

# Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia

*Edited by*  
A. K. NARAIN



KANAK PUBLICATIONS  
NEW DELHI INDIA  
1985

**STUDIES IN BUDDHIST ART OF SOUTH ASIA**

Edited by : **A.K. Narain**

First published in 1985

Price : Rs. 250.00 (For India only) US \$50.00

Published by Jayant Baxi for Kanak Publications Gay House, 16F/3 Ansari Road, Daryaganj,  
New Delhi 110002 India. Printed by Print India Press A38/2 Phase I Mayapuri, New Delh-110054.

# THE ORIGIN OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE : EARLY IMAGE TRADITIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF BUDDHADAR ŚANAPUNYĀ

JOHN C. HUNTINGTON

Like so many problems, the question of the Buddha image does not seem to have as simple a solution as was originally believed by past investigators. At present, it is generally accepted by historians of art that Coomaraswamy was correct, or at least very near the truth, when he found the *yakṣa* convention of the second century of the pre-Christian era as the basic formal prototype for the Mathurā Buddha image convention.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, in her *The "Scythian" Period*, J. E. van Lohuizen de Leeuw expressed the opinion that while she believed that Coomaraswamy was essentially correct, she preferred to see the prototype called a "king type" even though she did not feel that this distinction differed greatly from the view of Coomaraswamy.<sup>2</sup> For most, this was tantamount to the final resolution of the great debate between Foucher, who with his followers had postulated the "origin" of the image of the Buddha in the Indo-Iranian interface regions of Gandhāra and Bactria,<sup>3</sup> and Coomaraswamy and his followers who postulated an Indian "origin" in the Mathurā region.<sup>4</sup> However, since the very beginning of the debate, there has remained a nagging question. All the images that survive from the early periods are in stone, which only came into the most sparing use in the third century B.C. in India and did not become a sculptural major medium until the Kuṣāṇa era. What, if anything, came before?

Typical of the kind of comment ventured, van Lohuizen de Leeuw, while speaking of Kaṭrā Buddha, states, "It is clear [from the technical resolution of the image convention] that images like that of Kaṭrā are preceded by a whole line of development."<sup>5</sup> She continues to say that she does not necessarily mean that the earlier works were Buddha images *per se* but follows up by pointing out three obviously pre-Kaṭrā Buddha images from the Mathurā school.<sup>6</sup> The problem is clear: something must have existed prior to the stone images, but what?

In contrast to the acceptance that the art historical community has given the arguments of an "aniconic period" as postulated by Foucher and the stylistic arguments of Coomaraswamy, van Lohuizen de Leeuw and others, the Buddhological community has not been so easily convinced. In a 1974 article, Lewis,

R. Lancaster Suggested that the whole approach of the art historian has been incorrect in that the art historian has usually found the origin of the Buddha image to be tied into the popular "deification" of the Buddha or to the development of the *trikāya* concept of the Buddha's being.<sup>7</sup> He bases his comments on a narrative in an early recension of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* in which there is a passing remark about men who made images of the Buddha shortly after the *Nirvāṇa* in order to gain merit.<sup>8</sup> Padmanabh S. Jaini has also criticized the art historical community for not being more thorough in examining the textual evidence and for not giving "more credence to the accounts of the Chinese travellers [regarding early images]."<sup>9</sup>

Coupled with this criticism of what must be called shortsightedness on the part of the art historical community the discovery of early images in China<sup>10</sup> provided irrefutable evidence for early images. The earliest of these (Figures 1 and 2) is on a small ceramic jar dated to the equivalent of B.C. ("third year of Chien Chao" [under the Former Han]).<sup>11</sup> The unmistakable image of a Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and seated in a flame-like aura adorns one side of the vessel (Figure 1). The implications of this figure and the other early Chinese images are very obvious: China clearly did not invent the image type and there are no precedents for the convention anywhere in early Han or pre-Han art. This raises the point that images must have been part of the teaching modalities of the earliest proselytizers of Buddhism in China. Obviously, they did not invent the image for Chinese consumption and have it return from China to India as it has been shown that images survive even in the Indic sphere from an equally early date.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the image type, with the display of the *bhūmisparśamudrā* would seem to be a secondary convention that developed after the "four postures" (cf. *infra*). The suggestion that the image provides is clear, that images were an established tradition by the middle of the first century B.C., that there had been a period of development (presumably in the Indic sphere) prior to that time, and that conventions still in use today were already current by that time. It is apparent from these data and the implications drawn from them that one must search elsewhere than among surviving images for the true tradition of the "first" images of the Buddha.

Following these leads and suggestions, it is the purpose of this study to re-examine the evidence, both literary and archaeological, to determine if the earlier visions of the Buddha image and the postulated "Aniconic Phase" (that is said to have preceded the point in time in which the "first" Buddha images were created) have any validity, and, if they do not, to attempt to determine a more accurate history of the image development.<sup>13</sup> Simply stated, it will be the conclusion of this study that there is considerable corroborating literary and archaeological evidence for a tradition of early images, made in an effort to gain merit by viewing the Buddha (*Buddhadarśanapunya*). The phenomenon seems to have been unquestioned and to have been a completely natural and spontaneous reaction to the situation of allowing persons who had not been able to gain merit by seeing the Buddha in person either while he was absent during his lifetime or, because of his



death and cremation, after his lifetime, to do so by seeing an image of him. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the evidence regarding early images and to evaluate the place of fabrication of some of the first *surviving* images of the Buddha.

Ultimately, the results of this study take direct issue with the whole concept of the "pre-iconic" phase of Buddhism. If such a phase existed, it was extremely short, limited to specific sectarian movements, and without real relevance from either the art historical or doctrinal point of view for the majority of Buddhists.

#### TEXTS THAT HAVE BEEN CITED TO DENY THE PRODUCTION OF AN IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA

Initially, it is necessary to examine those citations from the Buddhist canonical literature that have been given by others as giving scriptural validity to the prohibition against making of an image of the Buddha.

Foucher, citing the *Mahāparinibhāna suttana*,<sup>14</sup> finds the passage

"The truths and the rules of the order which I have set forth and laid down for you all, let them, after I am gone, be the Teacher to you."<sup>15</sup> and a passage in the *Milindapañhā* as prohibiting the making of Buddha images. The king said: 'Is there such a such a person as the Buddha, Nāgasena?'

'Yes.'

'Can he then, Nāgasena, be pointed out as being here or there?'

'The Blessed One, O king, has passed away by that kind of passing away in which nothing remains which could tend to the formation of another individual (*anupādisesāya nibbānadhātuyā*). It is not possible to point out the Blessed One as being here or there.'<sup>16</sup>

The first passage is obviously about the continuation of the order and the succession of the teachings, while the second passage is about the cessation of life. Given the context of a religious system that makes an *a priori* assumption that any given living being will be reincarnated (*punarbhāva*) infinitely, it is a necessary and much developed topic. Since the Buddha was in the state of *Nirvāṇa*, there would never be another Buddha-being of that particular individual who was Gautama Śākyamuni. The problem of images is simply not germane to either passage, except through Foucher's somewhat contorted extrapolation which he assumes that "the gravest members of the order" must have made. It must be argued that such an assumption is unwarranted. The evidence of the several *vinayas* is that the rules of the order were spelled out in very explicit detail, leaving little room for the "gravest members of the order" to make such extrapolations. If images of the Buddha had been an issue of any importance at the period of the formation of the *vinaya* texts, and as we shall see, for one sect it was, there is little doubt that it would have been included in the regulations.

Gangoly, arguing vehemently against any possible icon in the early periods of

the Buddhist religion has cited a number of seemingly meaningful quotations from the Pāli canon as precluding art of any form and especially the image of the Buddha. Unfortunately, his method is to cite passages out of context and to construct a different and totally artificial meaning for them. In order to expose his fraudulent method, two of his citations shall be examined.

He cites<sup>17</sup> the *Cullavagga*, VI.3.2 as forbidding "the Brethren to permit the monastery walls to be adorned with figures of men and women." The text has the adjective *paṭibhānacitta*, which I.B. Horner has translated as "bold design."<sup>18</sup> Evidently, Horner read *citta* as implying "bright" or "gaily coloured,"<sup>19</sup> and *paṭibhāna* in the sense of "confident," "bold,"<sup>20</sup> "witty," and so on. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, in their translation of the *Cullavagga*<sup>21</sup> tell of uncertainty about the term, *paṭibhānacitta*, but point out that in one occurrence it means "indecent" and suggest that in the context of this passage, "suggestive" would probably be the best translation. A similar passage in the *vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādins prohibiting the depiction of "figures of men and women coupling"<sup>22</sup> reinforces the Rhys Davids/Oldenberg interpretation. Further, a simple examination of the broad context of Gangoly's passage leaves no doubt as to the intent of the citation. The text compares the monks who have the designs in questions to "householders who enjoy pleasures and the senses." The same theme of anti-luxury occurs in several places in the *Cullavagga* and in some cases an item is allowed the monks but it must not be too lavish. For example, in V. 11.1, a knife is allowed the monks but its handle must not be of gold or silver "like householders who enjoy pleasures of the senses" but a monk may own a knife with a handle of bone, ivory, horn, reed, bamboo, sticks, lac, crystal, copper, or the inside of a conch shell!

Further, the passage immediately preceding VI.3.2 regarding the "bold designs" describes in some detail the sleeping places in which the Buddha allows the use of whitewash, red coloring and black coloring on the walls. No design is mentioned but it is certainly possible that traditional Indian painting techniques, using a white ground with red underdrawing, figures in red and outlined in black could be made within the limitation given. At best, Gangoly's reading is a very forced interpretation of the meaning of the passage aimed to further his thesis that there could not possibly have been early images of the Buddha.

In another reasonable sounding citation, he gives the *Celokkhila* (sic.) *sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* as stating that the visible forms are one of the bondages of the human mind and finds that this is a reason for not producing images.<sup>23</sup> Yet I.B. Horner's translation of the passage<sup>24</sup> gives the bondages as sense pleasures (*kama*) the body (*kāya*), material shapes (*rū*), luxury (*artha*). future rebirth in the state of a *deva* (*devata*) and it deals with them in a most general and typical way—the monk is to root them out by cultivating the four bases of psychic power: ardour, continual application, perseverance and striving, hardly the specific prohibition against the visual images that Gangoly would have his readers believe. Such themes are found throughout Buddhist literature of all periods and without a much more specific reference to images; one would have to state that Gangoly's assumption that this brief passage precludes the making of images of the Buddha

only reflects an attempt to make his "aniconic" thesis more plausible. His other citations are equally distorted, as anyone who wishes to check them against the originals may easily find.

In all Buddhist literature, scholars have only been able to locate one reference to a specific, albeit indirect, prohibition against making images of the Buddha. This occurs in the *vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādins.<sup>25</sup> In a chapter dealing with the decoration of monasteries, the Buddha is asked by Anāthapiṇḍaka, "World-honoured one, if images of yours are not allowed to be made, pray may we not at least make images of Bodhisattvas in attendance upon you?" The Buddha then grants permission to the request.<sup>26</sup> Although the text was not translated into Chinese until A.D. 404, Waley suggests that this passage must reflect an early layer, at least of the first century A.D. Given the fact that the images identified by van Lohuizen de Leeuw as having been made prior to the Kaṭṭhā Buddha<sup>27</sup> have to date from the first century A.D. or before and that the Mathurā region, in which they were found was known as the main centre of the Sarvāstivādins;<sup>28</sup> then it can only be that the inference of the prohibition stems from an even earlier date. Yet the reference to *Bodhisattvas*<sup>29</sup> which troubles Waley,<sup>30</sup> would seem to indicate that some sort of iconic representations were already allowed, perhaps in the third to second centuries B.C. However, as Waley points out, the very existence of a prohibition means simply that someone (else) was making images<sup>31</sup> but that the Sarvāstivādins were (at that time) opposed to it.

In discussing the same passage, Lamotte points out that the *vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika and that of the Dharmaguptaka sects specifically allows the decoration of *stūpas* and monasteries with paintings of *devas*, monks, dragons, animals and landscapes, but both are silent on the subject of an image of the Buddha.<sup>32</sup> This absence from these *vinayas* may be seen in any of at least three ways: first, that the representation of the Buddha was so commonplace that there was no need to discuss it; second, that it just was not done and that there was no need to mention it; or third, that images of the Buddha were indeed made but that they would not have been mentioned as "decoration" since they were not appropriate to the decorative context but were cult or commemorative images of great sanctity. A variation on this last theme exists in that the making of images may have been outside the concern of the doctrinal religion, and that images were essentially a manifestation of a popular cult. The prohibition against the making of images itself suggests that one of the variations of the third possibility was in fact the case. If the images were not being made, then there would be no need to proscribe them and the general lack of attention that the making of images receives in the early literature can only mean that it was a generally accepted practice. Thus, the passages on "decoration" are just that—passages explaining that visual enrichment of was permitted. In view of the general tone of austerity apparent in the literature, thus permission would be particularly necessary. It follows then, that the Sarvāstivādin statement should be taken at face value as well: at the time the statement was formulated, the Sarvāstivādin sect did not allow images of the Buddha. However, because of their interdiction, it must be argued that other

movements had to allow images or that images had to have been well established among the laity.

Certainly by the Kuṣāṇa era the Sarvāstivādin had abandoned the prohibition. Specific dedications of images and reliquaries with images on them are made for the Sarvāstivādin by that time. For example, the Shāh-jī-kī-ḍheri casket inscription has been read by B.N. Mukherjee: "In the acceptance (i.e. for the acceptance) of the Sarvāstivādin teachers, this perfume box is the meritorious gift of Mahārāja Kanishka in the city of Kanishkapura. May (it) be for the welfare and happiness of all beings. . . . *sa*, the superintendent of construction of the refectory in Kanishka's *vihāra*, in Mahāsena's *saṃghārāma*."<sup>33</sup> Mukherjee's reading of the first line "*acharyana(na) sarvastivadina pratigrahe*"<sup>34</sup> makes it very clear that the acceptance of gifts (*pratigraha*)<sup>35</sup> is by the Sarvāstivādin teachers. As is well known the casket has four images of the Buddha, one on top attended by Indra and Brahma and three above the garland encircling the lower portion of the casket body. The possible fourth position of a Buddha on the lower portion is assumed by a rude portrait of the emperor Kaniška (I) who, attended by Kuṣāṇa deities, assists the garland bearers in supporting their load. Certainly, Kaniška, as a convert to Buddhism, would have made every attempt to have a doctrinally appropriate casket made to contain the relics. Accordingly, we must assume that by the time of the reign of Kaniška, the Sarvāstivādin, at the highest level, had either forgotten about or had come to ignore the interdiction against the portrayal of the image of the Buddha. One may also insist that such changes did not happen overnight. If, by the time of Kaniška, it was appropriate to portray the Buddha on what has to be assumed to be one of the most sacred locations available, on a casket presumably containing relics of the Buddha, then there had to have been a substantial period of development prior to such usage. As has been noted above, there were stone images of the Buddha at Mathurā from about the turn of the Christian era, and thus, relaxation of the interdiction must date from that time or before.

There is one other aspect to the statement in the Sarvāstivādin *vinaya* that is important and that is its casualness. As noted above, it is an indirect reference to the interdiction, and actually occurs in the context of a request to portray the *Bodhisattvas* attending the Buddha. Thus, nowhere in the literature is there a specific "*thou Shalt not*..."—it just does not seem to exist. Perhaps any such statement was removed in the compilation of the Sarvāstivādin *vinaya* since it was so obviously out of keeping with the actual practice. Yet, it is these casual references to images of the Buddha that will, in part, form the basis of the conclusions reached in this study.

It is also obvious from this statement that the cult of *Bodhisattvas* as attendants to the Buddha must have come into being while the Sarvāstivādin interdiction was still in effect. If, according to J.E. van Lohuizen de Leeuw's reasoning about the Kaṭrā Buddha image, that there must have been a long formative stage in its development,<sup>36</sup> the same must be true for images of the *Bodhisattvas*. *Bodhisattva* type figures do not occur, nor does any parallel figure convention



occur, in the Jain sculpture of Mathurā; thus it must be argued that the whole development of the *Bodhisattva* (essentially as *rājakumar*) type of image was within the Buddhist context. Further, of the related images to the Kaṭṭhā type, one, from Ahicchattra, clearly depicts the *Bodhisattvas* Vajrapāṇi and Padmapāṇi. Thus, it may be argued that the *karuṇā* (Padmapāṇi) and *prajñā* (Vajrapāṇi) concepts also emerge out of the mists of the period of wooden (or "pre-stone") sculpture. Since the interdiction against Buddha images was still in effect at the time permission was assumed to allow images to be made of *Bodhisattvas*, the date of the desire to make images of *Bodhisattvas* must fall some time between around 300 B.C. and 100 B.C.

Given the rather vehement and tempestuous tradition of controversy among varying groups in the *saṅgha*, it would seem that any great controversy over making images of the Buddha would have been recorded. Indeed, one might expect that such an issue would strike at the very core of devotional concepts and that it might have generated lengthy expositions of why, versus why not, make images. The fact that such expositions do not exist very probably indicates that image making was a foregone conclusion by all. It is my opinion that the Sarvāstivādin prohibition must be seen as an aside from the main stream of Buddhist concern about images of the Buddha.

There are a few other references to paintings in *vinaya* texts that limit monks or nuns from viewing "picture galleries" (*subhūti*) of either palaces or non-Buddhist religious buildings, but as these clearly do not refer to the Buddha or images of the Buddha, they have been excluded from this discussion.<sup>37</sup>

## EARLY TEXTS ON THE MAKING OF BUDDHA IMAGES

Korean Buddhist Canon number 281,<sup>38</sup> *Tso fo hsiang hsiang ching*, (*Tathāgata-pratibimbapraṭiṣṭhānuśāṁsāsūtra*), "Buddha spoken Buddha-image making *sūtra*," is one of a number of Chinese translations of a detailed account of the measurements and proportions of Buddha images. These translations are all more or less closely related and in quite close agreement on the proportions. Yet this particular text was translated in the Later Han (A.D. 25-220) and demonstrates that even at this relatively early date, the convention of the Buddha image had become canonical in the form of a *sūtra*. There are several implications to this. To be translated into Chinese, a text had to be important enough in either the Indo-Iranian region or in India proper to have been carried all the way to China and to warrant the time taken to make the translation. This presupposes some period of acceptance in Indian Buddhist circles. That a *sūtra* was formulated to explain certain concepts presupposes that those concepts were themselves broadly accepted within at least one of the major movements of Buddhism and that it had been in practice for a sufficiently long time to become the object of a *sūtra*. Thus, it must be argued that the existence of such texts in the first or second centuries of the modern era, absolutely demand a relatively long standing tradition of images and image making.

In support of this, it can be shown, at least in the Mathurā school of sculpture,

that there is evidence for early strict iconic formulations. J.E. van Lohuizen de Leeuw has demonstrated that the "Bala type" of image had at least one precedent in a stone image of the Mathurā school.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, there are a considerable number of images in this style convention, all really quite close to each other in most details.<sup>40</sup> By the time the convention emerged in stone, perhaps around A.D. 50, it was already a closed iconomorphic system with very little deviation acceptable in the form of the main figure. The only real variation in any of the images is the object placed between the legs of the figure. In at least one case, this is a lotus with a supporting figure to either side while in another it is a lion. These elements have yet to be comparatively analyzed but, in my opinion, a detailed study of them will probably reveal advanced iconological concepts in place by the first and second century. Given the stability of the figure and garment convention, and, as Coomaraswamy has already pointed out, its formal closeness to the Śūṅga *yakṣa* convention,<sup>41</sup> one can argue that the "Bala type" of the Buddha image had to have been formulated some time around 100 B.C. or earlier.

Since these images are generally associated with the Sarvāstivādins, this places the end of the Sarvāstivādins prohibition on images of the Buddha at a fairly early date, c. 100 B.C. More importantly, the uniformity of the Bala type image demonstrates the existence of early strict conventions for the representation of the Buddha. Further, since the Sarvāstivādins initially proscribed images of the Buddha, it must be assumed that it was their response to other ongoing traditions of making Buddha images during this period and that at the time of the Sarvāstivādin "invention" of the Buddha image, there were other established image conventions. Thus, while the only known date associated with the text is the Later Han period, it can be seen that the concept of iconometrically controlled images is of greater antiquity in India.

The drapery convention of the "Bala type" image is out of the mainstream of early Buddha figure conventions. However, in spite of stylistic differences, other early regional image traditions of the Buddha all bear a certain basic resemblance: the Buddha is depicted as a figure either standing or sitting wearing a loosely draped robe which either covers both shoulders or leaves the right shoulder bare (one isolated group of early images in Swat has a nude upper torso). Because of this apparent iconomorphic uniformity, a "common" prototype may be suggested for the majority of other conventions as we know them. This is not to say that the Amarāvati style images are stylistically the same as early Gandhāra images and so on, but simply that these are localized variations on a common theme. Unfortunately, the texts such as the K.B.C. 281, noted above, are not precise enough in their descriptions to give a clear impression of the actual appearance of an image. National and regional identities are easily discernible even in the most carefully iconometrically determined sculpture or painting. Yet, because of the apparent "common" prototype for all other styles, it is possible that it was the very convention against which the Sarvāstivādins first postulated the interdiction and finally presented their own interpretation.



In his note on the Buddha's image, Waley also cites the *vinaya* of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādins as stating that when "Anāthapiṇḍaka asks if it is permissible to make images of the Buddha's earthly semblance," he is told that there is no objection.<sup>42</sup> This text was translated in A.D. 170 and is further strong evidence of an early tradition of images. Just what the relationship of the "Original" (*Mūla*) Sarvāstivādins is to the Sarvāstivādins is not altogether clear; however, the Mūla-Sarvāstivādins were based in Kaśmīr and the north-west while the Sarvāstivādins were centred in the Mathurā region. However, applying the same arguments for a developmental process to this statement of permission, in the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin *vinaya*, it may be argued that it too suggests an early tradition.

#### SOURCES REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF THE IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA IN THE LIFETIME OF THE BUDDHA AND AN EARLY BUDDHA IMAGE

Perhaps the best known and yet the most easily dispensed with narrative of the "Origin of the Buddha image" is the tale of the image said to have been ordered to be made by king Udayana of Kauśāmbī. It occurs in its fullest form in Hsuan Tsang's *Records of the Western World*.<sup>43</sup>

In the city, within an old palace, there is a large *vihāra* about 60 feet high; in it is a figure of Buddha carved out of sandal-wood, about which is a stone canopy. It is the work of the king U-to-yen-na (Udayana). By its spiritual qualities (*or*, between its spiritual marks) it produces a divine light, which from time to time shines forth. The princes of various countries have used their power to carry off this statue, but although many men have tried, not all the number could move it. They therefore worship copies of it, and they pretend that the likeness is a true one, and this is the original of all such figures.

When the Tathāgata first arrived at complete enlightenment, he ascended up to heaven to preach the law for the benefit of his mother, and for three months remained absent. This king (i.e. Udayana), thinking of him with affection, desired to have an image of his person; therefore, he asked Mudgalyāyana-putra, by his spiritual power, to transport an artist to the heavenly mansions to observe the excellent marks of Buddha's body, and carve a sandal-wood statue. When Tathāgata returned from the heavenly palace, the carved figure of sandal-wood rose and saluted the Lord of the World.

There are several versions of this story, one in the twenty-eighth chapter of the *Ekottarāgama* which Waley has noted in which "Udayana makes an image of sandal-wood five feet high and Prasenajit follows suit with a golden image."<sup>44</sup> A version in Tibetan repeats much of the Hsuan Tsang version except that the image is depicted in a standing position and that a dazzling "sun-stone" was placed in front of the *uṣṇīṣa*.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of the pan-Asian popularity of both the image type and the narrative, Udayana's "true" image concerns this study only slightly. Since Przyluski's study of the *Aśokavadāna* has made it clear that the rise of Kauśāmbī occurred later than the first council and that the insertion of emphasis on Kauśāmbī in the Pāli canon probably took place well after Aśoka's lifetime,<sup>46</sup> we may dismiss the Udayana image as the "the" original. In fact, in Niti Adaval's study of King Udayana, a thorough analysis of the Buddhist references to Udayana gives no cause to believe that any of them are contemporary to the time of Udayana himself and he concludes that there is little reason to believe that the king was anything other than disinterested in, if indeed he knew of Buddhism at all.<sup>47</sup> The story does, however, play a minor role in our study, as it supports the tradition that there were early images, possible even one dating from or thought to date from the time of the Buddha. It is also very likely that the image was not an invention out of thin air but that it was a copy of, or closely resembled, an accepted image convention.<sup>48</sup>

As a brief aside, elements of the narrative fall into critical categories which by their very existence suggest that there is reason to question the validity of a literal interpretation of the narrative. It has been generally shown that the legends of the Buddha that deal with individuals who are known to have lived at the time of the Buddha and with places that are easily within the sphere of the Buddha's activities are often the least embellished with "magical" events. The more "down to earth", the fewer beings involved, the more logical the time sequence and the fewer *devas* and the like usually points to early layers of narratives.<sup>49</sup> While these criteria are very useful, they are by no means hard and fast. For example, Ānanda who became the voice of the Buddha's *sūtra* throughout Buddhism, is often presented in the role of reciting and enunciating later texts. However, other criteria can usually give a general indication of the chronological direction. Conversely, the presence of certain gods, especially Indra and Brahmā who were well established by the time of the Buddha, and at which time it seems to have been widely accepted that only individuals of enlightened insight could see them, are often said to attend events that otherwise meet all the criteria. This is completely appropriate in a culture which defines its place in the universe as only one of innumerable realms, existing simultaneously and in parallel. Accordingly, a modest number of animistic embodiments (i.e. *yakṣas*, *kiṇṇaras*, *gandharvas* *rākṣasas*, etc.) and deities of the various paradisaic realms (*devas*) appear in early literature. However, when they appear as participants in the production of material objects and the images rather than just listeners or attendants to the Buddha, such as in the production of an "original" image, this may reflect a secondary layer of literature in which divine "primacy" is being used to justify a claim over a pre-extant rival.

It is by no means certain when the first "Udayana image" came into existence but it is probable that, with the deliberate emphasis on Kauśāmbī being integrated into the literature some time in the third and second centuries B.C., the need to establish the primacy of Kauśāmbī extended to the story of the image. Indeed, since it is highly doubtful that Udayana had anything to do with Buddhism at all, one may argue that this account was a response to another similar and pre-extant

narrative. Further, the fact that the image is said to have been carved directly from the Buddha by a sculptor magically transported to Trayastrimśa seems to be a response to another story of an image said to have been made during the Buddha's lifetime, that of King Prasenajit at Śrāvastī. Fa-Hsien gives the earliest known narrative of it.<sup>50</sup>

When the Buddha went up to heaven for ninety days to preach the Faith to his mother, king Prasenajit, longing to see him, caused to be carved in sandal-wood from the Bull's head mountain an image of Buddha and placed it where Buddha usually sat. Later on, when Buddha returned to the shrine, the image straightway quitted the seat and came forth to receive him. Buddha cried out, 'Return to your seat: after my disappearance you shall be the model for the four classes of those in search of spiritual truth.' At this, the image went back to the seat. It was the very first of all such images, and is that which later ages have copied.

Hsuan Tsang gives a very interesting variation of the same story?<sup>51</sup>

Formerly, when Tathāgata ascended into the Trayastrimśas heaven to preach for the benefit of his mother, Prasēnajita-rāja, having heard that the king Udayana had caused a sandal-wood figure of Buddha to be carved, also caused this image to be made.

At the time of Hsuan Tsang's visit to Śrāvastī, the monastery that Fa-Hsien had visited was gone except for the solitary brick building containing what he reported to be the image.<sup>52</sup> Cunningham's exploration of the Śrāvastī site led him to identify his temple number 3 with the temple that Hsuan Tsang saw, which at that time (1863) still contained an image of the "Bala" type.<sup>53</sup> That this is not the image that Fa-Hsien saw is obvious, for he describes a seated image; yet Hsuan Tsang's version of the Prasenajit copy of the Udayana image is a standing figure. Simply, the tradition of the Prasenajit image was still remembered in Hsuan Tsang's time but there was no living tradition of it at the ruined site. However, an obviously early image had become the object of the modified legend which now gave primacy to the Udayana image.<sup>54</sup>

Fa-Hsien's version of the story is not so easily dispensed with, however. The miracle of the descent from Trayastrimśa is extremely important in early Buddhism and, while it is impossible to even suggest the actual events of the "descent" at Sāṅkāśya, it is one of the very early important pilgrimage sites, having been well established by the time of Aśoka.<sup>55</sup> The rising up of the image is typical of early, and what may be called "simple miracles" that demonstrate to total primacy of the Buddha over all phenomena.

It is widely accepted that Prasenajit actually did live at the time of the Buddha and that he was an active supporter of the early Buddhist community.<sup>56</sup> Thus, we are left with the problem of whether Prasenajit actually made an image or not. Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer to this question. However, long

overlooked by art historians, there is what might possibly be an early representation of the image as described by Fa-Hsien. Found by Cunningham at Sāṅkāśya,<sup>57</sup> a tiny steatite plaque, whose present whereabouts is unknown, depicts a seated Buddha on the uppermost crossmember of the architectural elements of the composition (Figures 3 and 4). In his report, Cunningham suggested that the representation shows the triple stairs at Sāṅkāśya.<sup>58</sup> Given the location of the findspot, this is certainly conceivable, but by no means certain. All early representations of the stairway show an obviously vertical and axially central stairway. However, in this case, the Buddha is the central figure with the "stairs" or more probably, walkway off to the left side of the composition.<sup>59</sup> Further, there seems to be a very solid landscape under the pavilion so that it may be suggested that it is a representation of the Buddha seated on a platform on a hill. With a piece such as this represented only by a drawing there is always the danger that the original draftsman (in this case, Cunningham) read into the elements of the object he was drawing and "clarified" them in his drawing. However, in other work that I have done over the years I have come to have great respect for Cunningham's "eye" and have considerable trust in his drawings.<sup>60</sup>

There are three factors that suggest a very early date for this piece. First, steatite carving was an important medium in the Maurya and Śuṅga periods but there was little done after that time. Second, the open quality of the architecture is in fact looser and more open than any surviving representations at Bodh Gayā, Bhārhut or other early sites. Given the continuum of increasing elaboration and heavier and more complex buildings that occur in Śuṅga and Āndhra-Sātavāhana architectural representations, it must be argued strongly that this structural convention depicted on the plaque is from prior to the Śuṅga period. Third, this view is furthered by the presence of a monumental peacock (*mayūra*), the totemic emblem of the Maurya dynasty, opposite a very small bird on the balustrade to the entrance of the walkway. This would seem too great a coincidence to be overlooked. The pre-eminence of the bird in scale over the rest of the composition, including the size of the central figure, coincides with what we know of the attitude of the early Maurya emperors, who by their conquests demonstrate that they saw themselves as universal monarchs.

While the fragmentary condition of the piece demands that these conclusions be more tentative than otherwise, the decidedly early architecture, the *mayūra* and use of steatite strongly suggest an early date. That the seated and robed figure is a Buddha is also strongly suggested by the posture and garments. The Jains and the Ājivikas of the period both wore no clothes. Śaivite ascetics and other ascetics found in the early sculpture of Bhārhut and Mathurā are emaciated, nude or nearly nude or wear animal skins and none make the *abhaya mudrā*. In contrast, this image may be seen to make *abhaya mudrā*, wears a garment much like that of later images of the Buddha and sits in a position identical with later representations. Simply, even in its fragmentary state, it seems self evident that the figure depicts a Buddha. If it is not the Buddha, who could it possibly be? In short, it seems probable that Cunningham found what may stand at present as



the earliest representation of the Buddha known. From what may be seen of the image, it is not far removed from the "common" iconomorphic prototype image that I have postulated, thus taking us one step closer to the "original" image of the Buddha.<sup>61</sup>

Later Tibetan commentarial literature contains a brief note of a very unembellished narrative which states that the first statue of the Buddha was made when the Buddha himself was not present at the noon-day meal offered the monks by a householder called Dad-sbyin (Sradhā, "Faithful" or "Believer") and it was felt that the gathering lacked splendor. As a result, another householder, mGon-med zas-sbyin (Anāthapiṇḍada, or Anāthapiṇḍaka, "Provider of cakes to the poor") asked for and was given permission to make statues of the Buddha.<sup>62</sup> Nothing more is made of this statement, other than the Buddha had set out the specifications and that Anāthapiṇḍada had many images made. No image traces its history to it, no one is credited with seeing it or copying it, it is not described and there is nothing magical about it. Further, one of the individuals, Anāthapiṇḍada is well known in early Buddhist literature. In short, it exhibits all the characteristics of being a hold-over of a very early account of the making of an image of the Buddha. These accounts cannot be dismissed as later inventions except on the basis that they tell of the making of an image. While it is very doubtful that any more direct evidence of images made during the lifetime of the Buddha will be found, the evidence that has preceded this section and that which follows will demonstrate that there is very little reason to doubt the possibility or even the probability of images if the accounts of their being made fulfil the following simple criteria :

1. The Buddha is not present.
2. His followers wish to see him.

In the above accounts, the Buddha is absent and in order to be reminded of his inspiration, an image of the Buddha is made. As will be seen in the following section, these are also the only reasons cited for the production of images in the post *Nirvāṇa* period as well. The point must also be made that Prasenajit, Sradhā and Anāthapiṇḍada are lay followers and not clerics. That the Buddha might have given permission to the laity to make images while not doing so for the monks is not surprising as the concepts "tameable men" and "each according to his own ability" are found widely expressed in early literature. Further, because of the importance of both as early supporters of the Buddha, it cannot be discounted that they may well have asked for and received permission to make an image of the Buddha. Indeed, if I may be allowed the indiscretion of a personal reaction, it seems to me that the narrative of Sradhā and Anāthapiṇḍada's image are the most plausible of all image narratives. They contain no pomp, no kings, no miracles, just laymen, and specifically one, Anāthapiṇḍada, who is well-known in Buddhist literature, who wanted an image. All other narratives contain some element of either pomp or the miraculous as if to attempt to show the primacy

over some other pre-extant narrative. For Example, Prasenajit's image narrative would seem to be embellished in response to some other earlier tradition; after all, how could the king not have the first and best image? Accordingly, the totally unembellished account of these two laymen who simply wanted to see the Buddha at gatherings of Buddhist may signal the beginning of the whole image tradition.

#### SOURCES REGARDING THE MAKING OF IMAGES AFTER THE NIRVĀṆA OF THE BUDDHA

The following accounts of the making of a Buddha image share several points in common. Most interesting among them is the fact that none claim that the image is the "original" image. Even though these were very early images, and the account of their production conforms to the standard of unembellished narrative, to not claim "originality" suggests that there were prior claimants to that privilege. Note again that it is generally the actions and the desires of the laity that causes the images to be made.

To quote Winternitz in his *History of Indian Literature* from a passage in which he dated the earliest layers of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* to the first Century A.D., "...one thing is [certain: the nature of the work as we know it, implies a *mature development* of Mahāyāna Buddhism, *especially in the direction of* Buddha-Bhakti and the cult of relics and *image worship*, and above all also on advanced stage of Buddhist art."<sup>63</sup> Hurvitz, in his recent translation of this important text, while addressing the problem of the age of the text, suggests, in agreement with Winternitz, that it is the verse layers of the text that are the earliest. He sees the prose layers as a kind of commentary added at a later date. Within the verse layer itself he also finds two layers, one in which it is said that there is only one path to salvation, not three, specifically an intermediate position encompassing Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekayāna and Mahāyāna, and a second layer in which the Buddha is defined as infinite in the contexts of time, space or any other finite division.<sup>64</sup> By implication, he suggests that the one vehicle layer is even earlier than the infinity of the Buddha layer.

Yet, it is in the one vehicle layer, the earliest in the text, where we find an elaborate discussion of the benefits of offering an image. Since, as Winternitz noted, this is a fully developed acceptance and encouragement of image worship, vastly beyond any limited set or individual "true image" concept, it may be argued that there already had been a substantial period of development by the first century A.D.

In the chapter on Expedient Devices (II), the Buddha tells of beings who have achieved the Buddha-path, which is called the "one-path" in the passage. They are those who offer *stūpas*, those who make or cause to be made images, carvings, colored images (paintings), children, again in play, who draw Buddha images, or those who make offerings to those images of various sorts. Any of these will have achieved the Buddha-path through the use of those expedient devices of the Buddha.<sup>65</sup> The same passage enumerates virtually every type of material used for an image, to wit: seven jewels, nickel, copper, bronze, white tin, bronze, alloys



of lead and tin, iron, wood and clay. In fact, virtually every likely material *except monolithic stone* is mentioned! Obviously, the tradition was well beyond any tradition of the "true" image in a specific material such as sandal wood.

Within the passage, there is a definite indication of how the image must look. Twice, the marks of the Buddha are mentioned, once as "carvings perfecting the multitudinous marks," and (speaking of paintings) "adorning them with marks of hundredfold merit." These cannot be taken as other than the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha which are well known from the earliest Buddhist literature.<sup>66</sup>

Not only are images accepted in this passage as an obviously foregone conclusion, but the scribbles of children are taken as demonstrating the achievement of the Buddha *Mārga*. There is no holding up of a particular image, no preciousness to any traditional—just simple wide open acceptance of any conceivable image. This attitude does not speak of a recent change in attitude toward images in general; there is a great comfort, ease and a sure, self-confident familiarity with images of the Buddha. If this is the case by the beginning of the Christian era, then the images that were known to the formulators of the earliest layers of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* were the product of a very old tradition.<sup>67</sup>

Citations from the Tibetan historians are an interesting problem in historiography. Sometimes the Tibetans have had at their disposal legitimate early versions of narratives that no longer survive in any form. Tāranātha, the source for the following account of images of the Buddha, reverses in time the Nanda and the Maurya dynasties in his *History of Buddhism in India*.<sup>68</sup> Yet, according to Przyluski,<sup>69</sup> Tāranātha must have had an independent version of the Aśoka legend and is therefore a source that one must consider when dealing with the legends of the period. He supplies the following narrative of the making of an image shortly after the death of the Buddha.<sup>70</sup> The three sons of a Mārādhi woman, Jāḥsa, who was about one hundred twenty years old, Jaya, Sujaya and Kalyāna, are converted to Buddhism and wish to build a temple for the Teacher. Jaya builds one at Vārāṇasī, Sujaya builds one at Rājagṛha and Kalyāna builds the "Gandhola (*gandhakuṭī*) of Vajrasana with the Mahābodhi (image) in it."<sup>71</sup> While making the image, Kalyāna and the artisans shut themselves away for seven days with the materials.

On the sixth day, the mother of the three *brāhmaṇa* brothers came and knocked at the door. [On being told it was not yet time she replied,] 'I am going to die tonight. In the world today, I alone survive who personally have seen the Buddha. Therefore, others in the future will not be able to determine whether the image is in the likeness of the Tathāgata or not. So you must open the door.'<sup>72</sup>

The brothers then arrange for the maintenance of five hundred *bhikṣus* at each of the three temples.<sup>73</sup>

The identical story is told of the image of the Mahābodhi temple in the

*Biography of Dharmasvāmin.* While the two accounts parallel each other very closely, there are sufficient major differences to demonstrate that the source for each version was different and somewhat separate. Tāranātha worked from Sanskrit and Tibetan sources. However, it is not known which, if any sources, Dharmasvāmin used and it is possible that he simply recounts a legend still in circulation at Bodh Gayā at the time he visited. He relates :

It is said that the image was erected by a young son of a Brāhmana some eighty years after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha.<sup>74</sup>

[Then follows a significantly different story of the conversion of the three brothers.]

Each of them erected an object of worship. The eldest boy erected a Vihāra at Rajagṛīha, which became known as the Vihāra of Veluvana. The middle one erected a Vihāra to the west of it at Vārāṇasī, which became known as the Vihāra of the Dharmachakrapravartana. The youngest thought, 'I did not get the best of the paternal inheritance. My two elder brothers are more influential. I was born the youngest.' Said the mother, 'You should not get displeased ! The best of the three shares is the seat under the Bodhi tree, and this you get ! Place an image on that seat, facing towards the East.' Then the youngest son thought, 'Whom shall I entrust with the making of the image, and of what material the image should be made ?' In (his) dream he received the following indication, 'The material (should consist of three parts), one of precious substances such as gold, etc., one of fragrant substances such as camphor, etc., one part (should consist) of sandal ointment. Place the three parts inside the Gandhola. Further, the sandal known as *Goṣiṣa* is found on the banks of the river Nirañjanā. Look for it in the sand hollows (pit). During seven days do not let anyone enter inside the (Gandhola). The image will appear (by itself). There is no need for an image maker!<sup>75</sup>

[There follows a passage on finding the sandal in hollows where elephants lie down.]

...after seven days some one said that it should be opened before the indicated time. The mother said that it should not be opened before the indicated time and remarked, 'Now, since there is no one else except me who had seen the face of the Buddha, it is for me to see whether (the image) is like Him, or not. Others will not be able to determine it ! At the age of twenty I had taken the vows of a lay-devotee in the presence of the Fully Enlightened Buddha ! I am to pass away at the age of hundred.' Without listening to the mother's words, they opened the door a day before the indicated time, and they found that except for the little toe of the right foot, the image had formed itself.<sup>76</sup>

By itself the narrative does not completely follow the criterion for inclusion that the origin of the image not be magical in any form. But in this case, with a very unmagical account given by Tāranātha, it seems prudent to include it, especially since some elements of the story seem to stem from earlier layer than even Tāranātha's version.<sup>77</sup> It is interesting that the brothers have inherited most of the Māgadha empire. While nothing is said of their rank as nobility, it would seem clear that they were from a family of considerable importance. This is further reinforced by the fact that they conceive of and are able to devote considerable resources to the building of temples and the maintenance of monks (five hundred is a standard number, and although it is very much within reason, especially when compared with the numbers in later texts, it is very likely that the number would have been much less than that, perhaps fifty or so). The material for the image is sandal in the Dharmasvāmin version, along with gold (for covering the image with leaf?), camphor (for incense?) and sandal ointment (as a coating or applied offering?).

The age of the mother is less in the Dharmasvāmin version and her role in the opening of the door is exactly reversed in the two narratives. According to Tāranātha, she is the one who causes it to be opened while in Dharmasvāmin's account she says it should not be opened but it is opened anyway. Most importantly, in both stories, she is an old woman who had seen the Buddha and who was the authority for the depiction made in the statue.<sup>78</sup> This has an air of plausibility to it that is undeniable. Since the narrative in both cases is focused on the Vajrāsana, we need not expect that the shrines dedicated by the other two brothers be emphasized in the narrative and since there is no image mentioned in connection with either of them, it need not concern us in this context.

The "elemental" legend may be summarized as follows: An elderly woman, who had become a lay follower of the Buddha during or toward the end of the Buddha's lifetime, had three sons who, while they had been followers of Mahādeva most of their lives, became converted to Buddhism. Being a family of means, they offer either *vihāras* or shrines to the Buddha as a manner of expressing devotion. The eldest built the Valuvana *vihāra*, the second built the Dharmachakra-pravartana *vihāra* while the youngest son, somehow elected to present his at the Vajrāsana, made a *gandhakuṭī* which was to contain a sandalwood image of the Buddha. During the process of making the image, the building was closed up so that none but the craftsmen (and the son?) might enter. Impatience caused the building to be opened early and the image to be examined. At that time, the old woman, the only one among the community remaining alive who had seen the Buddha, examined the image. She found it to be a good likeness but wanting in certain details.<sup>79</sup>

The importance of these three sites in the accounts and especially the fact that there was no emphasis on either the miracle sites of Śrāvastī or Sāṅkāśya further suggests that the legend is of a very early stratum. No later than the time of Aśoka (and probably well before), these two sites of miracles had become very important in Buddhist legend as had Lumbini. But the present form of the three

legends relating to the sites all contain highly miraculous events. Even so by the time of Aśoka, they had become immensely important with the emperor either erecting pillars or carving inscriptions on pillars already erected at the sites.<sup>80</sup> That the "elemental" legend is only related to the three non-miraculous sites of the Buddha's sphere of activity strongly suggests a very early tradition.

Those familiar with the process of the division of inheritance in early India will also find the ring of validity in the complaint of the youngest son as portrayed in the Dharmasvāmin version. While the division of the property was held to be equal among brothers, the eldest commanded the respect of and held a dominant position over his younger siblings.<sup>81</sup> It is thus very possible that, although the inheritance was supposed to have been equal, the older brothers would have been given the "first choice" and the younger brother felt in a secondary position relative to the importance of his property.

Something of the nature of the image may be gleaned from the criticisms of the mother when she examines the image of the Buddha. Tāranātha has:

A close examination of the image showed overall likeness with the Teacher. However, there were discrepancies in three aspects. These were : no halo radiated from it, it was not preaching the Doctrine and, except for sitting, it did not show the three other attitudes.<sup>82</sup>

Tāranātha goes on to say that according to his (unnamed) sources, either the big toe of the right foot was missing (he must have known of Dharmasvāmin's version in one form or another) or that the curl of the hair toward the right was missing. Others that he cites (unnamed *paṇḍitas*) said that the hair on the body was missing. [there had been] "failure to make the robe remain without touching the body."<sup>83</sup>

Dharmasvāmin relates : The mother said, 'In general' the likeness is great, but it has four distinct peculiarities, whereas the *uṣṇīṣa* (on the Lord's head) was not visible, it is visible (on the image). It does not show one of the four postures ! Whereas (the Lord) was preaching the Law, this (image) does not preach. Whereas (the Lord's body) was endowed with lustre, this (image) is not endowed to such an extent. Except for these four (peculiarities), it is similar to the Buddha Himself.<sup>84</sup>

The criticism of the presence of the visible *uṣṇīṣa* on the head of the image is particularly striking as something that a lay person might say when seeing a conventional image of the Buddha and being asked to compare it to the actual individual. Such a statement suggests a strong air of validity to the account. Generally, descriptions of the Buddha simply assume the presence of the *uṣṇīṣa*. But here, in the person of an elderly lay follower of the Buddha who according to the account, had actually seen him, is the voicing of a concern over the presence of something she did not recognize as belonging to the living Buddha. This candor



somehow surviving in the legend would seem to lend great credence to the basic legend of an elderly person who had seen the Buddha being shown an image made after the *Nirvāṇa*. It is also not hard to imagine the response of the image makers who might have replied, "Ah, but madam, the *uṣṇiṣa* was present and visible to those those who had attained arhatship. We have included it on the image in order that those of lesser attainment might also gain the merit from having seen it."

If we can accept this explanation of the criticism then there are other elements in it that must be taken into account. The account of the *uṣṇiṣa* demonstrates that within the life time of one person after the *Nirvāṇa*, an iconographic convention of placing an *uṣṇiṣa* on the head of the Buddha had arisen. That it was not recognized by a lay person suggests that there may have been a tradition of making images among the monks as well. Granted, this is only a tiny hint of such a tradition, but such an alteration of the figure of the Buddha would seem unacceptable without doctrinal justification. Thus, even if the monks did not make images themselves, they *knew* what the Buddha looked like.

The discussion of the four postures, that is sitting, standing, walking and lying, strongly suggests that there were other image conventions. The mention of the fact that the image was sitting but was not preaching demonstrates that there were gesture conventions which conveyed activity connotations to the viewer. (May we assume that the Mahābodhi image was in *bhūmisparśamudrā*? That gesture is certainly deeply associated with the site and the Mahābodhi image). A seated, preaching image would very probably have been *abhāyamudrā* which is the common preaching gesture of the earliest surviving images.<sup>85</sup> The lying posture would have to be the *Nirvāṇa*. Standing and walking images are known and the tradition of placing an image where the Buddha walked seems to be of great age.<sup>86</sup> If this account of the four postures is of the age of the "elemental" legend, it is very clear evidence for a complex tradition of imagery at a very early date, about or prior to 400 B.C.

The accounts by Tāranātha and Dharmasvāmin would seem to give us three specific points: first, that the Mahābodhi image in *gandhakuṭī* at the Vajrāsana was very probably made within the lifetime of a single individual after the *Nirvāṇa* and second, the strong suggestion that there was a developed image tradition that included four different postures of the Buddha; finally, the tentative hint that there may have been a monk's tradition of sculpture as well.

The concept of the four postures, at least two of which are obviously identifiable as relating to the life of the Buddha, bring us to a possible "origin" of the depiction of life scenes. In the *vinaya* of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādins<sup>87</sup> is an account of how the disciple of the Buddha, Mahā-Kāśyapa, informed King Ajātaśatru of Māgadha about the death of the Buddha.

Immediately after the Buddha had entered *Nirvāṇa*, his senior disciple Mahā-kāśyapa, considering that Ajātaśatru the king of Māgadha was still only shallowly rooted in his faith, 'and that if heard suddenly that the

Buddha had passed on would infallibly vomit hot blood in his grief and die, decided that it would be best to work out some means in advance by which the news might be broken to him gradually.' In consequence Kāśyapa had the Grand Councillor Vṛṣaghakṣatriyā 'quickly betake himself to a garden, and in a fine hall have depicted in the proper manner the causal chain of events in the Buddha's career. There would be shown the former time when as Boddhisattva He was in the Paradise of Tuṣita, and His meditation upon the Five Facts as He was about to become incarnate; the triple cleansing of His mother's body by the angels of the Realm of Sense; His conception in His mother's womb in the form of a baby elephant; then after the birth, the crossing through the city walls by which He renounced His family; the six years of austerities, His sitting upon the Adamantine Throne and winning full Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree; next the time when He preached for the five monks in Vārāṇasī; then the time when He made manifest the Grand Miracle at Srāvastī for the benefit of men and gods; the time when He broadly expounded the essentials of the Law for the sake of His mother Maya, having visited [the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods; His descent therefrom to Jambudvīpa [the Earth] on the precious triple way, to be welcomed by men and gods at the city of Sāṅkāśya; His conversion of living creatures wherever He went in the several realms; and finally the time when having completed the sum of His blessings (?) and looking forward to extinction, He went at last to the twin *sāla* trees at Kuśinagara, lay down with His head to the North, and entered the Great Nirvāṇa. When in this way the evidences of the Buddha's career of redemption had been pictured,' the king was brought to the garden and made to look at the scenes in turn, while the meaning of each was explained to him. When he reached the final section with the Parānirvāṇa he actually did cry out and fall fainting to the ground, but they were able to revive him without injury.<sup>88</sup>

The human events of the story meet all the requirements of early literature, mortal beings taking reasonable actions within the timeframe and acknowledged locations of the actions of early Buddhism. In fact, there is nothing extraordinary about the human actions whatever. Indeed, there is no problem with the suggestion that the nucleus of the narrative may have been founded in an actual event. If so, it is quite possible that the tradition of the four postures would stem from this event. A point must also be made of the incidental nature of this story: it exhibits nothing except the intense devotion of Ajātaśatru and Kāśyapa's concern for him, making it an aside of a historical nature rather than a didactic device. Further, there are no claims about the paintings of any sort. They were just done, yet their function is obvious; as the king progressed along the walls listening to the account, he would see and anticipate for himself the death of the Buddha —



a slower and less painful realization than the abrupt announcement "the Buddha is dead."<sup>89</sup>

From the evidence of the non-specific but obvious acceptance of images in the *Saddharma-puṇḍrika*, the accounts of the Mahābodhi image and the narrative of informing Ajātaśatru of the death of Buddha, one would have to state that there is a very strong tradition pointing to the making and use of images in the period immediately following the death of the Buddha. Moreover, it is significant that nothing is made of it in the sense of their having been the first or the original images. Whatever the history of these legends, and it may be argued that the "elemental" forms are very early, it was a foregone conclusion that there were previously made images and that these were simple incidents worth of note in the general historical consciousness of Buddhism.<sup>90</sup>

Another text that refers to early image making is the *Aṣṭasahasrikā prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>91</sup> It too contains a general, incidental reference to the making of images after the death of the Buddha in a manner that suggests that it was a foregone conclusion that such was done. However, the text is more important for telling why the images were made at that time rather than that they were made; accordingly, it will be treated in a separate section.<sup>92</sup>

#### NOTICES OF IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA DURING THE AŚOKAN PERIOD

The following four citations, taken at face value, demonstrate the continued use and acceptance of images during the Aśokan period and demonstrate the acceptance of a tradition of an early image tradition. While there is very little to work with regarding the first three legends, the fourth has a surprising, yet to be recognized, corroboration in the survival of an obvious approximate copy.

Tāranātha's, *History of Buddhism in India*, which as noted previously, contained material from an independent version of the Aśoka legends,<sup>93</sup> mentions two images in the account of the events during Aśoka's reign and the events of Aśoka's life. The first is an image which Aśoka saw during the process of his conversion.<sup>94</sup> The second is an image given by a merchant to the teacher of the king of the island of Siṃhala. Āsana Simahakoṣa (or Simahakoṣa),<sup>95</sup> during the period of Aśoka's conquests prior to his conversion.<sup>96</sup> In either case, the image was made prior to Aśoka's activity as a Buddhist. Siṃhala has not been positively identified but according to D.C. Sircar, it is a state in the Punjab-Rājasthan region.<sup>97</sup> Later traditions identify Siṃhala with the island of Śrī Lanka while the tantric tradition associates it with Shambala.<sup>98</sup> While it is clear that Tāranātha meant Śrī Lanka by his reference to an island, it is more probable that the Punjab-Rājasthan region is indicated by the account since this was in the line of the main trade route from the Magadha region to the west coast.<sup>99</sup> Except for the acceptance of a tradition of early images and the lack of a claim to primacy, there is little that can be gleaned from these stories. Indications are that by the time the legends were formed, images made prior to the date of the narratives were fully accepted. However, the case is radically different with the narrative of Fa-Hsien's visit to Śāṅkaśya.

[After relating the story of the Buddha's descent on the triple stairs, he continues]

In later days, king Asōka (sic), wishing to know where these last [the stairs] ended, caused men to dig down and find out. They got as far as the Yellow Spring (the confines of the next world), still without reaching the base. The king then became a more devout believer than ever, and built a shrine over the steps, placing on the middle flight a full-length image of Buddha, sixteen feet in height. Behind the shrine he raised a stone column sixty feet in height; upon the top he placed a lion, and within the column, at the four sides, images of the Buddha, brilliantly transparent and as unstained as strass [*vaidurya*].<sup>100</sup>

There is little doubt that the site of Sāṅkāśya was already important by the time of Aśoka. The fact that the stairs, presumably built by someone prior to Aśoka's reign reached below ground water and were only seven steps high so that Aśoka could have easily had a shrine raised over them, is of little concern here. However, he is also credited with causing an image to be placed in the middle flight of stairs. This tells us that there had not been an image there previously and, since Fa-Hsien mentions only the shrine (T'a, i.e. "pagoda") at the location of the descent without mentioning that he had seen stairs of the image,<sup>101</sup> the image and the Aśokan shrine were probably gone by the time of his visit (early fifth century A.D.). Again, nothing may be gleaned from the story of the image on the stairs except that it is incidental and matter of factly accepted as an ongoing part of the early image tradition.

If anything, the tale of digging down to the level of ground water, finding that the stairs went beyond, and assuming that the stairs were thereby miraculous lends an air of authenticity to the legend that could not have been known or understood in the time of Fa-Hsien's visit. John Irwin, in his series of articles in *The Burlington Magazine*<sup>102</sup> has analyzed the cult of the pillar as found at the time of Aśoka. Stemming from the tenth *kandha* of the *Adharva veda*, the pillar is seen as an *axis mundi* separating the waters and the heavens, literally reaching from the underlying waters of the universe (more prosaically, ground water) to the celestial realms.

Skambha set fast these two, the earth and heaven, Skambha maintained the ample air between them, Skambha established the six spacious regions: this whole world Skambha entered and pervaded.<sup>103</sup>

Since the waters underlying the earth were thought to be universal and infinite, the fact that the stairs disappeared into it would have been seen as sufficient evidence of supramundane origin.<sup>104</sup> This could hardly have been included by later "inventors" of Buddhist legends as the cult of pillars seems to have disappeared not long after the reign of Aśoka.<sup>105</sup> However, the *stambha* as an iconographic element

continues through to modern times in connection with several cults of Hinduism, Jainism and modern Newari Buddhism.

Fa-Hsien's description of the Sāṅkāśya pillar is striking to anyone familiar with the rock-cut pillar to the right of the entrance to cave three at Kānheri<sup>106</sup> (Figures 5, 6 and 7). The remains of the four lions at the top of the pillar make it clear that this is a copy, at least conceptually, of an Aśokan pillar. As a whole, the column is curiously by a *vedikā* about two-thirds of the way up the shaft, almost as if it were a column supporting a column. Above the dividing *vedikā* the upper portion of the pillar has a seated Buddha with two *Bodhisattvas* facing to the south (Figure 5) while the lower portion has a standing Buddha, also flanked by two *Bodhisattvas*, facing west (Figures 6 and 7). Apparently, matrix for an image of some sort was left at the upper north-west corner of the dividing *vedikā*, but it was left unfinished and, as the pillar is against the mass of the rock from which it was cut on the east sides, there are no images there. All images are in high relief against the shaft of the pillar and it would seem that the positions of the Buddhas answer the general description of the Sāṅkāśya pillar very closely. However, it is impossible to say whether four Buddhas were intended or not. The four adjoined lions are so closely associated with Aśoka's interest in Buddhism<sup>107</sup> that there is little doubt that the intent of the makers was to reproduce, at least conceptually, a famous symbol of the doctrine. Why the division of the column into two portions? At the time of the carving of the Kānheri pillar, were there two traditions about images shining out of pillars and did the makers attempt to combine the two? What is the iconography of the combination? Only further research will answer these questions.

It may be immediately objected that the Kānheri three pillar is much later (around third century A.D.) and that, if anything, it represents another episode of making visible the visions of the advanced practitioners to the less accomplished. Further, no Aśokan column has been found that has the slightest bit of relief sculpture on the shaft. Yet, to warrant a copy of this magnitude, the column (or possibly columns, if the double Kānheri "double column" is a combination of two prototypes) must have been an important early monument associated with Aśoka well prior to the excavation of Kānheri cave. Again, we have strong evidence of an early image tradition, presumably predating the Christian era.

The evidence from the Aśokan period would seem to point to a simple continuation of the image tradition. It is simply there, taken for granted, unembellished and presented in the most casual, almost off-hand manner. It is, in fact, at the time of Aśoka that we come to the end of legends of early images. In spite of the fact there are many non-canonical narratives of important images, the concern ceases to be for their earliness at the hands of some historical personage; rather, they are self-originated or something of the like and the main concern is for their efficacy, and the lineage of the special teachings that accompany them. In this situation alone there seems to be the end of the early image tradition and the beginning of a whole new concern for iconic communication through the well established devotional format of image worship.

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL PROGRESSION OF IMAGE MAKING

Przyluski followed the progression of the basic Aśoka legend from the Māgadha region where it was formulated, to Kauśāmbī where certain elements were added and modified, and on to Mathurā, where yet further changes were made.<sup>108</sup> It is striking that the locations of the early images also follow a geographical/chronological progression out of Māgadha through Kauśāmbī to Mathurā. The chart (Figure 8) clearly demonstrates this.<sup>109</sup> In fact from the chart it is evident that the first images of the Buddha must have been made in Māgadha. With the exception of the Udayana's image which has been shown to be of a later date, there are not even any claimants to primacy among any surviving tradition. Further, the one tradition to which the origin of the Buddha image has heretofore been ascribed by art historians, that of the Sarvāstivādins of Mathurā, is known to have had a proscription against the making of images which must have lasted until about 100 B.C. when the stylistic evidence demonstrated that they began making images of the Buddha along the lines of Śunga period *yakṣa* figures. In short, the tradition of making images and the image conventions themselves may be seen to follow the same pattern as the literature of the early period of Buddhism.

## BUDDHADARŚANAPUṆYA : THE PURPOSE OF MAKING THE EARLY IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA

In his 1974 article, Lewis R. Lancaster called attention to two recensions of the *Aṣṭasahasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, one translated into Chinese in A.D. 179 by Lokakṣma and the other a translation attributed to Chih Ch'ien, done between A.D. 222 and 229. Each contains a passage relating something of the nature of image worship.<sup>110</sup> A dialogue between two *Bodhisattvas*, *Sadāprarudita* and *Dharmodgata*, regarding the nature of the Buddha's body occurs :

*Dharmodgata :*

[After many lives of performing acts of merit . . .]

Then one achieves possession of the Thirty-two (marks of the Buddha) and the Eighty (minor marks) which are visible . . .

The Buddha's body is like the images which men make after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha. When they see these images, there is not one of them who does not bow down and make offering. These images are upright and handsome; they perfectly resemble the Buddha and when men see them they all rejoice and take flowers and incense to revere them.

O Noble One, would you say that the Buddha's spirit is in the image ?

*The Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita replied :*

It is not there. The image of the Buddha is made (only) because one desires to have men acquire merit.



*Dharmodgata said :*

You do not use one thing to make the image of the Buddha nor do you use two. There is gold and also a skilled artisan. If there is a man who has seen the Buddha in person, then after Nirvāṇa he will remember the Buddha and for this reason make an image, because he wants men in this world to revere the Buddha and receive the merit of the Buddha.

*Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita said :*

It is because of this Nirvāṇa of the Buddha that one makes an image ?

*Dharmodgata replied :*

It is just as you say, the constitution of the perfect Buddha's body is thus, you do not use one thing or even two, but rather tens of thousands of things, including the practice of the Bodhisattva and his original seeking for the Buddha (or Buddhahood). If men constantly see the Buddha performing meritorious deeds, then they too will constitute a perfect Buddha body, and he endowed with wisdom, the (power of bodily) transformations, flying and in sum all the auspicious marks of a Buddha. The constitution of a perfect Buddha body is like this.

The exact age of the Prajñāpāramitā literature is a much debated question<sup>111</sup> but is generally thought that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* is an early form and that parts of it date from prior to the beginning of the Christian era. In that it is deleted from later translations, the passage cited above may be considered to be among the older portions of the *sūtra*. It is important in that it may focus attention on the changing opinion on the nature of the Buddha body. As noted previously, it is as a result of this passage that Lancaster directly questions the basic premise postulated by art historians as to the cause of the origin of the Buddha body.<sup>112</sup> It is quite clear from the passage that the practitioner is aiming at having (or becoming) a perfect Buddha and that part of the process of doing so involved gaining merit (*puṇya*) through the act of seeing the Buddha (*Buddhadarśana*). The concept of reverence to the Buddha so permeates Buddhist literature that one finds it from the earliest literature to the latest commentarial writings. It is an underlying fundamental concept of all Buddhism and is especially important for the laity. Simply stated, a tradition existing at the time of the formation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (first century B.C. or before ?) stated clearly that the purpose of making an image was to cause men to gain merit by seeing it, *Buddhadarśanapuṇya*, and nothing more.

It is also interesting to note that the tradition includes the statement that the image is not made of one thing nor do you use two. By parallel construction in the statement on the constitution of the perfect Buddha's body as being made up of the ten thousand things (a Chinese metaphor for everything or infinity), it is suggested that any material might be used and be appropriate for making an

image. It may be that it is with the acceptance of this statement that it became possible to make images out of monolithic stone.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that if the passage from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāpraññāpāramitā* is read in the manner of "seeing-the-true-nature-of-the-Buddha", one gains the merit that leads to Buddhahood, it means in effect that one is seeing himself as the fully perfected Buddha. It would be important to determine just how much the oral tradition surrounding the transmission of the text emphasized this point (if, indeed, it did), for in such an interpretation one may suggest that the text contains clear evidence of the *devayoga* practices of Mantrayāna.

### CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA

If we can only avoid dismissing a source as late *because* it deals with images, we will find that there is an abundance of early literary and some archaeological material, that strongly suggests the possibility of very early images. Most convincing to me are the "prohibitions" of the Sarvāstivādins which demonstrate that someone else had to be making images, the Mahābodhi image, the highly developed image worship of the *Saddharma-puṇḍrika-sūtra* and the plaque from Sāṅkāśya. All of these are pre-Aśokan and carry with them the weight of pre-extant image traditions. It is possible that any one or more of the accounts given of early images may be a pious fiction, but not all of them; and, if any *one* is valid, then the whole notion of the pre-iconic phase must vanish.

It would seem relatively certain that the monks of the very earliest communities did not make or have sculpted images. At the outset, the community is generally believed to have been made up of only wandering mendicants who quartered for the season of rains in the *ārāmas* but who otherwise spent their time wandering the countryside. While this practice seems to have died out very soon in some of the early communities, their initial way of life would have precluded possession of sculpted images of any size and probably any images at all. This may account for the fact that only two of the *vinayas* are concerned in any way with images of the Buddha: the wandering groups simply did not have the physical capacity to manage them in their day to day situation. Given this possibility, it is reasonable to suggest that the earliest images, which as we have seen are all attributed to laymen, could *only* have been made by or commissioned by members of the lay community to be housed in shrines that were to be maintained by or for the laity.

The idea that the images were made so that one might gain merit is absolutely unastonishing. The whole of early Buddhist practice is based on the concept of gaining merit. It is very doubtful if the primary reason for making (actually the patronage of the making) an image of the Buddha has ever moved away from the basic effort to gain merit. Early dedications of merit to parents, teachers and all beings abound. The offering of the image itself is a meritorious act and the concept of "seeing" (*darśana*) is of great antiquity and a fundamental element of the popular tradition in Indian religions. This, coupled with the intense popularity



that the Buddha obviously achieved in his own lifetime may be suggested to be the underlying force behind the "first" image of the Buddha.

The idea of a popular "origin" of the image of the Buddha is by no means new. It may have been Hermann Jacobi in the introduction to his translation of the Jain *sūtras* who first propounded the concept in print.

I believe that this worship [of images] had nothing to do with original Buddhism or Gainism, that it did not originate with the monks, but with the lay community . . .<sup>113</sup>

However, at this point, true to the scholarly opinions of his time, he proceeds to adulate Buddhism and Jainism as "higher cults" while denigrating the "rude deities and demons" he assumed to have been the object of pre-Jain and pre-Buddhist religions.

Coomaraswamy developed at length the popular *bhakti* aspect of Buddhism as the element in the religion which gave rise to the need for images and in doing so, also directly suggested that the image worship has a popular origin.<sup>114</sup> Ironically, it was Foucher who seems to hit the exact truth, only to step away from it.

Since when, moreover, and in what country does popular devotion trouble itself about the dogmatic scruples of the doctors?<sup>115</sup>

Unfortunately, at this point, he proceeded to expound on how enthusiastically the population of the Indian subcontinent (who, he suggests by implication, were incapable of conceiving of an image) welcomed the Indo-Greek type of Buddha.

Based on this study, it is the obvious suggestion that the need for the image arose from two simple factors :

1. The need to gain merit by seeing the Buddha.
2. The desire, on the popular level, to continue to view the Buddha after his *Nirvāṇa*.

Further, both of the above were stimulated and fostered initially by the sheer force of the Buddha's personality.

The kings of Māgadha, the wealthy and even the peasants knew the Buddha as a man, like themselves, accessible, benevolent and kind, who moved about them expounding a reasonable and profound hope for eternity. But they also knew how unlike them he was. If only they could capture that most fleeting evangelical moments, the presence of his being that had convinced them of his truths, might it not somehow remind them of his way and encourage them along the path just as he had done? If only there was something to remind them of his splendor, may be a sculpture of him would help . . .

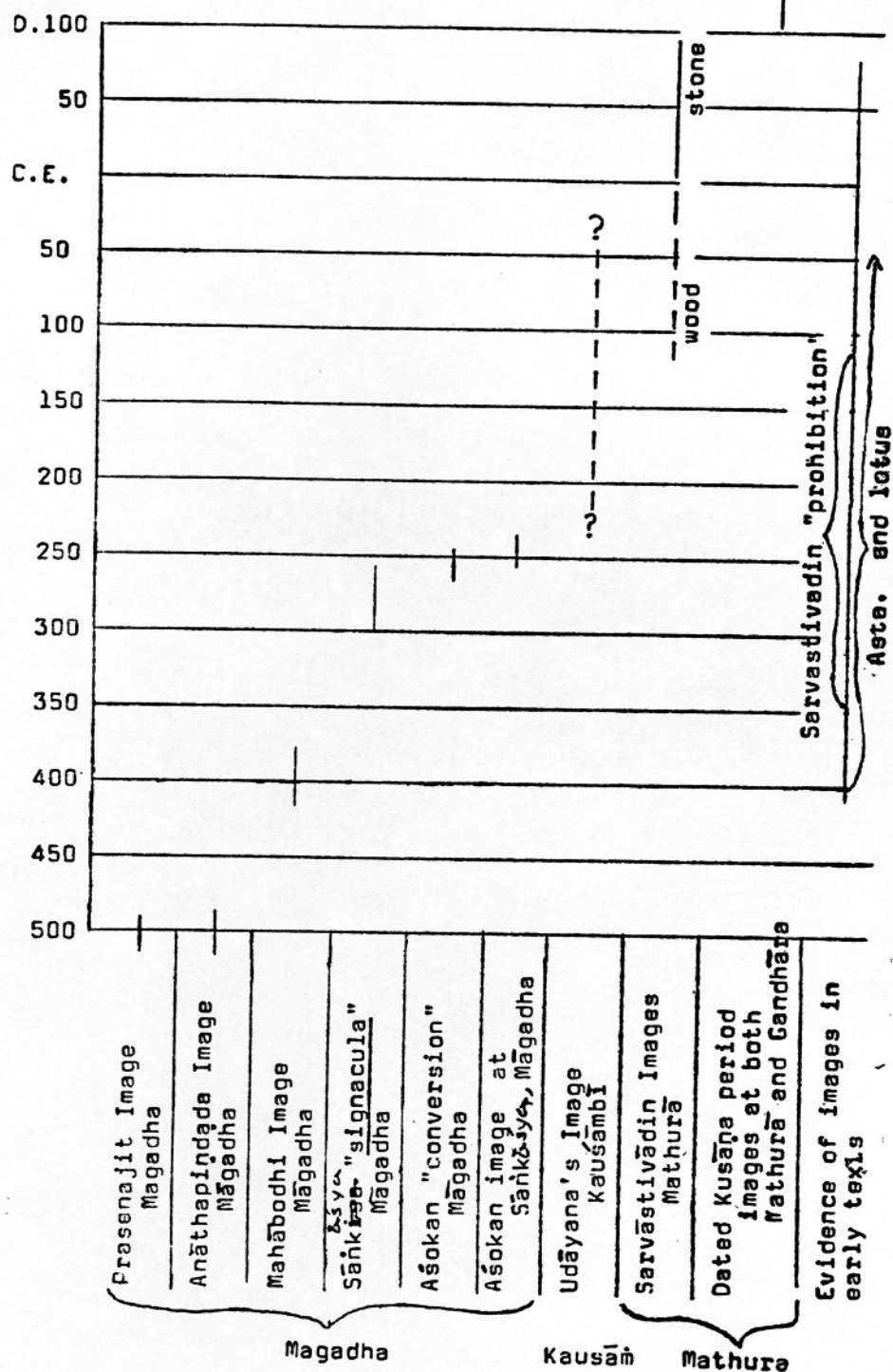


Fig. 8

## Afterword

Of all the studies that claim to represent the origin of the image of the Buddha, this one is the most severely limited in scope. There is no claim to represent *all* Buddhism. On the contrary, there is no claim to even represent any doctrinal aspect of Buddhism whatever. Until such time as the literature of the earliest Buddhist movements can be completely identified and analyzed, it will be impossible to make such a claim. If, by the time of Aśoka, there were eighteen (or more ?) sectarian divisions to the *saṅgha*, then it is necessary to admit that the divergencies that existed in the early Buddhist movements are complex indeed. While some of these were only modest issues on practical *vinaya* matters, others dealt with major soteriological and eschatological issues. However, from all the disclaimers and presentations of controversial issues, only one fact presents itself. The making of Buddha images *was not* a subject of debate from one fixed viewpoint or another. The point of this study is that in the earliest layers of the literature and in the earliest versions of certain legends, the making, or causing to be made, of images of the Buddha was a function of the devoted laity.

While very diverse sources have been drawn upon, it is by no means clear what the position of the *saṅgha* was nor is it certain how they dealt with the images created by the laity. As far as this study is concerned, the way is open for yet further work demonstrating the attitude of the various sects of the *saṅgha* toward the images and how these images were integrated into the devotional, meditational and soteriological teachings of any given sect.

## NOTES

1. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image," *Art Bulletin*, vol. IX, 1926-1927, pp. 287-328. [Also reprinted as a *separatum* by the University of Calcutta, 1970] (Hereafter abbreviated as Coomaraswamy).
2. J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, *The "Scythian" Period*, Leiden, 1949, p. 153. She summed up her arguments in her "Gandhāra and Mathurā : Their Cultural Relationship," in P. Pal, editor, *Aspects of Indian Art*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 27-43. Van Louizen de Leeuw has again approached the problem in a recent article, "New Evidence with Regard to the Origin of the Buddha Image," in *South Asian Archaeology 1979*, edited by H. Härtel, Berlin, 1981, pp. 377-400. In it she suggests that a "group" of twenty-two Swat and Gandhāran images are both very early, ca. first century A.D., and stylistically dependent on Mathurā prototypes. Thus, she gives primacy for the earliest surviving Gandhāran image type to Mathurā. I am in disagreement with several of the main points of her paper : Her "group" is clearly not a group in any realistic stylistic sense but an assemblage of fairly closely related images in differing, probably locally determined, stylistic variations based on a iconomorphic prototype. Her identification of the prototype with the early Mathurā school is especially problematic and, to me, on stylistic grounds, is doubtful in the extreme. However, her suggestions do not materially affect the thesis of this paper (all of the images she is concerned with were made long after the images dis-

cussed in Buddhist literature as early images) and it is unnecessary to be concerned with her arguments here. The real value of her article may well be that she did indeed find the earliest surviving images of both the Mathurān and the Bactro-Gandhāran monolithic stone tradition of sculptural images. I have no objection to such a thesis whatsoever. My only real argument with her position is that her material does not contain the true first images of Buddha; according to the evidence presented in this paper, there would seem to have been a much earlier image tradition.

3. The history of this confrontation may be traced bibliographically in Henri Deydier's *Contribution à l'étude de l'Art du Gandhāra*, Paris, 1950, pp. 46-64. It is interesting to note that Victor Goloubew was actually the first to postulate the origin of the Buddha image had been at Mathurā in a review of Foucher's work that appeared in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. XXIII (1924), pp. 438-454, and especially 451.
4. *Loc. cit.*
5. van Lohuizen de Leeuw *The "Scythian" Period* p. 155.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-161.
7. Lewis R. Lancaster, "An Early Mahāyān Sermon About the Body of the Buddha and the Making of Images," *Artibus Asiae* XXXVI, 4, 1974, pp. 287-291 (Hereafter abbreviated as Lancaster).
8. *Loc. cit.*
9. Padmanabh S. Jaini, "On the Buddha Image," in *Studies in Pāli and Buddhism: (A Homage Volume to the Memory of Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap)*, edited by A.K. Narain, Delhi, 1979, pp. 183-188, especially p. 186.
10. See Yu Wei-ch'ao, "Tung Han Fo Chiao T'u Hsiang K'ao (A Study of Eastern Han Buddhist Images)," *Wen Wu*, 1980, no. 5, pp. 68-77; Lien Yun Chiang Shih Po Wu Kuan (Lienyunchiang City Museum), "Lien Yun Chiang Shih Kung Wang Shan Mo Yai Tsao Hsian Tiao Ch'a Kao (A Report on Research on the Cliff Sculptures at Kung Wang Mountain at Lienyunchiang City)" *Wen Wu*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 1-7; Yu Wei-ch'ao and Hsin Li-hsiang, "Kung Wang Shan Mo Yai Tsao Hsian Ti Tai K'ao Chia (An Investigation on the Date of the Cliff Images at Kung Wang Mountain)," *Wen Wu*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 8-15; Yen Wen-ju, "Kung Wang Shan Fo Chiao Tsao Hsian Ti T'i Ts'ai (The Content of the Buddhist Images at Kung Wann Mountain)," *Wen Wu*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 16-19; Pu Lien-sheng, "Kung Wang Shan Tung Han Mo Yai fo Chiao Tsao Hsian Ch'u Pien (Preliminary Perceptions on the Eastern Han [Dynasty] Buddhist Cliff Images at Kung Wang Mountain)," *Wen Wu*, 1982, no. 9, pp. 61-65; and Li Hung-?, "Kung Wang Shan Tsao Hsian Chung Pu Fen T'i Ts'ai Ti K'ao Ting (Conclusions About the Carved Images in the Middle part of Kung Wang Mountain)," *Wen Wu*, 1982, vol. 9, pp. 66-70. In essence, the reports are primarily on some low relief images of Buddhist images discovered at Kung Wang Shan. They are believed, on primarily stylistic grounds, to be early Eastern Han (A.D. 25-221). Since, among them there are images of a Buddha with a distinct *uṣṇīṣa* standing and displaying *abhaya mudrā* and an obvious *paranirvana*, there is no doubt as to the iconography of at least some of the carvings. Other images may either be Buddhas or Bodhisattvas but this is uncertain. Interestingly, all images wear distinctly Chinese style garments clearly of the early Eastern Han tradition. These figures have raised many questions about the earliness of Buddhism in China, the beginnings of Buddhist art and the earliness of the Chinese tradition of an indigenous Buddhist style.



11. *Ancient Chinese Pottery*, National Museum of History, Taipei, Taiwan, 67th year of the Republic (1979), pp. 34 (pl. 24), 80 and 117. Surprisingly, this remarkable piece is published there "matter-of-factly" with comment on the importance of so early a dated depiction of a Buddha.
12. Van Lohuizen de Leeuw dates the "group" of images described in her "New Evidence" article to the first century A.D. (see note 2). However, other evidence suggests that the date should be first century B.C. See my chapter, "The Śaka and Parthian Kingdoms in the Indic Sphere," in Susan L. Huntington with the collaboration of John C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, Tokyo and New York, 1984, pp. 190-124, especially 113-115 and 122-123. (Hereafter cited as Huntington and Huntington.)
13. One issue among some art historians is the question of whether the image of the Buddha was somehow tied to the rise in popularity of Mahāyāna. Speculations by Benjamin Rowland Jr. (*The Evolution of the Buddha Image*, [exhibition catalogue], The Asia House Gallery, New York, 1963, p. 8) and others have led to the general belief that a need to display the "divinity" of Buddhas on the part of Mahāyanist practitioners greatly fostered the development of the image tradition. While it is possible that at some one site or another, there may have been a Mahāyāna versus Hinayana concern as to whether the image of the Buddha (but *never* as a "divinity") be displayed or not (see *infra*) as a general statement, it is totally erroneous. (For the Buddhological community's opinion of this approach, see, for example, Gregory Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," in *Indo Iranian Journal*, vol. 21 (1979), p. 16n7.) Because this issue is irrelevant to the problem under discussion it shall not be further addressed in this article.
14. A. Foucher, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Art," in *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and other Essays in Indian and Central-Asian Archaeology*, revised by the author and translated by L.A. Thomas and F.W. Thomas, Paris and London, 1917, pp. 3-7 (Hereafter abbreviated as Foucher). My copy of this book has been annotated by a most astute scholar whose insightful comments have proven useful in the preparation of this study and whom I would like to acknowledge but, alas, the individual is unknown to me.
15. See also, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XI, "The Mahā-parinibbāna Suttana," tr. by T.W. Rhys Davids, Oxford, 1881, reprinted, Delhi, 1968, p. 112.
16. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXXV, "The Questions of King Milinda," part I, tr. T.W. Rhys Davids, Oxford, 1980, reprinted as *The Questions of King Milinda*, New York, n.d., pp. 113-114.
17. O.C. Gangoly, *Andhra Sculptures*, Government of Andhra Pradesh Archaeological Series To. 36), Hyderabad, 1973, p. 1 (Hereafter abbreviated as Gangoly).
18. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. XX, "Books of the Discipline," part 5, "Cullavagga," tr. by I.B. Horner, London, 1952, p. 213.
19. The Pāli Text Society, *Pāli English Dictionary*, ed. by T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, London, 1966.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XX, "Vinaya Texts," part III, "The Kullavagga, IU-XII," tr. by T.W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, Oxford, 1985, reprinted, Delhi, 1969, p. 172 n3.

22. Alexander C. Soper, "Early Buddhist Attitudes Toward the Art of Painting," *Art Bulletin*, vol. XXXII, 1950, p. 147 (Hereafter abbreviated as Soper).
23. Gangoly, p. 1.
24. The Pāli Text Society, *Middle Length Sayings*, "Majjhima-Nikāya," vol. I, "The First Fifty Discourses (Mūlapaṇṇāsa)," tr. by I.B. Horner, London, 1967, pp. 134-135.
25. A. Waley, appended to "Did the Buddha Die of Eating Pork," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, vol. I, 1932, pp. 352-4 (Soper gives a fuller translation).
26. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
27. See note 6.
28. Jean Przyluski, *Legends of the Emperor Aśoka, in Indian and Chinese Texts*, tr. and annotated by Dilip Kumar Biswas, Calcutta, 1967, p. 1 ff. (Hereafter abbreviated as Przyluski).
29. Perhaps I should remind the reader that all monks in Mahāyāna are, by definition, *Bodhisattvas* and point out that this term need not refer to the fully developed *Bodhisattva* concept of the beginning of the modern era.
30. A. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 352 n4.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
32. Etienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien des origines à l'ère śaka*, Louvain, 1958, reprint, 1967, p. 703.
33. B. N. Mukherjee, "Shāh-jī-kī-dherī Casket Inscription," *British Museum Quarterly*, vol. 28, 1964, pp. 39-45. On the authenticity of Kaniska attribution, see K. Walton Dobbins, *The Stūpa and Vihāra of Kaniska I*, Calcutta, 1971, *passim*.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
35. D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, Delhi, 1966, p. 259.
36. See above, note 5.
37. For an example of this type, see Soper, p. 147.
38. Lancaster Lewis, *The Korean Buddhist Canon : A Descriptive Catalog*, Berkeley. Los Angeles and London, 1979, p. 104.
39. van Lohuizen de Leeuw, *The Scythian Period*, Leiden, 1949, p. 150. See also J. ph. Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathura*, (*Ars, Asiatica*, vol. Paris and Breuxelles, 1930, pl. XXVIIIa).
40. *American Committee for South Asian Art Archive*, "Kushan Period : Mathura," ed. Susan L. Huntington, Leiden, n. d.(1976), fiche no. 2, frames 37-45.
41. See above, note 1.
42. See above, note 21.
43. Hiuen Tsiang [Husan Tsang], *Si-yu-ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World* vol. I, tr. Samuel Beal, London, 1884, reprinted, Delhi, 1969, pp. 235-6 (Hereafter abbreviated as Hiuen Tsiang).
44. A. Whaley, *op. cit.*, p. 453. For another, somewhat more elaborated version see Loden Sherap Dagab, *Tibetan Religious Art*, (*Asiatische Forschungen* vol. 52), part I, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 22 (Hereafter abbreviated as Dagab).
45. Dagab, p. 22.
46. Przyluski, pp. 78-80.
47. Niti Adaval, *The Story of King Udāyana*, Vārānasī, 1970, pp. 203-223.
48. Surviving copies of the "Udāyana image" in the art of China, Japan and

Tibet all hint at a "common source" but are so stylistically divergent as to give little information about the details of its appearance.

49. Przyluski has used this and other similar methods of analysis in his study of the *Aśokāvadana*. See also Padmanabh S. Jaini's article cited in note 9 for a South-east Asian version of the same story.
50. *The Travels of Fa hsien*, tr. H. A. Giles, Cambridge, 1923, reprint, London, 1966, pp. 30-31 (Hereafter abbreviated Fa hsien).
51. Hiuen Tsiang, vol. II, pp. 4.
52. *Loc. cit.*
53. Alexander Cunningham, *Reports of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar, in 1875-76 and 1877-78*, (Archaeological Survey of India [Reports]), vol. XI, Calcutta, 1880, pp. 86-88 (Hereafter abbreviated as Cunningham, A.S.I.R., vol. XI).
54. That Hsuan Tsang could not tell that the image was stone rather than wood was probably due to the fact that he never actually saw the surface of the image. The custom of dressing images, frequently in multiple layers of cloth and metal "garments", was already commonplace. The custom is still practiced throughout India, Nepal and Tibet.
55. See *infra*, section V.
56. Przyluski, p. 81 and p. 81 n5.
56. Cunningham, A.S.I.R., vol. IX, fig. 2.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
59. In an attempt to determine if the composition could have possibly been bilaterally symmetrical I reversed the tracing and superimposed the Buddha image of the tracing over that of the lithograph. The walkway of the hypothetical right side would have overlapped that of the surviving fragment; thus, it cannot have been a symmetrical composition.
60. In his initial drawings of the Lomās Rṣi cave facade he instinctively showed a round design in spite of an optical illusion that strongly indicates otherwise. See my "Lomās Rṣi: Another Look," *Archives of Asian Art*, vol. XXVIII, 1974-75, pp. 34-56.
61. Perhaps the Sāṅkāśya image is a *signacula* or commemorative plaque, meant to be carried away from a pilgrimage location by pilgrims making the journey. The existence of these was postulated by Foucher and denied by Coomaraswamy. If it is one, it is ironic that they were both wrong about them. Foucher assumed that they would not have Buddha images on them and Coomaraswamy insisted that they did not exist. It is even more ironic that it had been published in a standard source long before either attacked the problem.
62. Dāgyab, p. 22. Dāgyab also gives a number of rather more magical accounts which are not included in this study. It must also be noted that while Dāgyab gives his sources, he frequently fails to cite volumes and editions and he almost never gives folio numbers. Thus, without a vast library of Tibetan materials at hand, and the time to scan for a single line or two in volumes of three to four hundred folios, his references are useless.
63. Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. II, Calcutta, 1933, reprinted, New Delhi, 1972, p. 304, (my italics).
64. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, tr. by Leon Hurvitz, New York, 1976, pp. xvii-xviii.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-42.
66. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. IV, "Dialogues of the Buddha," (Dīgha Nikāya), tr. T.W. Rhys Davids, Oxford, 1921, reprint, London, 1965, "Lakkhaṇa Suttana," pp. 137-167.
67. In researching this material, it has become evident to me that there is a strong possibility of a "lost Mahāyāna Canon," (or body of literature which had otherwise never been formally collected into a canon) in which such texts as the *Saddharman-puṇḍarīka* and the *Aṣṭasāhasrika-prajñāpāramitā* had their sources. Certainly these were not "invented" out of thin air as there are too many of the concepts that occur in them that may be found in the pre-Buddhist *Upaniṣads*. Too much scholarly emphasis has been put on the Pāli canon as the "pure form" of Buddhism. However, it has recently become recognized that the so-called Pāli canon is actually the product of "vested interest" and was, itself based on Māgadhī versions which were much expanded to demonstrate a pre-eminence of Kauśāmbī, a city having little or no connection with the Buddha during his actual lifetime and probably not actively Buddhist until the time of Aśoka or later (see Przyluski, p. 76 ff.)  
Often expurgated, (Przyluski calls it an "exaggerated sense of modesty," p. 121-122) sometimes into insensibility, by both the Śrī Lankan compilers and its modern translators, the Pāli canon would seem little better qualified than the rest of Buddhist literature to demonstrate the "Original" form of Buddhism. Given the *Atharva Veda* and the *Upaniṣadic* precedents for much of Pāramitāyāna and Mantrayāna, it would seem that one must look past the views of a few, very biased, late Victorians for the "origins of Buddhism."
68. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, tr. by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Simla, 1970 (hereafter abbreviated as Tāranātha). Herein, the Aśokan chapters, 5, 6, 7 and 8, are followed by the Nanda period chapters, 10 and 11, the last of which ends with the beginning of the reign of Candragupta Mayura
69. Przyluski, p. 71.
70. Tāranātha, pp. 31-42, presented here in a much abbreviated form.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
72. *Loc. cit.*
73. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
74. *Biography of Dharmasvāmī*, (K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute Historical Researches Series, vol. II), tr. George Roerich, Patna, 1959, p. 67 (Hereafter abbreviated as Dharmasvāmī).
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
76. *Loc. cit.*
77. Dāgyab gives a version in which there are images in the other temples, p. 23.
78. There is an interesting parallel to this story in the legend of the great *stūpa* of Kāśyapa Buddha at Baudha (or Bodha) in Nepal. A woman and her three sons are responsible for building the *stūpa* in spite of their apparent poverty. The implications of this parallel and the questions it raises about early Buddhism are beyond the scope of this brief study but they do suggest an extremely interesting path of investigation into early Buddhist legends and devotional practices.

See *The Legend of the Great Stūpa*

[*mChod.rten.chen.po.byā.rung.kha.sor.gyi.lo.rgyus.thos.pas.grol.ba.bshugs.su*],  
tr. Keith Dowman, Berkeley, 1973.



79. See *infra*.
80. John Irwin, "Aśokan Pillars : a reassessment of the evidence," *The Burlington Magazine*, part I, vol. CXV, Nov. 1973, pp. 706-720; part II, vol. CXVI, Dec. 1974, 712-727; part III, vol. CXVII, Oct. 1975, pp. 631-643; part IV, vol. CXVIII, Nov. 1976, pp. 734-753.
81. Narendra Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* Bombay, 1966, pp. 86-87.
82. Tāranātha, pp. 42-43. The four attitudes are sitting, standing, walking and lying. See *infra* for a fuller discussion.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
84. Dharmasvāmin, pp. 69-70.
85. *Abhayāmudrā* was the first preaching gesture. See my chapter on Gandhāra in Huntington and Huntington, pp. 143-44.
86. Hiuen Tsiang, vol. II, p. 48. The image found at the location was the Bala image of year 3 in the Kanishka era. However, I cannot trace the placement convention to an earlier date; therefore it has not been included in this study.
87. Soper, p. 149.
88. *Loc. cit.*
89. There are several versions of this story, all built around the same nucleus, that the king would be overcome by news of the death of the Buddha. There is a late painting of the story at Qizil which depicts Ajātaśatru in a large urn of hot oil while he is being shown a cloth on which are drawn the four scenes of birth, Mahābodhi, Dharmacakra-pravartana and Parānirvāṇa. The hot oil bath would originate in the *ayurvedic* principle of opposites. If Ajātaśatru had a circulatory problem his extremities would have been cold and the appropriate treatment would have been the application of heat. This suggests that the account in its "elemental" form may have been about Kāśyapa the physician, of the Māgadha court, rather than Mahākāśyapa, the Arhat. If this is the case, then our narrative in its "element" form would conform exactly to the use of images by the laity as postulated in this study. See A. Grunwedel, *Alt Kutscha*, Berlin, 1920, pp. 101 ff. and pls. XLII-XLIII, and A. von Le Coq, *Bilderatlas zur Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Mittel-Asiens*, Berlin, 1925, p. 25, and fig. 175.
90. It should be noted that in the Buddhist tradition it is the history of the image, who made it, to whom it was passed on, and the history of those who have attained success in meditations or propitiations that is the important "art history," not the "origin" of a type or the stylistic history of a particular representation.
91. See above, note 7.
92. *infra*, section VII.
93. See above, note 68.
94. Tāranātha, p. 59.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
97. D. C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, 2nd ed., Delhi, 1971, p. 110.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317.
99. Przyluski, pp. 79-80.

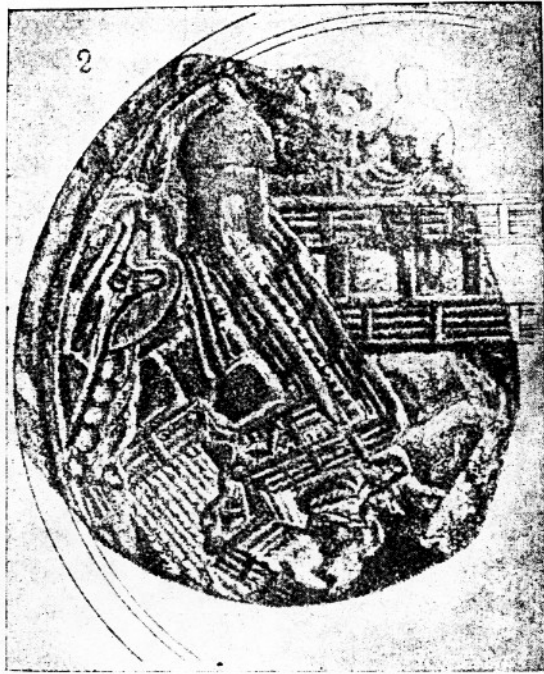
100. Fa-Hsien, p. 25. Stress is a highly refractive, high lead content glass mix used in the manufacture of artificial "gems" which is better known as "paste." Whatever leads Giles to translate the Chinese technical term for *vaiḍūrya* (often incorrectly rendered into English as lapis lazuli), by this obscure German technical term is a mystery.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
102. See above, note 80.
103. *Hymns of the Adharvaveda* (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, vol. LXVI), tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, vol. II, (first publication not noted), [reprint edition], Vārāṇasī, 1968, p. 32.
104. The relationship of pre-Budhist iconology and early Buddhist symbology is a virtually untouched area of investigation which shows great promise. The *Atharvaveda* and the *Upaniṣads* need to be analysed in great detail relative to their potential as source for much of early Mahāyāna thought.
105. Evidence for this may be seen in the fact that the *stambha* dies out as a symbol on early Indian tribal coins by about the beginning of the Christian era. See J. Allen, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins in the British Museum*, vol. I, "Coins of Ancient India," London, 1936, pp. 117-286. (Allen himself makes no analysis of this type; however, it is evident from the coins themselves).
106. Although the figures on this pillar are very probably the earliest known images of the Buddha and *Bodhisattavas* in western India they have received only passing notice in literature.
107. Two of the major pillars associated with Aśoka have the four adorsed lions capital, i.e. Sārnāth and Sāñcī.
108. See above, note 99.
109. In constructing the chart I have not taken the legends at face value but have depended on the analysis as presented.
110. Lancaster, pp. 287-91.
111. It is interesting to note that at least one Tibetan tradition cited by Tāranātha expresses the opinion that the *Aṣṭasāhasrika-prajñāpāramitā* was first preached at the court of Chandragupta Maurya. Tāranātha, p. 90.
112. See above, Introduction.
113. *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXII, "Gāṇi Sūtras," tr. Hermann Jacobi, part I, Oxford, 1884, reprinted as *Jaina Sūtras*, part I, New York, 1968, p. xxi.
114. Coomaraswamy, p. 297. One must note however, that he should have called the movement *śraddha* and *bhakti*.
115. Foucher, p. 7.



1



Fig 1 & 2 Chinese ceramic jar showing seated image of Buddha in *bhumi sparsamudra*.



3



Fig. 3 & 4 A tiny steatite plaque showing Buddha seated on the top most structural cross-member.



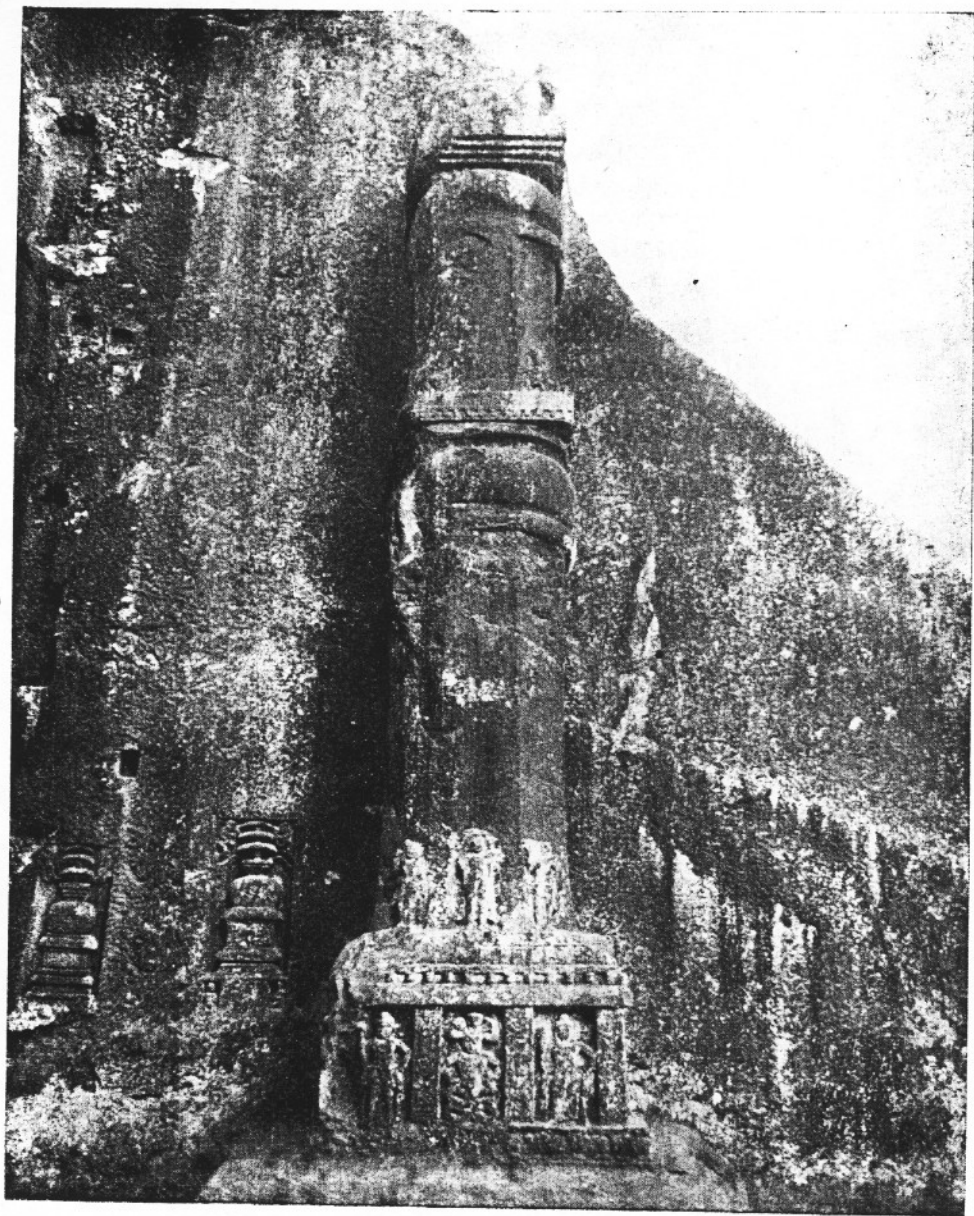


Fig. 5 A seated Buddha with two Bodhisattvas facing south.

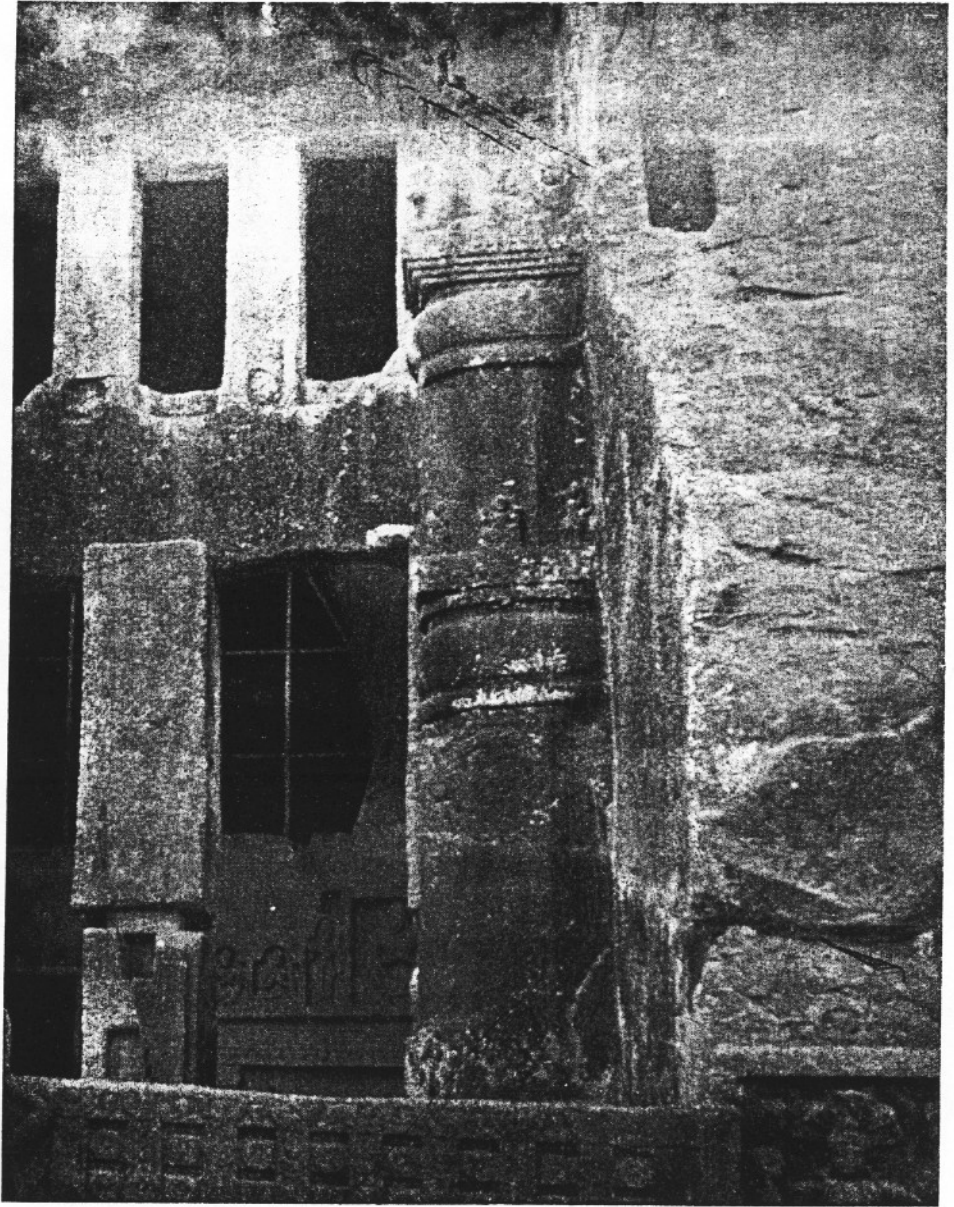


Fig. 6 A standing Buddha with two Bodhisattvas facing west.

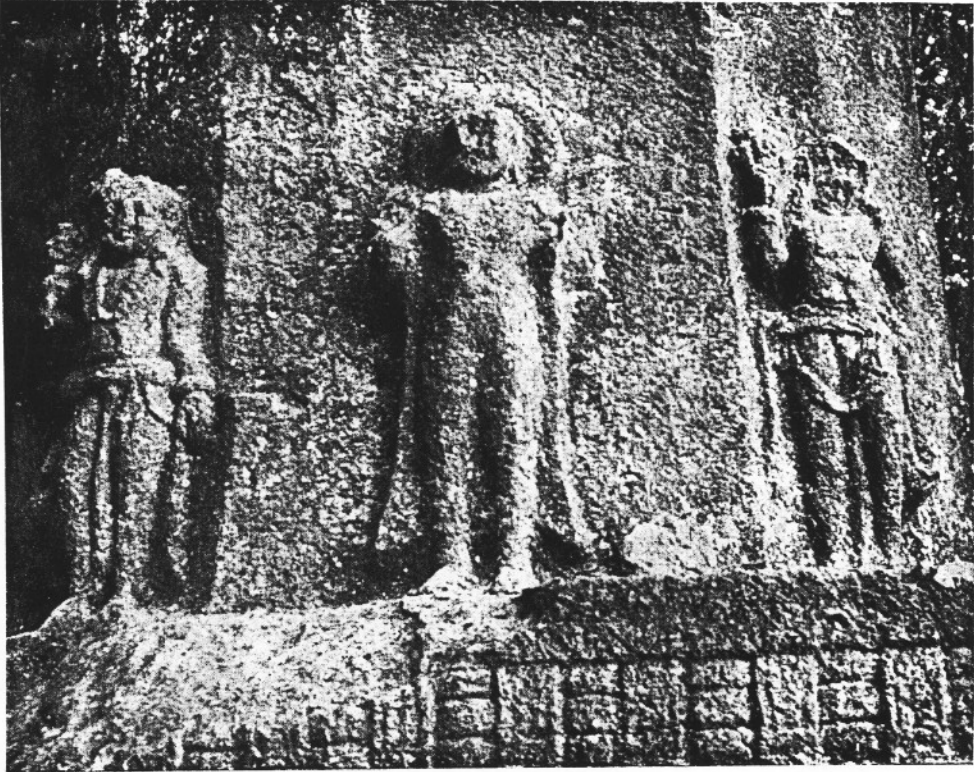


Fig. 7 A standing Buddha with two Bodhisattvas facing west.

Fig. 8 Chart showing the geographical/chronological progression of the locations of early Buddhist images (see page 50).