practice of philosophers, poets and even scholiasts, not to speak of painters, architects and other *śilpīns*, it equally tells us that the practitioner is no longer distracted by the mundane activities, ‘channeled’ as he is into the normative tenets.

To return to the simile of the painter (*citrakaradṛṣṭānta*), as it appears in the *Ratnacūḍasūtra*, quoted in *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (I.88–92),⁷² we see

sequentially. Moreover and given the immense scholastic *corpus* handed down to us it would be, to say the least, extravagant to imagine that this is not the case. Naturally however we should be aware that the doctrinal positions may be so to speak ‘fluid and fluctuant’ and need not always be attributed to a specific school. This has been brilliantly illustrated by Collett Cox 2009 (2013).

⁷¹ See Deleanu 2013: 903 and n. 55.

⁷² E.H. Johnston & T. Chowdhury 1950: 57; translated by J. Takasaki 1966: 263–264.

that the *didactisme religieux* is expert in adapting the message to the intended meaning conveyed by the medium.

Suppose there were some painters (*citralekhaka*) [each of them] expert in a different sphere, so that whatever skill possessed by one of them, the others could not understand. Then a mighty king would give them a painting cloth (*dūṣya*) with the following commandment: on this [cloth] ye all should draw my portrait (*pratikṛti*). Then the painters, having promised [to the king], would start their work of painting. Of these [painters] engaged in this work, one would have gone abroad. Because of his absence during his being abroad this picture would remain without the completion of all parts; thus the parable is made.

The painters who are meant here are Charity, Morals, Patience, and other dispositions. Being endowed with all kinds of excellencies, the Non-substantiality is called the picture //)

However this, as is often the case, is another story.⁷³

Primary Sources and Abbreviations

<i>Buddhacarita</i>	See Johnston 1972 [1936].
<i>Dharmasamuccaya</i>	See Lin Li-kouang 1946, 1969, and 1973.
Höbögirin	Höbögirin. <i>Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises</i> . Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1929–2003.
JIABS	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>
JIP	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
<i>Mahāvastu</i>	See Senart 1882–1897 [1977].
<i>Mahāvānasūtrālaṃkāra</i>	See Lévi 1907–1911.
MSāVin	<i>Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya</i>
<i>Padamañjarī</i>	See Ramachandrudu and Sundara Sarma 1981.
<i>Ratnagoṭravibhāga</i>	See Johnston & Chowdhury 1950.
<i>Ratnāvalī</i>	See Hahn 1982.
<i>Samādhirañjasūtra</i>	See Harrison 1990.
<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> SN	See Feer 1970.
TGVŚ	See Lamotte 1944–1980.
Tsukamoto	See Tsukamoto 1996–1998.

⁷³ Cf. “The boughs and leaves of the bodhi-tree – as all deciduous trees, extend in all directions – on reading and interpreting Buddhist sources as far as they lead us.” Presidential Address Vienna, August 18, 2014, IABS XVIIth Conference. Forthcoming-c.

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