Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures
Polish Academy of Sciences

Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia

38

Warsaw 2025

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Ministry of Science and Higher Education
Republic of Poland

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The project entitled "Internationalisation, enhancement and popularisation of the research conducted by the IMOC PAS on ancient Egypt, classical Mediterranean cultures, Nubia, the reception of antiquity and the Silk Road" (No. MNiSW/2025/DAP/723) was financed by the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

Warsaw 2025
ISSN 0860-6102
eISSN 2449-8653

Contents

Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 5–29
https://doi.org/10.60018/AcAsVa.tmnx3233

The Sphinx of Pattanam. A Game-Changing Workshop in India

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Abstract: The traditional historical view maintains that precious gems were mostly crafted and worked in the Mediterranean. It was thought that in classical times, cultures outside the Mediterranean world were mainly providers of raw materials. Recent unexpected discoveries in India challenge this view. The prospect of establishing an ancient gem craft workshop within the historic confines of the Pattanam archaeological site in India presents a tantalising proposition. But is it possible that a gem craft industry was established in ancient Pattanam? An outstanding intaglio with the representation of a sphinx, plus others found in the site, pose stimulating challenges in this regard.

Keywords: Pattanam, workshop, trade, engraved gems, India, Rome

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0009-0002-1604-2072.

A beautiful intaglio found in 2020 in the Pattanam site of India is shrouded in mystery, giving rise to stimulating enigmas. Carved on a banded agate stone, the small piece has an oval shape, very characteristic of a Roman intaglio. Was it intended for a ring? The sphinx is a recurring Mediterranean mythological theme, a creature with the head of a woman and the wings and body of a lioness. Was it manufactured in Indian lands, or did it get there by chance? Is it simply the random product of international trade? We will try to deal with these questions and give, as far as possible, clues to address highly relevant issues in Roman-Indian relations.

Indeed, Pattanam is an archaeological site on the Kerala (Malabar) coast, first to provide a *plethora* of material evidence of maritime trade in ancient times. The trade in this site was part of the first transoceanic network in human history, uniting the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe through the water bodies of the Mediterranean, the Nile River, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea (Indian Ocean), the Bay of Bengal and South China Sea. Based on radiocarbon dating, stratigraphic analysis and material studies, the 3rd century BCE–5th CE is marked as the culminating phase of these maritime exchanges in Pattanam (Cherian 2016: 9).

Nestled within the Periyar river delta, this coastal location lies 4 km from the Arabian Sea. The area is characterised by paleochannels, lagoons, and banks, with the Paravur Todu – a flow channel of the Periyar River – located 1 km to the south. Through a multidisciplinary archaeo-morphological study with geographers, it has been possible to reveal that this distributary was once the main course of the Periyar River (Narayana et al. 2001).

The archaeological site of Pattanam, supported by the material evidence recovered from excavations, strongly indicates its potential and identification with the legendary port city of Muciri Pattinam, or Muziris (Cherian 2016: 10). Frequently mentioned in early Indian literary sources, such as the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (v. 343) and *Akanāṉūṟu* (v. 149), as well as in Mediterranean accounts like the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (PME), Pliny's *Natural History* (NH VI.26), and the *Muziris Papyrus*, Muziris has long been regarded as a significant hub of maritime trade in antiquity. Nevertheless, the importance of Pattanam transcends its identification with Muziris. As a pivotal centre within the transoceanic trade networks of the ancient world, Pattanam appears to have facilitated the incorporation of the western region of peninsular India, historically referred to as Tamilakam, into the broader processes of urbanisation and economic integration during the early historic period (Cherian 2016: 9).

The assemblage of exogenous pottery at Pattanam, including Roman amphorae, Terra Sigillata, glazed turquoise ware, Sassanid jars, and dolia, provides compelling evidence of the site's integration into extensive transoceanic trade networks during the early historic period. These ceramics, along with their likely

contents, attest to imports from the Roman Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, and broader Indian Ocean spheres (Tomber 2008; Gurukkal 2016), up to China (Cherian 2016: 10). Such finds underscore the site's role as a major trading hub facilitating the exchange of goods, technologies, and cultural practices (PME p. 23; Cherian 2016).

In addition, the discovery of Rouletted Ware – a ceramic type associated with Indian manufacturing traditions – demonstrates Pattanam's connectivity to regional trade networks within the Indian subcontinent. Complementary artifacts, such as glass necklaces, Roman glazed pottery, and precious stones, further indicate a high volume of trade and the circulation of luxury goods. These findings align with scholarly observations that Pattanam may correspond to the ancient port of Muziris, a critical node in the Indo-Roman trade system (Tomber 2008; Gurukkal 2016). The material evidence reflects not only economic prosperity, but also the sociocultural and technological interactions that characterised the Indian Ocean world during the early centuries CE, a transformative period in global commerce (PME pp. 45–47; Cherian 2016).

In this period, between the 3rd century BCE and the 5th century CE, Pattanam seems to have urbanised (Cherian 2016: 24), evident in the numerous finds of clay and bricks, roof tiles, hydraulic supply systems such as wells and other evidence materials like copper and lead coins from the Chera empire (Cherian 2016: 24).

The nine excavation campaigns conducted until 2015, initially led by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) and later by the PAMA Institute for the Advancement of Transdisciplinary Archaeology, unearthed a significant volume and variety of artifacts of both Indian and exogenous origin, representing diverse cultures and cultural periods. Continued archaeological interventions were carried out until 2024, with my own participation in the 2023 campaign, contributing to the ongoing exploration and analysis of the site and its gem industry.

Having such an extensive chronological continuity (1000 BCE–1500 CE) this variety is normal, but we note that in the period of its zenith, between 300 BCE and 500 CE, there is also this cultural variety that leads us to think of the site of Pattanam as a multicultural port city or a large-scale commercial redistribution hub (Cherian 2016: 25).

Apart from the carvings, described in more detail later, the manufacture of precious stones seems to be an almost irrefutable fact at the site (Cherian 2016: 25–26). The find of more than 700 necklace beads made of precious stones, including evidence of their production *in situ* directly related to lithic carving, reveal lapidary workshops specialising in precious stones such as agates,

amethysts, beryl, carnelian, chalcedony, quartz, topaz and onyx. The production stages involve carving the stone to achieve the desired shape, modelling it to its final shape, polishing and drilling it.

Finding precious stones in all these manufacturing stages *in situ* seems to indicate a gem industry totally functional in this location. The 2012 campaign report provides 275 samples of precious stone cutting evidence, among which 55 pieces of blank beads, fragments of semi-cut gems and fragments of raw material (Cherian 2015: 24). It should be highlighted that we found evidence of a large volume concentration of precious stones that would indicate a stone manufacturing industry designed for export, or in any case to supply a population very disproportionate in relation to the figures estimated for the site.

1. Manufacturing and infrastructure

As initially conceived, this paper theorises the possibility of an intaglio producing and exporting centre in the port settlement of Pattanam. But what characteristics should show the infrastructure and material culture of the site?

Firstly, obtaining such precious resources as gems is a key factor in the development of a producing hub. The mining of precious stones such as those found in Pattanam, specifically carnelian and agate, or the gathering of these resources through a regional trade network, are essential characteristics. A settlement must supply such production with sufficient surplus to export.

Secondly, the material culture of the settlement should show evidence of a mastery of certain techniques of engraving or gem manufacture, from the stone's base form to the final engraved product. In India, the working of agate and carnelian demonstrates a remarkable technological continuity that can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, dating to the 3rd and 2nd millennia bce (Borell 2017: 26; Kenoyer 1998: 65). Ethno-archaeological studies conducted in Gujarat have provided critical insights into the production processes, revealing that the manufacture of agate and carnelian involves a highly specialised set of techniques that have persisted through millennia (Kenoyer et al. 1994: 23; Francis 1991: 87; Borell 2017: 26–27; Kanungo 2017: 191–193). This study is based on some extracts from the study carried out by Brigitte Borell in Khambhat, in Gujarat (India), the experience of Alok Kumar Kanungo from ITT Gandhinagar, also in Gujarat, and our personal experience in Kerala and Gujarat in 2023.

For the polishing of the stone in its basic form, the people of Khambhat have a method of carving by indirect percussion with hammer blows (Borell 2017: 27). For the preparation of this method, previously, the stone nodules are heated to facilitate carving (Borell 2017: 27). There will probably be several firings

of the stone during this process. After the stone is in the desired shape, the object is forged to achieve the characteristic orange colouring of carnelian. This process is currently carried out using modern ovens (Borell 2017: 27), but in the contextual framework proposed in this study the ovens were probably made of bricks or clay, because of its easy extraction in the surrounding area of Pattanam.

The proposal of Kumar Kanungo (Kanungo 2017; personal communication, May 10, 2023) of clay-based furnaces is quite significant, since a very clear image would be transposed in the strata of a succession of different furnaces, for the treatment of precious stones. The functioning of this interpretation is based on the fact that clay-coated furnaces, in high-temperature operations such as the firing of precious stones, usually crack. The crux of this point is that instead of reusing the infrastructure, they abandon the structure and create a new furnace. When translated to the archaeological record, this pattern appears as multiple combustion layers with comparable characteristics, yet without statigraphic superposition.

When the shape has already been achieved, and if there is a desire to turn the stone into necklace beads, the product is drilled before or after its polishing using a diamond-tipped bow drill (Borell 2017: 27). It is a complex set of specific techniques, which require years of learning. The traces of these techniques are consistent with those found in archaeological interventions, suggesting that, in the past, similar techniques were used (Kanungo 2017: 193–223; Borell 2017: 27).

Studies conducted by Bérénice Bellina (2007), primarily focused on the findings at Khao Sam Kaeo in Thailand, reveal not only a wide array of finished objects in Indian styles, but also raw materials and evidence of gem processing. It is plausible to conclude that high-quality agate and carnelian raw materials were transported from India to Southeast Asia, accompanied by a set of advanced manufacturing techniques. This likely also included skilled Indian craftsmen, as suggested by Bellina's analysis (Bellina 2007: 27).

In the third instance, the settlement should show characteristics of suitable architectural infrastructure to carry out the manufacture of gems such as agate and carnelian. As we have already seen, this production – which changes the raw material into a gem – has certain specific characteristics. Therefore, the settlement should have designated spaces for pyrotechnics and carving (Kanungo, personal communication, May 10, 2023), a space where combustion structures, furnaces, and carving spaces could be related. Also, the material evidence found in the same stratigraphic contexts should contain a large volume of gem finds in different states of manufacture.

If the site has infrastructure of these characteristics, or similar, it could be identified as a gem production workshop for intaglios. In addition, the material culture of the settlement should respond positively to this context, producing numerous samples of precious stones in different stages of manufacture. The stages run from raw material, to polished, drilled, cameo blanks and the final product, engraved precious stones, as the material evidence derivate of this industrial process, debitage and unfinished precious stone elements.

2. Extraction of gems

To investigate which gemstones were most valued in the classical Mediterranean world, it is essential to examine classical literary sources, with *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History) by Pliny the Elder serving as a foundational text (Pérez González 2019: 142; Thoresen 2017: 159). In Book XXXVII of this encyclopaedic corpus, Pliny provides an extensive catalogue of the most prestigious and widely recognised gemstones in the Roman Empire, detailing their origins – whether through extraction or trade – and describing their perceived qualities and uses (Pérez González 2019: 142; Francis 1991: 35).

The corpus of Book XXXVII identifies a total of 240 varieties of gemstones, although the place of origin is explicitly mentioned in only 93 cases (Pérez González 2019: 142; Kenoyer 1998: 78). Notably, Pliny emphasises the predominance of stones originating from India, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, and Africa, which were considered the most desirable by the Roman elite due to their quality, rarity, and exotic appeal (Pérez González 2019: 142; Gurukkal 2016: 118; Thoresen 2017: 159–161). This prioritisation underscores the significant role of long-distance trade networks, such as the "precious stone route", in facilitating the movement of luxury goods across the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Mediterranean (Pérez González 2019: 142; Vidale 2000: 45; Borell 2017: 26–28).

In fact, efforts to compile this type of mineral seem to come from Greek sources, since Pliny's work is largely based on older collections, such as the *Περὶ λίθων (Peri Lithon*) of Theophrastus. This work, also cited as *De Lapidibus* by Latin writers, is a treatise that was used as a reference source for the study of lapidary materials from its writing, around 314 bce (Thoresen 2017: 157), until in the Renaissance (Walton 2001: 359).

The contemporary idea of established, one-way trade routes is not contemplated in this study, which aims to show a trade framework with networked and multi-directional connections. Free market trade, in my opinion, would be the most realistic mode to accommodate such large-scale trade without the guidance or

control of any state power. Contrary to the traditional historiographical view, the precious stone trade network was not only carried out overland, such as along the Silk Road. In fact, the commercial network would extend to the south of India, connecting by sea with powers in areas such as the Mediterranean area, Arabia or China; a trade well attested archaeologically and logically, as it was cheaper, faster and safer than land trade (Evers 2017: 95–112; Cherian 2016; Sidebotham et al. 2023).

Recent research by Eivind Heldaas Seland (2017) has revealed that the trade in precious stones during antiquity was far more complex and multidirectional than previously assumed. Seland explores the motivations behind the demand for exogenous gemstones among African, Arabian, and Indian elites, despite the apparent availability of similar resources within their own territories (Seland 2017: 107–109).

Through a critical analysis of classical sources, particularly the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Seland identifies evidence of the circulation of Egyptian stones in ports across Africa, Arabia, and India, highlighting the complex dynamics of this luxury trade and the demand for foreign commodities as a marker of status and prestige (Seland 2017: 108; Thoresen 2017: 159–161). These findings underscore the interconnectedness of ancient trade networks and challenge assumptions regarding localised resource utilisation, illustrating the broader socio-cultural significance of gemstone exchange within elite consumption practices (Gurukkal 2016: 112; Francis 1991: 35–37).

But how does this information, exemplified in the classical sources, translate into the tangible Indic world? The art of gem cutting achieved inimitable importance in human history for its economic value and aesthetic appeal. Despite technological improvements, artisans today continue to use the same traditional methods used in India since ancient times (Rajan 2017: 347). The art of cutting and engraving precious stones has been the most refined aspect of minimalist art in India, as opposed to other maximalist art forms such as architecture, painting or, in general, classical fine arts (Rajan 2017: 347). Many specialists have tried to reveal the techniques and extraction sites involved in this art in different parts of the subcontinent (Possehl 1981: 39–47). But this technology cannot be accurately discerned without a deep study of the traditional gem cutting carried out today.

In this aspect, the site of Kodumanal is a perfect example to analyse this phenomenon, due to its continuity in the extraction and manufacture of precious stones from antiquity to the present day. The role of this site in the commercial network that led to Pattanam, and encountered the Roman world, is evidenced through the various samples of numismatics in the area, located along the route to Pattanam. At the site of Kodumanal itself, three Roman coins have been

identified, found on the surface, belonging to the coins issued by the emperors Augustus, Tiberius and Antonius Pius respectively (Suresh 2004).

The sources of Sangam literature, specifically chapters 67 and 74 of the work *Patirruppattu*, referring to the Chera dynasty, speak of this settlement as Kotumanam, and describe it as a place recognised for the great value of its precious stones (*arun-kalam*). The presence of mines around it, such as the beryl mines of Padiyur, with continuity until the 20th century, added to the great evidence of stone beads, in various phases of their manufacture, shows us an active gem industry at the site. Two pottery inscriptions from Kodumanal, known as a place of manufacture of gems and weapons, reads ni Ka ma (nikama) indicating that merchant guilds were established at several industrial and trade centres in ancient Tamil country (Mahadevan 2003: 141). The other one, referring to a gem evaluator as *maniya-vannakan,* strengthens this theory (Mahadevan 2003: 141).

It should be noted that this settlement does not operate in isolation but is integrated into a network of extraction and distribution of precious stones that includes the Kongu region (Rajan 2017: 352). This region is marked by small hills that constitute conglomerates of crystalline gneiss rocks with veins of quartz and limestone rock that make this area an extremely rich spot in minerals, while also playing a dominant role in the trade network of the Indian subcontinent (Rajan 2017: 352).

Despite the intense extraction of minerals in this area, such as beryl, sapphires, quartz and corundum, from the Kongu region we can only extract the traditional manufacturing techniques of precious stone carving, such as the way in which their trade was organised up to Pattanam. This fact occurs as it is an area, currently, exempt from the minerals that are the subject of this study, mainly agate and carnelian. Despite this fact, the artisans living in this region inherited the skill and technology of their ancestors without any cultural-technological gap (Rajan 2017: 348). In India, the working of agate and carnelian has a long history going back to the time of the Indus civilisation in the late 3rd and 2nd millennium bce.

The gem industry exposed at Kodumanal, and its survival to the present day, lends credence to this perception (Rajan 2017: 348). The absence of precious stones such as carnelian, agate and lapis lazuli in the region suggests that these were procured from the Gujarat area and Afghanistan (Rajan 2017: 360; Verma 2022: 82), either directly or through intermediaries in commercial transactions (Verma 2022: 82), to Pattanam. Despite this fact, the Kodumanal site shows clear evidence that this trade network existed as a large quantity of sapphires, beryl, agates, carnelians, amethysts, lapis lazuli and quartz have been identified in domestic contexts (Rajan 2017: 347–350), while the most carnelian bodies

were restricted to necropolises, possibly as prestige goods differentiating social class (Rajan 2017: 350).

Currently, the archaeological trend favours a new possibility of extracting these minerals. Research groups such as PAMA have turned their sights to the southern Deccan region. The Deccan is a plateau that occupies most of the central and southern part of the Indian subcontinent. The name derives from the Sanskrit *dakṣiṇa*, which means southern. In a broader sense it includes all southern India, but in a more restricted sense it is defined as the territory between the Narmada and the Krishna rivers. Although archaeological interventions have not been made on the southern side of this plateau, the area where the possibility of agate and carnelian mines with a connection with Muziris is theorised, the area of Gujarat north of the plateau has been working intensively in this research line with very satisfactory results in terms of precious stones trade (IIT Gandhinagar). It is easy to fall into the temptation of expecting similar results on the southern slope, but the reality is that there is currently no information available to support this hypothesis.

It must be firmly stated that the perspective proposed in this study, regarding the organisation of Roman demand in India, forces us to consider other issues. Namely the parallel organisation of the supply of the western Deccan and southern India, thus including in the study the commercial performance of areas such as the eastern Deccan, northern India and even south-east Asia. A good example of the functioning of trade networks within the Indian territory, witnessed by the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (PME pp. 49, 56) and the *Papyrus of Muziris* (verse, col. ii), tells us how wares containing nard from the Gangetic, the areas low in the Himalayas in northern India, could achieve the transport of large volumes of cargo, with frequent availability (80 boxes for one buyer) at ports such as Muziris and Barygaza (Evers 2017: 171). Data such as these raise the question of how this organisation of extraction/production, processing, packaging and transportation could have worked from the northern areas to the ports on the western coast of India.

Based on an analogy with evidence from the western Deccan and southern India, this complex supply operation may have been organised by groups of possibly similar organisations. For instance, the association of perfumers (e.g. Skt. *gandhika*s) of Kausambi, an association trade network that became important enough to issue its own coins around the second century bce (Schenk 2006: 130), or in cooperation with prominent merchants using their own corporate seals, dating from the early historic period after the Maurya empire and up to Gupta domination chronologies of locations such as Bhita and Varanasi.

3. Trade context of Pattanam

As revealed in this study, southern India was an important supplier of long-distance goods for Mediterranean consumption (Cherian 2016; Evers 2017: 171–172; Sidebotham et al. 2023; Tomber 2008), but also on its Asian side (Cherian 2016). Thus, pearls from the shallow waters between India and Sri Lanka, as precious stones from the inland mining centres (for the *margaritarii*, *gemmarii*, etc., of the *collegium aurificum* in the Roman Empire) and pepper from the southern tropical forests of the Deccan region (for *collegium aromatariorum* and *horrea piperataria*), were cultivated, exploited and collected by the inhabitants of the ancient Tamil kingdoms (Evers 2017: 173).

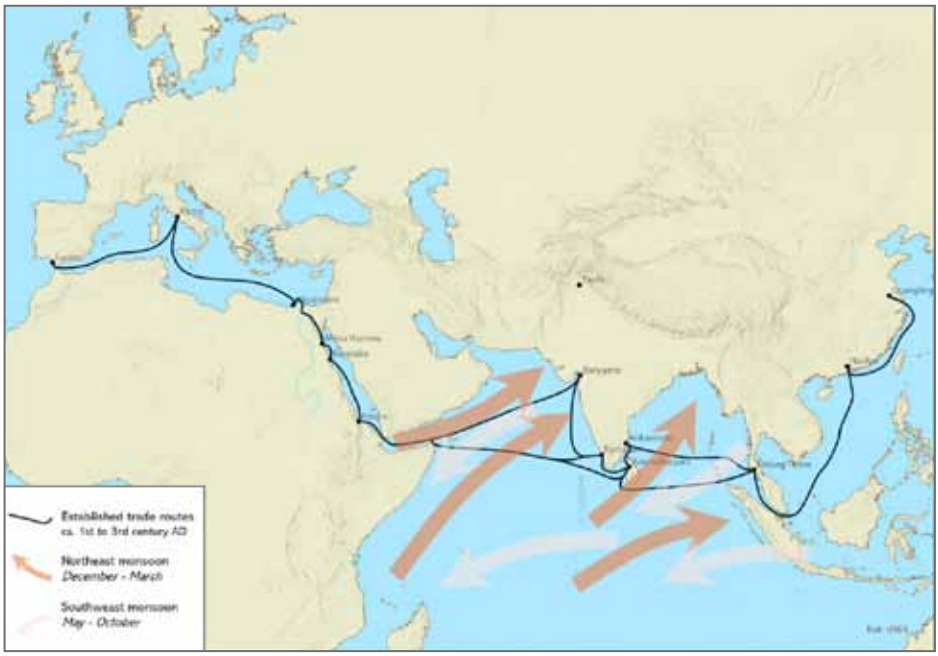

Fig. 1. International maritime trade routes c. 1st BCE–3rd CE.

As previously explained, the precious stones with which the Pattanam carvings were made, carnelian and agate, correspond to certain minerals with unique characteristics. Before exemplifying the possible candidates, which ended up as intaglio of Asian origin and manufacture, it is important to examine two instances that characterise these two minerals as products of Indian origin.

In the first case, the high value of both minerals is due to the extreme scarcity of available extraction mines for these precious stones in the world. Based on the sources and studies already stated (Cf. Pliny, NH XXXVII; Pérez González 2021; Rajan 2017; Thoresen 2017), it can be concluded that both

the largest part, and the best quality, of carnelian and agate introduced into the Roman Empire came from India. Keep in mind that this precious stone has only been found in India, Saudi Arabia, Germany (Bavaria and Saxony), Sri Lanka, Thailand, Madagascar, Brazil, the United States and Siberia (Kulke and Rothermund 2004: 18–50).

Secondly, the techniques used with regard these precious stones are of Indian tradition. In the case of carnelian, it is usually processed through ovens to achieve a brighter and more polished orange coloration. And in the case of agate, pronounced banded marks, so characteristic of this gem, are achieved through a process based on sugar and baking (Possehl 1981; Bhan et al. 1994; Francis 1991; Borell 2017). The bow drill, used in the carnelian beads, is also a traditional technique of the Indus Civilisation, with parallels going back to the 4th–5th millennium bce in Mehrgarh, Pakistan (Kulke and Rothermund 2004: 18–50) or Dholavira, India (Prabhakar 2018: 475–485).

As we have already seen, jewellery and stamps are not a rare or innovative phenomenon in the Mediterranean. Some of the earliest examples of such writing are found in a seal or personal identity format, such as Egyptian scarab seals (Newberry 1908). So, what drove the trade of these prestige goods globally?

The conquests of Alexander the Great, in the late 4th century bce (335–323 bce), seem to mark the crucial turning point (Higgins 1969). With the introduction of Indian gems to the Mediterranean world, thanks to the Eastern conquests carried out by Alexander the Great, Eastern gemstones were easily delivered in the West. This translated into a commercial "boom" for the acquisition of these prestigious goods globally (Richter 2006). Both the sources and the material culture show this change, since all kinds of jewellery (Mediterranean) will be adorned with precious stones, especially jewellery and articles of clothing (cf. *Aeneid* I, 647–655; NH XXXVII.6).

Despite the great evidence in Mediterranean settings of carnelian and agate gemstones manufactured in the Indian typology, it is not possible for us to discern the exact location from which they came or where they were engraved in the final state. But the archaeological record seems to show that the closer we get to the extractive centres, such as the mines of India, the more finds occur of mineral-supported intaglio with Indian characteristics. The fact that all the carvings found in Mediterranean contexts, in the proposed chronological framework, are linked to the Roman Empire could be due to a misconception of the techniques used and the locations where they were manufactured. In this sense, our study leaves open the proposal of the origin of certain carvings with Indian characteristics currently identified as Mediterranean. But, because this line of study goes beyond the general objective of our research, our claims are based on questioning the preconceived ideas of Eurocentric thought.

The variety of finds in the field of South Asia, in terms of engraved precious stones, raises a large number of doubts as to how the flow of trade in this region really worked.

As for sites in India, it is necessary to focus attention on the site of Arikamedu. This site is located south of Pondicherry, on one of the drainage systems of the Ponnaiyar River, in southeastern India. Currently the location of this emporium, called by the Roman sources *Poduke Emporium* (PME pp. 47, 89), has been identified with the site of Arikamedu (Wheeler 1954). This settlement on the Coromandel Coast is currently located in an area of marshland, but maps and sources from the 17th and 18th centuries ce suggest that it belonged to one of the branches of the Gingee River, before discharging into the Bay of Bengal (Deloche 1980: 144–147).

The Mediterranean-centric view tends to propose that the Romans controlled trade in the Indic area, which is far from what must have been the scheme at the time (Rawlinson 1916; Wheeler 1954; Begley 2004). The material evidence does show close commercial contact, and probably some Roman populations would also reside there during waits for the Monsoon winds. What is evident in Arikamedu, as in Pattanam, is the presence of a multicultural society. The collection of graffiti found in the settlement, include Northern Brahmi, Tamil-Brahmi and Ceylon-Brahmi scripts, mostly written in Tamil or Prakrit (Mahadevan 2003: 63). This fact suggests the wide multiculturalism of the inhabitants of Arikamedu, or those who made intermittent stays, coming from different cultural strata and probably from a plurilingual society.

Arikamedu or Poduke was also an important centre for the manufacture of precious stones; this is evident from the finding of more than 100 white cameos, mostly amethyst gems, during archaeological interventions (Francis 1991: 504). But the most important find of this site, in relation to this work, is that of an artifact identified as an intaglio. It would be an unfinished piece of quartz, with the artistic representation of an engraving recreating a winged cupid with a bird identified as an eagle. It should be noted that this artifact, together with another carnelian intaglio with a bust representation of Augustus (Wheeler 1954: 21, 101), were reported as surface finds in the area surrounding the Arikamedu site; the second of the carvings is currently missing (Begley 1983: 3, 29). The singularity of this finding, with the piece uncut but including an engraving, raises the question of whether engravers with knowledge of Greco-Roman iconography were present in Poduke. The initial hypothesis, proposed by Begley (1983: 481), was that native craftsmen must have been inspired by models imported from the Western world, or that craftsmen of Mediterranean origin would be present at the Poduke Emporium settlement.

To date, a substantial corpus of carvings with classical motifs have been identified, not only from the regions of southern India, but from locations such as Gandhara, Taxila or Varanasi, in northern Pakistan and India respectively, also large centres connected to the commercial network, in this case the terrestrial one. Samples include an intaglio with a representation of the winged goddess Nike, found in Gandhara (Thaplyal 1971: 35–38). The example of Taxila is the perfect material evidence to make comparisons; the intaglio TM 06.07.02 found on the surface at this site shows the representation of a cupid with a bird. Therefore, it shows clear parallels in the iconography located at southern sites such as Arikamedu.

Such empirical evidence challenges the traditional idea that intaglio engravings with Mediterranean iconography might not be exclusive to the Mediterranean geographic framework. However, now that the Arikamedu quartz and carnelian intaglios have been identified with certainty, they can be considered in relation to the three Pattanam intaglios, especially the two carnelian intaglios. From the beginning, this paper has sought to adopt a neutral position regarding Mediterranean-centric reasoning; the intention has been to propose ideas from a critical side of historiography. The hypothetical proposal of a Roman diaspora, involving the establishment of a population and artisan workshops, such as the *gemmarii* of Rome, in settlements such as Pattanam, proposed by traditional historiography (Wheeler 1954; Begley 1983: 481), seems like a Europocentric vision on this matter, not coinciding with the development that the Pattanam site is providing in its material culture (Cherian 2016: 25–27).

Through the intaglio of Arikamedu, a new possibility arises as to what could have been the operation or journey of the precious stones from their raw material state to their final destination. The idea that the gems were sent from Rome in a semi-worked format, with the engraving carried out but not having been cut, is a prospect that has not been properly analysed. This practice is already observed, in the opposite situation, in sites like Berenike. The cameo blanks found at this site, imported from India and unpolished, would have required engraving and finishing at a location far removed from their source of extraction (Sidebotham 2011: 238).

A crucial aspect to consider is the historical context of Southeast Asia and its role within ancient maritime trade networks. For a long time, Southeast Asian archaeology remained peripheral to research on ancient transoceanic exchanges, which traditionally focussed on Indian Ocean trade and rarely extended beyond the Indian subcontinent. However, recent developments have marked a departure from Western-centric paradigms in the humanities, leading to an increasing recognition of Southeast Asia's significance in these networks. A growing body of regional studies has identified key archaeological sites spanning from the Bay

of Bengal to southern China, positioning this region as an essential intermediary in the exchange of goods, technologies, and cultural practices between the East and West during antiquity (Hoppál 2021: 197; Bellina 2007: 62–63; Seland 2017: 108–110).

International collaboration, coupled with local efforts, has sparked renewed interest in the collection of Roman artifacts among local communities. Among these objects, carved gems are particularly notable for both their quantity and craftsmanship (Hoppál 2021: 198). In the Roman Empire, such carvings were generally owned by private individuals, with the motifs chosen reflecting personal preferences, thus endowing these items with rich human and historical symbolism (Richter 2006).

In Southeast Asia, the presence of Roman or Western-style carvings indicates a degree of recognition and likely an appreciation of these materials by indigenous populations. This suggests that these objects held cultural significance, providing valuable insights into the cultural fabric of the societies that received them. Although many of these engraved gems, featuring Western influences to varying extents, are found in private collections and often lack clear archaeological provenance, a significant portion can be traced to specific sites in Thailand (Hoppál 2021: 198).

Fig. 2. Influence areas of trade c. 1st BCE–3rd CE. Credit: Cherian.

The site of Khlong Thom, in the contemporary city of Krabi, is a great example, counting with four objects of Mediterranean origin (Borell et al. 2014: 101–102). One of the carvings is the carnelian representation of the goddess Fortuna, currently in the Wat Khlong Thom Museum (Hoppál 2021: 198). This object resembles the intaglio of the goddess Fortuna from Pattanam, a depicted

standing female figure dressed in a chiton and a himation; another detail that identifies her as this goddess is the cornucopia engraved on her arms, as a sign of abundance.

Even if parallels between some of the motifs may connect the objects with the West, they are not a proof of origin; in fact, the proximity with eastern cities like Pattanam (**Fig. 2**) makes much more sense in practical terms of trade, such as reduced production and transport costs.

4. The intagli of Pattanam

The main object under study is an intaglio with the representation of a sphinx. This was found during excavations on April 25, 2020, in the PT20 LXV borehole. The methodology of archaeological interventions in Pattanam is carried out following the division into locus. The studied artefact would thus be found in locus 5 of this trench, at a relative depth of 1.15 m. This locus has been identified thanks to the material evidence collected in the following section (referring to the material found in relation to the stratigraphic context), in the chronological framework named by the local archaeological team as the "Early Historic era" (c. 1st BCE–3rd CE), a highly suitable range for the chronology in which this study is framed.

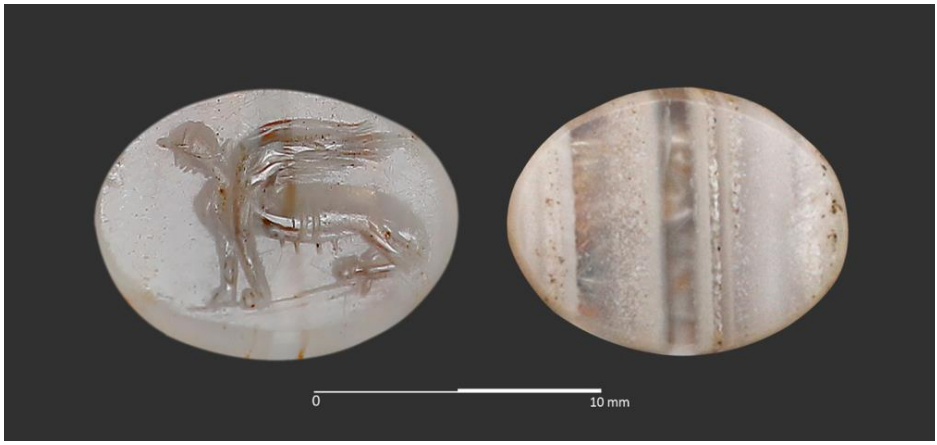

Fig. 3. The Sphinx intaglio of Pattanam. Credit: CHERIAN (2016: 32).

As for the object, it would be an intaglio made on a banded agate stone, a stone derived from chalcedony (**Fig. 3**), a precious stone very abundant in the surrounding areas of Pattanam. It would present an oval shape, very characteristic of Roman intaglio, with dimensions of 1.2 cm in height, 2 cm long and 1 cm in width, thus highlighting its dimensions for the suitability of the gem in a ring, and not to be modelled as a cameo. The subject matter engraved

in the intaglio would consist of a recurring Mediterranean mythological theme such as the sphinx, a creature with the head and torso of a human woman, often depicted with the wings and body of a lioness (Gantz 1996: 24).

The mystery behind this object is further aroused with reference to this artifact's iconography. In Roman sources, we are told that the emperor Augustus, in the first years of his reign, would have used two identical intaglios with the representation of the sphinx as a personal seal (NH XXXVII.4, 10). The chronology given for this object is from 1st c. ce, during or immediately after the principality of Augustus. This chronology has been based mostly on the location and stratigraphic sequence in which the artefact is found, in strata that clearly mark this chronology thanks to the dating of the material remains recovered. Encompassing the finding of 49 amphora sherds, 7 terra sigillata, 13 TGP sherds, 6 Arabic Torpedo jars and 1 Chinese sherd that mark a clear chronological scope.

Fig. 4. Tyche-Fortuna intaglio of Pattanam. Credit: Cherian (2016: 32).

Apart from this artefact, it is worth noting the presence of two more carvings in the northern sector of Pattanam, currently only 1% intervened, which also have similar characteristics. These show the raw material, the gem of Indian origin, but the subject of the engraving is of Mediterranean origin. In this context we find the intaglio of Fortuna (**Fig. 4**), made on a carnelian gem, a semi-precious stone consisting of a variety of orange or red coloured chalcedony, and measuring approximately 1.5 x 1 cm in height. The anthropomorphic figure stands in a central space and in profile, facing left, framed within a thin oval piece of carnelian. This figure is positioned vertically within the gem. The piece was recovered during the 2014 campaign, from locus 13, within trench PT14 XLII,

at a relative depth of 1.3–1.4 cm. The chronology has been based mostly on the location and stratigraphic sequence in which the artefact is found, in strata that clearly mark this chronology thanks to the dating of the material remains recovered.

Most of the evidence related to the manufacture of precious stones in Muziris was uncovered on the campaigns carried out in 2020. Due to the large number of loci and evidence found in the trenches, in this section we only highlight the evidence related to the trench with the Sphinx intaglio and chronologies marked at the beginning of the study, that is, c. 1st–3rd CE.

From Trench PT20 LV, with special reference to loci 5–11, the significant finds are the pottery artefacts of non-Indic origin. Among these are fragments of *amphorae*, *Terra Sigillata*, Torpedo Jar, TGP, Indian Rouletted Ware and Chinese porcelain. The type of pottery identified in the survey are mostly bowls, jars, basins and storage jars. We should add the identification of iron keys, and 182 precious stone related objects listed as 1 banded Agate intaglio, 3 Carnelian cameo blanks, 17 Carnelian stone debitages, 15 Carnelian roughouts, 1 Agate inlay, 2 Agate beads, 1 Agate debitage, 2 Agate roughouts, 86 glass beads, 41 precious stone geological samples, 2 Amethyst beads, 1 Amethyst roughout, 1 Amethyst debitage, 4 Quartz debitage and 5 Citrine roughouts.

Fig. 5. Lion intaglio of Pattanam. Credit: CHERIAN (2016: 32).

The third example of intaglio found in Pattanam is that of the lion (**Fig. 5**). This artifact is also engraved on one carnelian gem and measures approximately 1.2 x 1 cm in height (as we see standardised for the use of gems in rings).

This gem contains the engraving of a lion supported on it's both rear paws, configured horizontally within the stone design. The intaglio was recovered in the 2010 campaign, at locus 22 of the trench PT XVII, at a relative depth of 1.15–1.2 m. By stratigraphy, this one piece can also be dated to the 2nd century ce (Cherian 2016: 32). In Greece, the lion symbolised heroism, courage, and the triumph of the living over the dead (Henig 1978: 356). The image of a deity flanked by two lions is a recurring motif in ancient art; in Greek iconography, the lion specifically functions as a symbol of victory. Interestingly, statues commemorating military successes often depicted lionesses rather than lions, as lionesses were regarded as more courageous and formidable than their male counterparts (Sagiv 2018: 94), as could be the case with this model (Cherian and Rocco 2020: 2).

The stratigraphic data of the trench where this artifact was found, dated to the Classical Era (c. 3rd bce–3rd ce), offers us other precious stone-related archaeological materials. Apart from the Lion intaglio, it was possible to recover 2 Agate inlays, 8 Carnelian beads, 4 Carnelian debitage, 3 Carnelian roughouts, 3 Agate beads, 1 Agate debitage, 10 stone beads, 4242 glass beads, 4 Amethyst beads, 5 Amethyst roughouts, 4 Amethyst debitage, 12 Quartz debitage, 2 Chalcedony beads, 4 Chalcedony roughouts, 8 Garnet debitage, 1 Garnet roughout, 54 Beryl beads, 4 Beryl roughout, 6 Onyx beads, 3 iron rings and 8 geological samples; a great amount of gem industry-related materials.

Fig. 6. Carnelian stages of production found in Pattanam. The left group consists of carnelian on its cut process, and the right-side group consists of carnelian polished and rounded. Credit: Cherian (2016: 33).

Therefore, we verify a certain uniformity between the three intaglios recovered. The presence of Mediterranean themes or designs in all the pieces, the contemporaneity of the objects, interpreted thanks to the stratigraphic location in similar contexts, oblige us to think that the finding of these artifacts at Pattanam does not constitute a random archaeological coincidence.

Based on the evidence chronogram shown below, based on all the precious stones and exogenous material recovered in trench PT20 LXV, it seems that Pattanam experienced a precious stone "boom" during the Classical Era. In this table it could appear as if this factor is directly related to the exogenous material

recovered, but in fact during the Classical Era the local manufactured pottery in Pattanam totals 12,192 sherds, representing 96% of the total pottery recovered in the site.

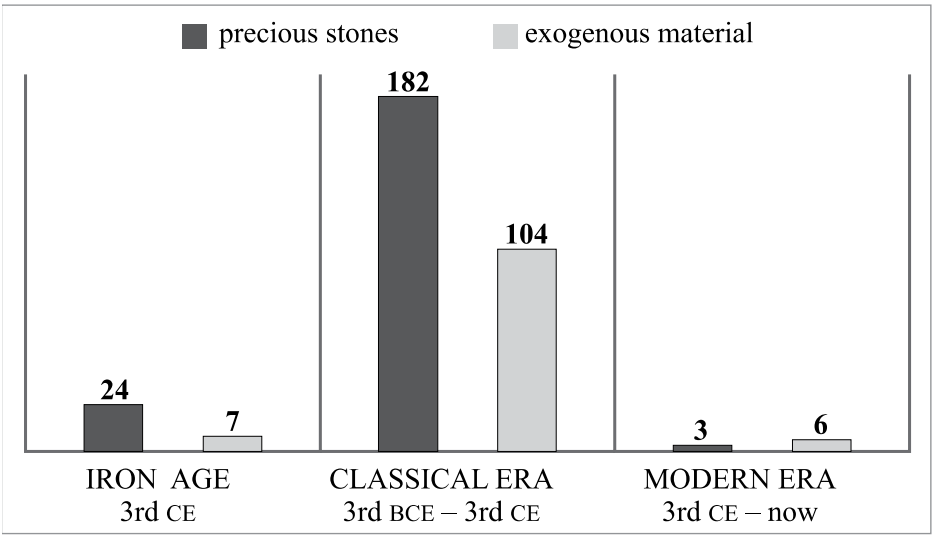

Fig. 7. Chronogram of material evidence in Trench PT20 LXV.

As can be seen from the material recovered in the surrounding contexts of the extraction area of the sphinx intaglio, the Pattanam site has enough evidence to prove that there was local production and manufacture of precious stones and products derived from these, such as beads or inlays. On the other hand, the findings of these manufactured and blank artefacts related to the numerous evidence of non-Indic ceramics inclines us to believe that these products were not only designated for the local population's own consumption but also export.

5. Conclusions

As we have observed in this study, Pattanam increasingly appears as a commercial urban centre with all the characteristics of an international hub. A settlement with such a volume of material evidence can only be equated with a large-scale centre of imports and exports. Based on a commercial model, such as the proposed free-scale network, in which certain settlements show commercial pre-eminence within a series of main commercial flow routes, Pattanam would have had a series of regional commercial networks that would have been integrated into a global network.

In our opinion, the proposed model is evidenced in the development of the commercial network between the different states and regions of India, based on a system of private and mutually regulated organisations, such as the association

of perfumers (*gandhika*s) of Kausambi. And it would receive trade flows from areas further away from the main trade network to the cities pre-eminent in this globalised trade, with better established connections in south Indian ports. The connectivity offered inland by the river Periyar and the abundance of natural resources of the various regions allows for effective inter-regional trade. Thus, the trade in precious stones must have worked in similar patterns; the organisational evidence in regions such as Kongu or Gujarat indicates established gem trade networks.

We find a clear parallel of a city with these characteristics, save for all the differences, with Alexandria. The port par excellence of Egypt was used by the Roman emperors as a Mediterranean "hub", a city that served to redistribute Mediterranean trade and the entire volume of imports from the East. As in the case of Pattanam, the city would become a multicultural centre thanks to the great demographic fluctuations that global scale commerce offers, entailing the grafting of exogenous cultures into the local ones, the more connections the more cultural diversity. The port-city of Berenike would be a great parallel to this vision, in a geographical context of Egyptian culture, with the constant incision of Eastern cultures through the commercial pre-eminence of this port.

Regarding the possibility of infrastructure related to the trade of precious stones in Pattanam, the archaeological evidence has been quite satisfactory. In the first place, the large volume of material found in trenches PT20 LXV, PT14 XLIII and PT10 XVII, referring to the finding of precious stones in different states of manufacture, indicates production of products related to gems and carvings. Despite having only found intaglio samples on a mineral support of carnelian or agate, the samples of a great diversity of precious stones, and glass, in the process of jewellery manufacturing at the site, open the possibility that Pattanam's gem production is not limited only to these minerals.

Pattanam's strategic connectivity with inland mining regions underscores its importance within both regional and transoceanic trade networks. The presence of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions across areas such as the Deccan Plateau attests to sustained cultural and commercial interaction between southern and northern India, suggesting a well-established overland corridor facilitated by Tamil-speaking polities. These networks likely ensured secure and efficient movement of goods, including raw materials such as semi-precious stones and metals, from resource-rich regions into coastal exchange centres. In this context, Pattanam may have been supplied not only by the celebrated mines of northern India and the Deccan, such as those near Vidarbha and Telangana, but also by those of the Kongu region in western Tamil Nadu, and potentially even from sites closer to Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, areas known for beryl, and carnelian production.

When viewed within the broader geography of the Indian Ocean world, and accounting for the maritime corridors shaped by the monsoon system, Pattanam's role as a nodal point in the redistribution of goods between the Mediterranean, South Asia, and Southeast Asia becomes particularly evident. Its position allowed it to mediate both the influx of Roman and West Asian imports and the outflow of Indian and Southeast Asian commodities, supported by both coastal navigation and its access to inland production zones.

In fact, in the scheme presented to us by Pattanam, we see a clear desire for intensive production to satisfy strong external demand, possibly from the Mediterranean, that is, from Rome. We note how, contrary to the common perception that only the raw material of precious stones was mined in India, a settlement like Pattanam shows sufficient characteristics to prove production and manufacture of gems, including all stages of production, with nothing to envy compared with the productive or manufacturing centres of the Mediterranean orbit. This is a context where, from our point of view, the emergence of a precious stone engraving workshop would be possible, due to the great source of natural supply in the area and the constant demand of Western fashion for manufactured products in this art.

In terms of iconography and symbolism, this study has no possibility of discerning the nature of the carvings found in Pattanam. The fact that we find iconographic motifs of Mediterranean indole in a clearly local context endorses the rethinking of the international production centres of engraved gems in antiquity, placing a city like Pattanam at the centre of the productive and export world of gems.

The cultural link that the intaglio of the Pattanam sphinx shows with Rome, and more specifically with the figure of Augustus, demands additional research on the preconceived schemes about exogenous artisans in the final engraving process. However, were it to be proven that it is the product of a wholly local workshop, albeit of a multicultural nature, this would surely provide a ground-breaking contribution. In this regard, and responding to the initial hypothesis of this study, it can be concluded that the Pattanam site shows enough archaeological evidence to verify the presence of an autonomous gem manufacturing workshop, even though it cannot be discerned as a specialist workshop exclusively of intagli. Pattanam and its Sphinx could be real game changers in the archaeology and history of South India, indicating its significant mark on its economic and trading mark on ancient global networks.

Author's note

Previous versions: Red Sea Conference 2024 Poster. Pattanam, breaking ground on classical gem industries in India. Barcelona 7th of June 2024.

Abbreviations

Aeneid	Publius Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid*. Trans.: Fagles (2006).
ITT Gandhinagar	Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar.
KCHR	Kerala Council for Historical Research.
NH	Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*. Ed. and trans.: Bostock and Riley (1855).
PAMA	Paternal and Maternal Ancestry for Transdisciplinary Archaeology.
PME	*Periplus Maris Erythraei.* Ed. and trans.: Casson (1989).
TGP	Turquoise glazed pottery.

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 31–53
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The Notion of Linguistic Convention (*saṁketa*) in the *Prameya-kamala-mārtaṇḍa* 427.22–431.9

Małgorzata B. Glinicka

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to define the nature and the role of linguistic convention in the *Prameya-kamala-mārtaṇḍa* (PKM, "The Lotus-like Sun [revealing] Objects of Valid Cognition"), Prabhācandra's (11th cent. CE) commentary on Māṇikyanandin's *Parīkṣâmukha* (PĀ, "Introduction to [Logical] Analysis"), with particular reference to PĀ 3.100–101 (PKM 427.22–431.9). The problem of linguistic convention has been thoroughly discussed in Jaina philosophical literature, since it is one of the major factors of understanding the relationship between a word and its meaning, as well as a word and an object signified by the word. In order to reconstruct Prabhācandra's view on this subject I will focus on the nature of this relationship – as presented in the PKM – that is characterised as "conventional", having regard to the existing discussions in Jaina philosophy of language and trying to assess whether they are reflected in Prabhācandra's deliberations. In this particular approach to the problem of linguistic convention, an important role is played by what is called *yogyatā* ("power", "ability", "compatibility of meaning"), of which an additional element of description is the adjective *sahaja* ("inherent", "innate"). Tracing instances of the contextualisation of this concept in close connection with the problem of linguistic convention in Jaina philosophical literature and situating the whole complex issue against the background of other interdependent aspects of this nuanced and multifaceted theory of meaning will form the pivotal part of the analysis.

Keywords: Prabhācandra, Māṇikyanandin, Jainism, meaning, *saṁketa*, *sahaja-yogyatā*, *śabda*, *artha*, *vastu*

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper[1] is to define the nature and the role of linguistic convention (*saṁketa*) in the *Prameya-kamala-mārtaṇḍa* (PKM), Prabhācandra's (11th cent. CE) commentary on Māṇikyanandin's *Parīkṣâmukha* (PĀ, 9th cent. CE), with particular (but not exclusive) focus on PĀ 3.100–101 (PKM 427.22–431.9[22]). I confront the relevant PKM passages with Prabhācandra's other work, the *Nyāya-kumuda-candra* (NKC), a commentary on Akalaṅka's *Laghīyas-traya* (LT, 8th cent. CE), when necessary.

Prabhācandra's reflections on linguistic convention are part of an extensive section on language and meaning, which includes the following subsections: construction-free and construction-filled awareness (PKM 27.8–36.12, 69.4–70.6), *apoha* and *sphoṭa* theories (PKM 431.23–458.4), the meaning of words and sentences (PKM 458.5–460.23), the refutation of *anvitâbhidhāna* and *abhihitânvaya* theories (PKM 461.1–465.9), and relation between speech and epistle/ complex text (PKM 684.16–687.12, 689.9–692.27).

The English term "convention" is ambiguous. It is associated with a kind of prearranged order of assigning names to objects, a form of agreement. However, the issue – in the case of all approaches that acknowledge linguistic convention – is whether this order follows from genuinely existing connections between language and objects (meanings) or is just arbitrary. This raises other questions: Is it possible to assess to what extent linguistic features and processes are natural? What is the relationship between language constituted by convention – defined in different ways – and the valid cognition of the real thing? Can such language be a carrier of truth? In the Jaina perspective which I would like to discuss, the term *saṁketa*, rendered as "linguistic convention"[2], takes on a narrower meaning. As the result of cognitive decision based on an agreement, it is used to shape interpersonal communication – regarding the perception of objects in the external world and influencing the thoughts (mentations) associated with these objects – as well as to convey and understand the content of the scriptures; it does not concern the subtleties of communication style but rather relies on considering meanings based on the syntactic structure of the statement and its constituent parts, also sensitised and particularised by context (which in itself must be referred to and interpreted in a specific way). In an attempt to understand the mechanism of conventionalisation, it is worth considering whether linguistic conventions *constitute* or *create* the meanings of words, sentences and larger linguistic wholes

[1] This article is a revised version of the paper I presented during 19th World Sanskrit Conference in Kathmandu, 26–30 June 2025.

[2] Rendered after Balcerowicz (2008: 17, 32, 34, 104, 122), Balcerowicz and Potter (2013: 165, 167, 210).

or merely *ascribe*[3] meaning to them (and finally *stabilise*[4] them). And if we look at the issue from the point of view of utility, are collective discoveries about the meaning of language accessible to all members of a community (who does convention serve)? How do they influence the creation of collective and individual associations? And finally: Does linguistic convention become legitimised through an evolving shared opinion that has been formed and widely established over time or does it need authentication by a concrete authoritative person? And then, does the image of an authoritative person also evolve, which would influence changes to the rules and requirements of conventionalisation patterns?

All these questions inevitably arise when examining this issue from a Jaina perspective encounters the assumptions of Jaina theory of meaning discussed in various texts. When the Jainas speak of linguistic convention, they refer to the relation between language and the realm of objects, and the overarching philosophical problem is to explore the nature of this relation as well as the ontological and epistemological consequences of each of the options considered. Going backwards, it was Siddhasena Divākara (6th cent. CE) who exposes in the *Dvātriṁśika* (*Guṇavacana* part, DT) that the word or the term may have more than one meaning.[5] Charlotte KRAUSE (1948: 235–236) notes that Siddhasena uses the word *guṇa* in such a way that it reflects its conventional (poetical) meaning, i.e. "virtue" (and other synonymous equivalents), or its technical meaning, i.e. "quality".[6] Sometimes, as KRAUSE (1948: 235–236) underlines, these two meanings are cleverly combined, creating a new dimension of understanding. The same applies to the word *Śrī* that may mean "wealth", "fortune" as well as the name "Lakṣmī" or – as KRAUSE (1948: 244 n. 1; ref. to DT 5.9) suggests – it may refer to the "Śrī's avatāra as Rukmiṇī"[7] (another

[3] The term "ascription" with reference to language and, particularly, to meaning has been used e.g. in OETKE (2012).

[4] The issue of the stabilisation of meanings has been undertaken by Stuart HALL (1997: 21) with reference to codes. Stéphane ROBERT (2008: 55–92) considers the "principles of variation and stabilisation" of the meanings of words.

[5] The *Guṇavacana* has been edited and translated by Charlotte KRAUSE (1948: 236–252). I base my references and analysis on this particular edition. Cf. MALVANIA and SONI (2007: 183).

[6] KRAUSE (1948) renders the term *guṇa* as "Qualities" (DT 5.7, 10, 12, 15, 20, 22, pp. 237–240; trans. pp. 243, 244, 245, 246, 247–248), '"Qualities"' (DT 5.1, 4, p. 236; trans. pp. 241, 242), "virtue" (DT 5.19, p. 239; trans. p. 247, lit. *guṇavatī*, "virtuous").

[7] E.g. *śrīr āśriteṣu vinayâbhyudayaḥ suteṣu*
buddhir nayeṣu ripu-vāsa-gṛheṣu tejaḥ | (DT 5.2ab); after KRAUSE (1948: 236; 241–242): "wealth".
avaśyaṁ kartavyaḥ śriyam abhilaṣatā pakṣa-pāṭo guṇeṣu
prasannāyāṁ tasyāṁ katham iva ca na te lālanīyā bhaveyuḥ | (DT 5.7 ab); after KRAUSE (1948: 237; 243): "Fortune".
na tvêvaṁ tair guru-paribhavaḥ spṛṣṭa-pūrvo yathâyaṁ
śrīs te rājann urasi ramate saty abhāmāsa-patnī | (DT 5.9 cd); after KRAUSE (1948: 237; 244): "Śrī".

word of this kind is *lakṣmī*[8] etc.). Krause (1948: 235) calls this rhetorical device "occasional paranomasia" and emphasises that it was used by the author of the *Dvātriṁśika* in order to enter into polemic with the Vaiśeṣika. In this example, both meanings presupposed and considered simultaneously provide an integral, multidimensional semantic whole.

The confrontation with polisemy of this kind (which is linked to issues such as vagueness and ambiguity)[9] opens up a new field of associations and allows many other questions about the nature of language (in this context, it is primarily about philosophical language and non-philosophical language subjected to philosophical analysis) to be asked, for example: What accounts for its various peculiarities and eccentricities?[10] There are other issues related to this subject: the conditions and limitations of language creation and the evolution of linguistic creativity (through modifying language paradigms, neology etc.), the rules for choosing the meaning of words and complex statements (and therefore a certain arbitrariness), the possibilities and limits of using conventional meaning to reveal the intended content.

The problem of linguistic convention was also raised in Akalaṅka's *Pramāṇa-saṅgraha* (PSa) 7.64 and Siddharṣigaṇin's *Nyāyâvatāra-vivṛti* (NAV, 9/10th cent. ce)[11] 1.8, 4.3–4.4, 29.18, 27.[12] Akalaṅka places his reflections in the context of the scriptures (*pravacana*),[13] Siddharṣigaṇin – in the context of considerations regarding conceptual and non-conceptual cognition (e.g. at what point in the

anyonyâvekṣayā strī bhavati guṇavatī prāyaśo viplutā vā
loka-pratyakṣam etat kṣiti-viṣamatayā cañcalā śrīr yathâsīt | (DT 5.19 ab); after Krause (1948: 239; 247): "Śrī".

[8] See DT 5.5 and 5.18, trans. "Lakṣmī"; DT 5.6, trans. "Fortune". After Krause (1948: 237, 239; 242–243, 246–247).

[9] Polysemy, vagueness and ambiguity are discussed in this juxtaposition in Dunbar (2001), Grudzińska (2011), Haber and Poesio (2024). A valuable analysis of the problem of polysemy in a broader philosophical context is to be found in Liu (2025) and Odrowąż-Sypniewska (2023).

[10] The phrase "linguistic eccentricities" has been used e.g. in Brock (1988).

[11] The commentary on the Siddhasena Mahāmati's *Nyāyâvatāra* (NV, 8th cent. ce). Dating given according to Balcerowicz (2005–2006: 14 n. 21). Cf. Balcerowicz (2016a: 993–1039).

[12] Balcerowicz (2008: 16–17, 340–341; 32–35, 359–362; 104–105, 449–450; 121–122; 470–471). According to Balcerowicz (2001: 385), "Siddharṣigaṇi explicitly states that to determine the truth-value of an utterance we have to take into account at least the intention of the speaker and the linguistic convention, beside the denoter-denotatum relation." Simultaneously, Balcerowicz (2001: 385) suggests that other "additional factors" are possible, referring to the passages of the NAV and *Syād-vāda-mañjarī*.

[13] The following question is raised in PSa 7.64 (pp. 116–117): *puruṣâtiśayo 'jñeyo vipralambhī kim iṣyate? samāna-pariṇāmârthe saṅketāc chabda-vṛttitaḥ*. "Why are the excellent qualities of a man that cannot be cognised accepted as deceptive? Because of linguistic convention with regard to an object whose modifications are similar, due to the functioning of words."

course of perception and by what means does the recognition of an object occur and the object become associated with a name?); as well as in the light of the Jaina ontology of substance (*dravya*), which is associated with qualities (*guṇa*) and modes (*paryaya*) (see TS 5.38, p. 132), and therefore certain phenomena resulting from the variable configuration of manifestations are still not enough to be associated with linguistic characteristics or description. Siddharṣigaṇin realises that

> […] [certain] momentary or indescribable transient occurrences of a substance are inexpressible, inasmuch as it is impossible to express [them], if there are no means of grasping the linguistic convention [relating them and the linguistic units denoting them] (NAV 29.27).[14]

Reflection on linguistic convention in Jaina philosophy should also be considered against the background of the method of four standpoints (*nikṣepa-vāda*), the method of viewpoints (*naya-vāda*) and the method of the seven-fold modal description (*sapta-bhaṅgī*),[15] because all these methods set the framework for manifold referring to a given object – grasped, ideated and named differently in non-identical situations and contexts. Due to the modes of this diverse framework, the linguistic convention itself takes on a different meaning and scope of application. As Balcerowicz (2001: 379; 2003: 37) underlines, these three approaches are intrinsically linked to the theory of the multidimensionality of reality (*anekânta-vāda*). According to this theory, every object – with a complex structure that comprises substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*) and mode (*paryāya*) (cf. PSā 1.10,[16] TS 5.37–41,[17] etc.), subject to continuous metamorphoses (*pariṇāma*) (TS 5.42[18]) – can be found in an infinite number of relational configurations with other objects, which contributes to infinite possibilities of description.[19] All these interrelated procedures of describing reality, which protect one from falling into the description loop, evince how difficult it can be to reach epistemological and linguistic agreement on any

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[14] NAV 29.27, p. 470 (line 15–16): […] *kṣaṇikâlakṣya-dravya-vivartānāṁ saṅketa-grahaṇôpāyâbhāvenâbhilapitum aśakyatayânabhilāpyatva-*. Balcerowicz's translation in Balcerowicz (2008: 121–122).

[15] See Balcerowicz (2001); Clerbout et al. (2011).

[16] PSā 1.10, p. 10: *ṇatthi viṇā pariṇāmaṁ attho atthaṁ viṇeha pariṇāmo | davvaguṇapajjayattho attho atthittaṇivatto ||*
Sanskrit *chāyā*: *nâsti vinā pariṇāmam artho 'rthaṁ vinêha pariṇāmaḥ | dravya-guṇa-paryaya-stho 'tho 'stitva-nirvṛttaḥ ||*

[17] TS 5.37–41, pp. 131–132: *bandhe 'dhikau pāriṇāmikau | guṇa-paryayavad-dravyam | kālaś ca | so 'nanta-samayaḥ | dravyâśrayā nirguṇā guṇāḥ |*

[18] TS 5.42, p. 134: *tad-bhāvaḥ pariṇāmaḥ |*

[19] A significant elucidation of the complexity of the structure of reality and the relationships within it, together with outlining the problematic nature of its description, is provided by Balcerowicz (2016b: 569–573).

object. Since Prabhācandra does not consider the relation between these methods and linguistic convention in the passage in question – although he refers to the method of viewpoints followed by the juxtaposition of *naya-sapta-bhaṅgī* and *pramāṇa-sapta-bhaṅgī* elsewhere (PKM 676.5–684.15)[20] – the emphasis in this paper is placed solely on the issues raised therein. In Prabhācandra's analysis, reflection on the scriptural authority leads to ontological cogitation on the realm of objects and its relation to language.

2. Conventional *versus* natural

Convention connotes arbitrary and methodical procedures of determining ways to approach knowledge and is often contrasted with the natural character of cognitive processes, but in Māṇikyanandin's and Prabhācandra's perspective, linguistic convention is associated with a term referring to the inherent potentiality of a word, a sentence or an expression.[21]

Prabhācandra's reference to linguistic convention, and starting point of reflection on it, occurs in the commentary on Māṇikyanandin's *Parīkṣâmukha* 3.100–101 (PKM 427.25–26, 428.5):

> Words, etc., are the causes of apprehension (*pratipatti*) of the real thing (*vastu*), by virtue of linguistic convention (*saṅketa-vaśa*) [associated with] inherent semantic power (*sahaja-yogyatā*). Like, for example, [the sentence]: "[The Mountain] Meru, etc., exists."[22]

Māṇikyanandin introduces in PĀ 3.100 the term *yogyatā* ("power", "capability"), of which an additional element of description is the adjective *sahaja* ("inherent", "innate"). The subject of the co-occurrence of this power – preceded by the same adjective – and linguistic convention is taken up, except Prabhācandra and Anantavīrya (another *Parīkṣâmukha* commentator from 11th cent. CE, author

[20] Māṇikyanandin does not address this issue, concentrating on epistemological aspects (i.e. the cognitive criteria).

[21] Y. J. Padmarajiah (1963: 356, fn. 3) writes on the co-presence of these two factors.

[22] PĀ 3.100–101: *sahaja-yogyatā-saṅketa-vaśād dhi śabdâdayaḥ vastu-pratipatti-hetavaḥ || yathā merv-ādayaḥ santi* || Most of the translations are mine, except for those where another author is credited. In Glinicka (2020: 128), I translated this sūtra in the following way: "words [etc.] are the causes of the cognition of things by means of linguistic convention in the presence of innate semantic fitness". Finally, I have decided to render *yogyatā* as "semantic power" after Balcerowicz and Potter (2013: 165). The term *yogyatā* itself, used without reference to the issue of meaning, appears in PKM 14.11–16.10, where there is a longer and more complex argument concerning the power or capability in the context of the contact (*sannikarṣa*) between a sense (*indriya*) and an object (*artha*) which – as the basis for the emergence of perception – has been referred to in *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.4: *indriyârtha-sannikarṣôtpannaṁ jñānam avyapadeśyam avyabhicāri vyavasāyâtmakaṁ pratyakṣam* (Thakur 1997: 10). "Perception is cognition which arises from the contact between the sense organ and the object, [that is] not to be verbalised, [that is] unerring, [and the one] whose nature is [cognitive] decision." Trans. *vyavasāya* after Balcerowicz (2008: 30–31, 36–37).

of the *Parīkṣâmukha-laghu-vṛtti*, PĀLV), by Vādidevasūri in the *Syād-vāda-ratnâkara* (SRK 701.19–715.20 = *tṛtīya pariccheda*), an autocommentary on the *Pramāṇa-naya-tattvâlokālaṅkāra* (PNTĀA 4.11[23]). Vādidevasūri defines the term *yogyatā* as "the power that demonstrates the meaning of a word" (*śabdasyârtha-pratipādana-śakti*), which is a synonym to the term *sāmarthya* in PNTĀA 4.11, and he adds that it is a power of the same kind as "the power of making known the object of cognition by cognition" (*jñānasya jñeya-jñāpana-śakti*) (SRK 701.21–22). In the case of *saṁketa*, which is according to Vādidevasūri an equivalent expression to *samaya*, the word is the cause (*kāraṇa*) of, i.e. the basis (*nibandhana*) for, the knowledge (*bodha*) of the meaning (*artha*) of a word, i.e., the understanding (*avagama*) of what is to be expressed (*abhidheya*) (SRK 701.22–23). These definitional agreements are accompanied by a lengthy analysis regarding i.e. cause and effect relationships and other aspects of meaning.

Before going on to discuss Prabhācandra's position expressed in the PKM, it is worth emphasising that the problem of the relation between a word and its object – as well as a word and its meaning – forms part of a longer argument in the field of philosophical reflection on language in the NKC. In that treatise, Prabhācandra develops, among other things, the same aspects that he presents in a more condensed – and less systematic – form in the PKM. Although the elements of the theory of meaning are numerous, the most representative passage, in the light of this paper, is NKC 538.12–555.6, a commentary on LT 26,[24] in which he addresses the same as in PKM 427.22–431.9 issue of linguistic convention (he uses both terms *saṁketa* and *samaya*) associated with inherent semantic power (NKC 538.12–541.5). In attempting to describe the nature of the co-occurrence or concomitance of linguistic convention and inherent semantic power, Prabhācandra applies the phrase *saṁketa-saciva-yogyatā*, which means "power associated with linguistic convention" (NKC 539.1); then he moves on to the question of the statement made by an authoritative person (*āpta-vacana*) (NKC 541.6–542.16); the ability of a word to illuminate the real thing (√*prakāś*) (NKC 542.17–543.5); the issue of negating cognition (*bādhaka-pratyaya*) (NKC 543.6–8); considering a word as a cognitive criterion[25] (*pramāṇa*) (NKC 543.9–15); the nature of the relationship between a word and its object (NKC 543.16–547.1); the role of human being in the process of conventionalisation (NKC 547.2–548.5). Prabhācandra stops longer at the hypothetical assumption that the relationship between a word and its object could be permanent and

[23] Commentary on PNTĀA 4.11: *svābhāvika-sāmarthya-samayābhyām artha-bodha-nibandhanaṁ śabda iti* || "A word is the basis of the understanding of meaning in agreement with natural capacity".

[24] LT 26, p. 9: *pramāṇaṁ śrutam artheṣu siddhaṁ dvīpântarâdiṣu | anāśvāsaṁ na kurvīran kvacit tad-vyabhicārataḥ* ||

[25] I render the term *pramāṇa* after Piotr Balcerowicz, who explains his choice in detail in Balcerowicz (2008: 139–144 n. 4).

considers: What would be this permanent component (a word, an object, or both)? Other related issues are also considered (NKC 548.6–555.6). Some phrases or sentences from the NKC overlap in formulation with phrases or sentences from the PKM, and sometimes the same idea is expressed in a slightly different way.[26]

At the beginning of his commentary to PĀ 3.100–101 – pointing out the question behind Māṇikyanandin's *sūtra* – Prabhācandra verbalises the opponent's doubt: Since the relationship (*sambandha*) between words (*śabda*)[27] and signified (denoted) objects (*artha*)[28] has not been proven, how can a word, including that spoken by an authoritative person (*āpta-praṇīta*), create knowledge with regard to an object (*arthe jñānaṃ kuryād*)? And just after quoting verse PĀ 3.100, he explains:

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[26] The following sentences illustrate this convergence: NKC 538.13–14: *yogyatā hi śabdârthayoḥ pratipādya-pratipādaka-śaktiḥ, jñāna-jñeyayor jñāpya-jñāpaka-śaktivat*, and PKM 428.1–2: *sahajā svābhāvikī yogyatā śabdârthayoḥ pratipādya-pratipādaka-śaktiḥ jñāna-jñeyayor jñāpya-jñāpaka-śaktivat*; NKC 538.18: *yogyatāto 'nyasya kārya-kāraṇa-bhāvâdi-pratibandhasya tatra tat-pratiniyama-hetor asaṁbhavāt*, and PKM 428.2–3: *na hi tatrâpy ato yogyatāto 'nyaḥ kārya-kāraṇa-bhāvâdiḥ sambandhostîty uktam*.

[27] I decided to render *śabda* as "word" to convey the relationship between a single numerically defined thing and a word, although this term may be rendered as: "speech element" (e.g. Balcerowicz 2008: 1), "sound" (Monier-Williams 2005: 1052) etc.

[28] The term *artha* is a term that is ambiguous and broad in meaning (it may mean "object," "meaning," "sense," "notion" etc. after Monier-Williams 2005: 90–91). This was noticed, among others, by Patrick McAllister (2020: 83), who, in his translation of Ratnakīrti's *Apoha-siddhi*, chooses "referent" as an optimal rendition of the term *artha*, justifying his choice with the following words: "Here *artha* shall be translated as 'referent', with the intention of expressing the object that words refer to. By not translating this *artha* as 'meaning', the suggestion that it might correspond to 'sense' in a rigorously philosophical (Fregean) interpretation can be avoided." (McAllister 2020: 83). Piotr Balcerowicz, in his synopsis of the content of the PKM in Balcerowicz and Potter (2013: 85–211), also inteprets this relation as the relation between language and objects, when he summarises the beginning of the PKM's section, which is the subject of this article: "Words etc. are the causes of the cognition of things due to linguistic convention […] in the presence of inherent semantic power which concerns the relation of the signified thing and the signifying instrument (the word) that obtains between objects and the speech. An example is: 'Like the sentence: Mount Meru etc. exists'." (Balcerowicz and Potter 2013: 165). In Jainism, strong emphasis is laid on a particular theory of reality (*anekânta-vāda*), infinitely complex, and therefore never fully cognisable (except for the position of the omniscient, who in their state does not need tools to describe it), which serves as a starting point for further consideration. This is reflected, for example, in the distinction between *artha* and *artha-mātra* (PKM 429.11–13), which fits well with the Jaina theory of reality (by identifying a single referential core amidst the transformations of all elements of reality). Anantavīrya, referring to the same PĀ's *sūtra*, asks significant question: "How to ascertain the object [that is] the real thing on the basis of the word […]?" (*śabdāt kathaṁ vastu-bhūtârthâvagama* […], PĀLV 232.4–5), which demonstrates the significance of discovering a valid way of cognising the objects of reality in the Jaina thought. When I consider it appropriate, I render *artha* (expressed in relation to *śabda*) as "signified object" after Balcerowicz and Potter (2013: 165) or "object" .

> Inherent (*sahajā*) [means] arising from one's own nature (*svābhāvikī*), semantic power (*yogyatā*) is the power (*śakti*) [of the relation] between that which demonstrates (*pratipādaka*) and that to be demonstrated (*pratipādya*), [i.e. between] the word (*śabda*) and the signified object (*artha*), as in the case of the power (*śakti*) [of the relation] between that which cognises (*jñāpaka*) and that to be cognised (*jñāpya*), [i.e. between] cognition (*jñāna*) (~ subject of cognition) and the object of cognition (*jñeya*). For it has not been stated that the relation (*bhāva*) between cause (*kāraṇa*) and effect (*kārya*), etc., that is different (*anya*) from this semantic power (*yogyatā*), is the relation also in this [case]. When there is this [semantic power], there is linguistic convention (*saṅketa*). For by virtue of it, words, etc. are evidently the causes of the apprehension (*pratipatti*) of the real thing (*vastu*).[29]

In this passage, Prabhācandra explains that this relationship between that which demonstrates and that to be demonstrated should be distinguished from other types of relation, such as the cause and effect relationship. Elsewhere in his treatise, in the polemic with the Sāṁkhya, he attempts to understand the relationship between cause and the effect:

> […] for the distinction (*vibhāga*) between the cause and the effect is seen (*dṛṣṭa*), for instance, a lump of clay (*mṛt-piṇḍa*) is the cause, a pot (*ghaṭa*) is the effect. And this pot, whose nature (*svabhāva*) is distinct (*vibhakta*) from the lump of clay, has as its aim holding (*dhāraṇā*) and carrying (*haraṇa*) wine (*madya*) and water (*udaka*), etc., but not the lump of clay.[30]

When Prabhācandra writes about the distinct nature of the pot, he clearly means the difference in functioning – compared to a lump of clay – stemming from the distinctiveness in form that the same substance has taken on in the two stages of various modes. On the other hand, the relation between that which demonstrates and that to be demonstrated applies to situations when there is no identity of the substratum (cognitive v. non-cognitive domains), but the two separate substances meet in one event of cognition.

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[29] PKM 428.1–4: *sahajā svābhāvikī yogyatā śabdârthayoḥ pratipādya-pratipādaka-śaktiḥ jñāna-jñeyayor jñāpya-jñāpaka-śaktivat. na hi tatrâpy ato yogyatāto 'nyaḥ kārya-kāraṇa-bhāvâdiḥ sambandho 'stîty uktam. tasyāṁ satyāṁ saṅketaḥ. tad-vaśād dhi sphuṭaṁ śabdâdayo vastu-pratipatti-hetavaḥ*. In the case of the PKM, I occasionally suggest slightly different punctuation.

[30] PKM 289.5–7: […] *dṛṣṭo hi kārya-kāraṇayor vibhāgaḥ, yathā mṛt-piṇḍaḥ kāraṇaṁ ghaṭaḥ kāryam. sa ca mṛt-piṇḍād vibhakta-svabhāvo ghaṭo madyôdakâdi-dhāraṇā-haraṇa-samartho na tu mṛt-piṇḍaḥ.*

3. Permanent *versus* Impermanent

A large part of Prabhācandra's commentary to PĀ 3.101, that is PKM 427.22–431.9, is taken up by considering whether the inherent semantic power is permanent (*nitya*) or impermanent (*anitya*), which is important for capturing its very nature, and thus approaching the essence of linguistic convention itself. The analysis focuses on the response to the philosophy of the Mīmāṁsā, as was in the case of Anantavīrya's commentary on Māṇikyanandin's *sūtra* (PĀLV 3.95, pp. 203–232) immediately preceding the two *sūtra*s I discuss in this paper:

> Scriptural testimony (*āgama*) is the cognition of an object (*artha-jñāna*) that is caused by the statement (*vacana*), etc., of an authoritative person (*āpta*).[31]

It was the Mīmāṁsakas who brought together the question of the eternity of the Vedas – understood as tradition without beginning (*anādi*) – and therefore, the uninterruptibility of this kind of verbal transmission, and the concept that the Vedas are authorless, i.e. of non-human origin (*apauruṣeya*) (e.g. MS 1.1.27–32, *adhikaraṇa* VIII, pp. 19–21;[32] MŚV 2.46, p. 59; 2.61–120, pp. 65–82[33]).[34] Akalaṅka refers to this idea in several places in the *Nyāya-viniścaya* (e.g. NV 3.405, 436, 469) – he explores the specific nature of "the manifestation of the speech that is not made by a man" (*vācām apauruṣeyīṇām āvirbhāva*) in the context of cognitive criteria (*pramāṇa*), agreement or assent (*samaya*, *saṁvāda*), right cognition (*samyag-jñāna*), etc.[35] Anantavīrya's argumentation and line of

[31] PĀLV 3.95 = PKM 3.99 (391.1): *āpta-vacanâdi-nibandhanam artha-jñānam āgamaḥ* |

[32] MS 1.1.27–32, pp. 19–21: *vedāṁś caike sannikarṣaṁ puruṣâkhyāḥ* || *anitya-darśanāc ca* || *uktan tu śabda-pūrvatvam* || *ākhyā pravacanāt* || *paran tu śruti-sāmānya-mātram* || *kṛte vā viniyogaḥ syāt karmaṇaḥ sambandhāt* ||

[33] Olle Qvarnström (2006: 90–91) realises that Kumārila, the author of the *Mīmāṁsā-śloka-vārttika*, opposed the concept of the non-human origin of the Vedas to the concept of, as Qvarnström puts it, the "personal omniscience of the Buddha", which drew criticism from Jainas, for example from Haribhadrasūri, the author of the *Śāstra-vārtā-samuccaya* and the *Sarva-jña-siddhi* (Qvarnström 2006: 91).

[34] Francis X. D'Sa (1980) examines this problem in the philosophy of Śabara (105–110) and Kumārila (192–200). As far as Kumārila is concerned, this problem "can be studied from his statements on three distinct but not disconnected topics: i) the rejection of an omniscient person, ii) the unacceptability of a creator for this world, and ii[i]) the beginningless tradition of Veda-recitation-and-learning" (D'Sa 1980: 192). "[i]" added by the author of this article. This problem – seen from the perspective of Śabara, Prabhākara and Kumārila – has been discussed in Jha (1964: 144–153, 178).

[35] NV 3.405, p. 84: *āgamaḥ pauruṣeyaḥ syāt pramāṇam atilaukikam* |
saṁvādâsaṁbhavâbhāvāt samayâvipra-lambhanaḥ ||
NV 3.436–437a, p. 88: *vācām apauruṣeyīṇām āvirbhāvo na yujyate* |
samyag-jñānâṅkuśaḥ satyaḥ puruṣârthâbhidhāyakaḥ ||
atrâpauruṣeyatvaṁ jātu siddham anarthakam |
NV 3.469, p. 92: *apauruṣeya-vṛttânto 'py ata eva virudhyate* |
pratyakṣam añjasā spaṣṭam anyac chrutam aviplavam ||

reasoning on this aspect is even more detailed than Prabhācandra's. He considers several clearly defined issues: is it possible for the Vedas to be of non-human origin as "eternal current" (*pravāha-nityatva*)[36] (PĀLV pp. 209, 219)?; what kind of units of sound (speech)[37] or sets of sounds does this statement – which suggests permanence inherent in the transmission of the Vedas – refer to (*varṇa*, "phonemes"; *śabda-mātra*, "mere words"; or *viśiṣta*[-*śabda*], "specific words") (PĀLV pp. 206, 219)?; and who would be the potential audience of the Vedas (PĀLV pp. 220–228)? The author of the PĀLV emphasises that this tradition must not be uninterrupted due to the inadequacies of knowledge transfer pathways (including the shortcomings of the human mind, the intentional alteration of the true content of the Vedas).[38]

The idea of the omniscient person (*sarva-jñā*), compared to a person who has partial knowledge (*kiñci-jñā*), occupies a special place in these considerations. The person who has partial knowledge remains in relation to "unfathomable" (*duradhigama*) objects, and thus can conceive (√*kḷp*) them falsely (PĀLV pp. 220–228). In Mīmāṁsā philosophy, these considerations on the permanent nature of the Vedas are related to the conviction about the permanent nature and "ubiquitousness"[39] of words (e.g. MS 1.1.6–23, *adhikaraṇa* IV, pp. 9–16); as well as whether the word that is used in the Vedas, and its relation to the respective object, is different from the same-sounding word used in ordinary speech (MS 1.3.30, *adhikaraṇa* X(a), p. 91).

Prabhācandra formulates an objection made by the opponent (i.e. the Mīmāṁsakas) that it cannot be stated that this inherent semantic power is impermanent, because it would lead to the undesired consequence (*prasaṅga*) in the form of *regressus ad infinitum* (*anavasthā*). The reasoning, which indicates these undesired consequences, is as follows: The relation between the word "pot" (*ghaṭa*) and the signified object – which relation is not yet well-known (*aprasiddha*) – is established (*kriyate*) by means of another word, such as the demonstrative pronoun "this [one]" (*ayam*), etc., whose relation (*sambandha*) with its object is well-known (*prasiddha*). Furthermore, the relation between that word "this [one]" and its object would have to be established – in a certain

[36] Deshpande (2022) translates the term *pravāha-nityatva* as "fluid persistence". Freschi and Kataoka (2012: 40 fn. 105) explain: "Permanence (*nityatva*) can be of two types: *kūṭasthanityatva* and *pravāhanityatva*. The former is the permanence of something which never changes throughout times, like a mountain (if compared to the life-span of a human being). The latter is the permanence of something which changes continuously, but whose later stages are identical with the former ones, like a river, which is always the same notwithstanding the fact that the drops of water composing it change at every second."

[37] The term "unit of speech" after https://www.britannica.com/topic/phoneme; https://www.britannica.com/science/phonology (accessed 19 December 2025).

[38] Handiqui (1968: 388) refers to the position of Anantavīrya.

[39] The word "ubiquitous" with reference to the nature of a word in Mīmāṁsā philosophy has been used by Mookerjee (1978: 37).

previous referential context – by means of yet another (*anya*) word, whose relation with its object – at the time of establishing this particular relationship is well-known; and again the relation between that word and its object would have to be established by yet another word, whose relation with its object is well-known, and so on, *ad infinitum* (PKM 428.7–10).[40]

On the other hand, one cannot claim that this semantic relation is permanent in an absolute sense. Prabhācandra gives as an example ostension (*hasta-saṁjñā*) and implicitly other forms of non-verbal signs (*ādi*), such as gesticulation, where the relation between the sign and its own object (*svârtha*) is impermanent, but these signs are able to lead to the apprehension (*pratipatti*) of the object (*artha*). This is a clear response to Mīmāṁsā statement – expressed in his own words – that if this inherent semantic power were permanent, the fact that words are the causes of the apprehension of the real thing (*vastu*) due to the permanent relation has been proved (PKM 428.10–12). Therefore, no relation that is dependent on signs of this kind (*tad-āśrita-sambandha*) can be permanent. Prabhācandra illustrates this constatation with the following comparison: When there is the absence (*vyapāya*) of a fragment (*bhitti*), the picture or ornament (*citra*) that is dependent on it cannot fail to disappear (√*vyape*) (PKM 428.12–16).[41] The author of the PKM realises that even if the relation between a word or a sign and the signified object (the object it denotes) is impermanent, it does not mean that the fact of this denotation occurring is not seen:

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[40] PKM 428.7–10: *nanu câsau sahaja-yogyatā 'nityā, nityā vā? na tāvad anityā, anavasthā-prasaṅgāt – yena hi prasiddha-sambandhena "ayam" ity-ādinā śabdenâprasiddha-sambandhasya ghaṭâdeḥ śabdasya sambandhaḥ kriyate tasyâpy anyena prasiddha-sambandhena sambandhas tasyâpy anyenêti.* "And now [an objection is made by the opponent:] 'Is this inherent semantic power impermanent or permanent? To begin with, it is not impermanent, because [otherwise] it would lead to the unwanted consequence in the form of *regressus ad infinitum*; for the relation between the word, such as "pot", etc., whose relation [with its object] is not [yet] well-known, [and its object], is established by means of [another] word, such as "this [one]", etc., whose relation [with its object] is [already] well-known; [and] the relation between that [word and its object would] also [be established] by means of another [word], whose relation [with its object] is well-known; [and the relation between] that [word and its object would] also [be established] by [yet] another [word, whose relation with its object is well-known, and so on *ad infinitum*]."'

[41] PKM 428.10–16: […] *hasta-saṁjñâdi-sambandhavac chabdârtha-sambandhasyânityatve 'py artha-pratipatti-hetutva-sambhavāt. na khalu hasta-saṁjñâdīnāṁ svârthena sambandho nityaḥ, teṣām anityatve tad-āśrita-sambandhasya nityatva-virodhāt. na hi bhitti-vyapāye tad-āśritaṁ citraṁ na vyapaitîty abhidhātuṁ śakyam.* "[…] even if the relation between the word and the signified object is impermanent, as in the case of the relation of denotation through ostension, etc., the fact that words are the causes of the apprehension of the object is possible. Indeed, the relation between denotation through ostension, etc., and one's own object is not permanent, because since these [types of relation as denotation through ostension etc.] are impermanent, the relation that is dependent on them, is contrary to permanence. For the following is not possible to be carried out: When there is the absence of a fragment, the picture that is dependent on it does not disappear."

> And it is not the case that when [the relation] is impermanent, the fact – that this [sign, like ostension, etc.,] is the cause (*hetu*) of the apprehension of an object – is not seen (*dṛṣṭa*), because [otherwise] it would be contrary (*virodha*) to perception (*pratyakṣa*).[42]

Therefore, temporal gestures and other non-verbal signs, such as various forms of visual or auditory expression, can also be the source of cognition, due to their unique architecture, since their efficacy (i.e. access to this moment of cognising the object) is immediate and apparent to the seer or listener.

Prabhācandra continues to explore the possibility that this relation is impermanent, referring to the association between being in relationship and being dependent on something:

> Even if the relation between the word (sign) (*śabda*) and the signified object (*artha*) is such (*evam*) (i.e. impermanent, as in the case of ostension, etc.), the following should be said: For, to begin with, this [relation] is not independent (*anāśrita*), because what is not dependent, cannot be relation, like the sky (*nabha*).[43]

Having made this assumption, the Jaina thinker investigates further the nature of that on which the relation is dependent (whether it is permanent or impermanent) and considers what might have such a nature:

> If [this relation is] dependent (*āśrita*), is what it depends on (*tad-āśraya*) [1] permanent (*nitya*) or [2] impermanent (*anitya*)? [1] If it is permanent, what is [then] that which you call "that on which it is dependent", which is intended to be permanent? [a] A universal (*jāti*, lit. "class") or [b] an individual (*vyakti*)? [a'] First of all, it is not a universal, because this [universal], when it is the object [signified by] the word, is demonstrated (*pratipādana*) as the absence (*abhāva*) of activity (*pravṛti*), etc., and because [it] is to be rejected (*nirākariṣyamāṇa*). [b'] However, when an individual (*vyakti*) is that on which this [relation] is dependent (*āśraya*), how can there be permanence [to this relation] on account of its being non-accepted [by others] (*anabhyupagama*) and thus on account of the absence of cognition (*pratīti*)? [2] And when that on which it is dependent is impermanent, the impermanence (*anityatva*) of the relation with reference to its disappearance is proved (*siddha*), as in the case of a picture, when its fragment disappears.[44]

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42 PKM 428.17–18: *na cânityatve 'syârtha-pratipatti-hetutvaṁ na dṛṣṭam, pratyakṣa-virodhāt*.

43 PKM 428.18–19: *evaṁ śabdârtha-sambandhe 'py etad vācyam – sa hi na tāvad anāśritaḥ, nabhovad anāśritasya sambandhatvâsambhavāt.*

44 PKM 428.19–429.3: *āśritaś cet kiṁ tad-āśrayo nityaḥ, anityo vā?* [1] *nityaś cet, ko 'yaṁ nityatvenâbhipretas tad-āśrayo nāma?* [a] *jātiḥ,* [b] *vyaktir vā?* [a'] *na tāvaj jātiḥ, tasyāḥ śabdârthatve pravṛty-ādy-abhāva-pratipādanāt, nirākariṣyamāṇatvāc ca.* [b'] *vyaktes tu tad-*

In an attempt to consider these possibilities, Prabhācandra quotes Bhartṛhari's *Vākya-padīya* 1.23,[45] which states the permanence of the relation between the word or the sign and the signified object (meaning), and stresses that what this *kārikā* conveys is inappropriate, because – as he explains –

> in no way is it possible for the word, whose object is distinguished (*viśiṣṭa*) by the modifications of the same [property] (*sadṛśa-pariṇāma*), and for the relation that is dependent on that [which is impermanent] to be permanent[46] (PKM 429.3–9).

A further argument for the fact that the real thing, which is permanent, cannot exist is that such an existing thing is capable of the efficient action (*artha-kriyā*) (cf. PKM 69.25), when the efficient action is considered to be executed either consecutively (*krama*) or simultanously (*yaugapad*),[47] which is contradictory to permanence (PKM 421.8–10, cf. 498.22–499.19).

Referring to the fault (*dūṣaṇa*) of *regressus ad infinitum* – postulated by the opponent (i.e. Mīmāṁsakas) – which he had already addressed (i.e. the infinite sequence of relations between the word and the signified object established by the other word whose relation with the object is well-known), Prabhācandra states that this objection is flawed (*ayukta*)…

> because the word, such as "this [one]" (*ayam*), etc., is in a well-known relation with the object itself (*artha-mātra*) in an uninterrupted succession (*anādi-paramparā*), since the word "pot" (*ghaṭa*), etc., whose relation with [its object] is comprehended (*avagata*) by virtue of this [word "this one", etc.], is caused by linguistic convention.[48]

The Jaina understanding of the relation between words and their objects stems from the assumptions of their specific ontology, according to which an object undergoes modifications successively; it is not fixed and well-defined, therefore, the characteristics of such an object – as well as the characteristics of objects remaining in relations with other objects of equally complex nature – cannot be unchangeable or predictable.

āśrayatve kathaṁ nityatvam anabhyupagamāt tathā pratīty-abhāvāc ca. [2] *anityatve ca tad-āśrayatvasya siddhaṁ tad-vyapāye sambandhasyânityatvaṁ bhitti-vyapāye citravat.*

45 *Vākya-padīya* 1.23 (Rau 1977: 39): *nityāḥ śabdârtha-saṁbandhās tatrâmnātā maharṣibhiḥ | sūtrāṇāṁ sānu-tantrāṇāṁ bhāṣyāṇāṁ ca praṇetṛbhiḥ ||*

46 PKM 429.8–9: *sadṛśa-pariṇāma-viśiṣṭasyârthasya śabdasya tad-āśrita-sambandhasya caîkāntato nityatvâsambhavāt.*

47 PKM 429.9–10: *sarvathā nityasya vastunaḥ krama-yaugapadyābhyām artha-kriyā-sambhavato 'sattvaṁ câśva-viṣāṇavat.* "And non-existence of the permanent thing is completely due to the possibility of the efficient action [when efficient action is considered to be executed either] consecutively or simultaneously, like in the case of a horse's horn."

48 PKM 429.11–13: […] *"ayam" ity-ādeḥ śabdasyânādi-paramparāto 'rtha-mātre prasiddha-sambandhatvāt, tenâvagata-sambandhasya ghaṭâdi-śabdasya saṅketa-karaṇāt*.

Prabhācandra proves that a similar (*tulya*) error (*doṣa*) of falling into *regressus infinitum* can be levelled at the proponents of the theory of the permanent relation (*nitya-sambandha-vādin*, i.e. the Mīmāṁsaka) themselves and their line of reasoning:

> For the manifestation (*abhivyakti*) of the relation between a word whose relation [with its object] is not manifest (*anabhivyakta*) [and its object] should be done by means of [another] word whose relation [with its object] is [already] manifest (*abhivyakta*); [and the manifestation of the relation] between that [particular word and its object should] also [be done] by [yet] another (*anya*) [word] whose relation [with its object] is [already] manifest. If, on the other hand, the manifestation of the relation between a certain (*kaścid*) [word and its object is] exclusively out of itself (*svatas*) (i.e. out of this very word), this [manifestation of the relation] between another (*apara*) [word and its object] is also exclusively such (*tathā*), therefore, making linguistic convention (*saṅketa-kriyā*) is useless (*vyarthā*). And when there is the acceptance (*abhyupagama*) of the difference (*vibhāga*) between words (i.e. expressed in that the relation between the word "this one", etc., and the object is out of itself and the relation between the word "pot", etc., and the object is established by the other word such as "this one", etc.[49]), enough with the concept of the permanence of relation.[50]

Finally, Prabhācandra comes to the conclusion:

> Furthermore, if [this semantic power] were conjectured to be [permanent], there would be the apprehension (*pratipatti*) of the object also for the linguistic convention that has not been grasped (*agṛhīta-saṅketa*). The [following statement] is also not correct: "The linguistic convention manifests (*vyañjaka*) this [permanent word]", because it is unjustified to assume that what is permanent is that which is manifested (*vyaṅgya*). For the real thing (*vastu*) that is permanent, if it is manifested (*vyakta*), only then is it manifested, moreover, also [if] it is unmanifested (*avyakta*), only then is it unmanifested, because this [real thing] has [one] undivided nature (*abhinna-svabhāva*). And the consequence (*anuṣaṅga*) in the form of a fault (*doṣa*) rejected (*nikṣipta*) by [the proponents of] the position (*pakṣa*) that is in favour of the manifestation of the word is indeed similar (*tulya*) also in this case (*atra*).[51]

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[49] See Shastri's remark no. 24, p. 429 ("*ayam ity-ādi-śabdasya svata eva sambandhaḥ. ghaṭâdi-śabdasya tu ayam ity-ādinā śabdenâpareṇa sambandha iti*").

[50] PKM 429.14–19: […] *anabhivyakta-sambandhasya hi śabdasyâbhivyakta-sambandhena śabdena sambandhâbhivyaktiḥ karttavyā, tasyâpy anyenâbhivyakta-sambandhenêti. yadi punaḥ kasyacit svata eva sambandhâbhivyaktiḥ, aparasyâpi sā tathaîvâstîti saṅketa-kriyā vyarthā. śabda-vibhāgâbhyupagame câlaṁ sambandhasya nityatva-kalpanayā.*

[51] PKM 429.19–23: *kalpane câgṛhīta-saṅketasyâpy ato 'rtha-pratipattiḥ syāt. saṅketas tasya*

From the interpretation that Prabhācandra has made in the above passage – which can also be attributed to the NKC (cf. NKC 539.5–8) – it follows that for him linguistic convention is taken through grasping that which can be understood as the learning process: this intuition can be applied to linking the term *saṁketa* with the verb √*grah* ("to grasp, gain, learn"). In light of such a reading, linguistic convention may be understood as an accessible intermediary means that lead to a greater understanding of words as well as their clusters and combinations, and consequently and gradually bringing one closer to the truth. A similar approach is represented by Anantavīrya.[52] In this very passage, Prabhācandra makes an important ontological observation that the real thing has undivided nature, and it cannot undergo the process of transformation that is manifestation (it can be either manifested, or unmanifested).

4. The restrictions of linguistic convention and the role of human beings

In the subsequent part of his argument (PKM 430.1–431.2), Prabhācandra raises numerous further questions regarding the restrictions of linguistic convention, such as: Would linguistic convention be restricted (*niyata*) – by virtue of permanent relation – to one signified object (*ekârtha*) or many signified objects (*anekârtha*)? (PKM 430.4–5) If it is restricted to one signified object, does it occur with one part of it (*eka-deśena*) or with its entirety (*sarvâtmanā*)? (PKM 430.5–6). If it occurs with one part of it, is this one place restricted to one imagined object (*abhimataîkârtha*) or one unimagined object (*anabhimataîkârtha*)? (PKM 430.7–8). If this one part is restricted to one unimagined object, how is it possible that the lack of cognitive validity (*aprāmāṇya*) is not characterised as falsity (*mithyātva*)? If this one part is restricted to one imagined object, then it should be decided whether it is restricted on account of a human being (*puruṣa*) or on account of its own nature (*svabhāva*) (PKM 430.8–10). Later, Prabhācandra asks: Is this relation between the word and the signified object sensory (*aindriya*), extrasensory (*atīndriya*), or inferred by inference (*anumāna-gamya*)? (PKM 430.15–18). This argument leads gradually to the lengthy disquisition aimed at refuting the Buddhist theory of semantic exclusion and the *sphoṭa* theory (PKM 431.3–458.4).

In answering these questions and considering various alternatives, Prabhācandra looks at the role of the human being in the overall process of attributing names to objects, suggesting that the Mīmāṁsakas have rejected the possibility that man is the creator of the Vedas due to his "blindness [caused by] affection"

vyañjakaḥ, ity apy ayuktam, nityasya vyaṅgyatvâyogāt. nityaṁ hi vastu yadi vyaktaṁ vyaktam eva, athâvyaktam apy avyaktam eva, abhinna-svabhāvatvāt tasya. śabdâbhivyakti-pakṣa-nikṣipta-doṣânuṣaṅgaś câtrâpi tulya eva.

[52] Prof. Piotr Balcerowicz drew my attention to the fact that according to Anantavīrya linguistic convention can be learned.

(*rāgâdy-andhatva*) (PKM 430.11–13). The Jaina author emphasises strongly that linguistic convention has its undeniable foundation in the human being (*puruṣâśraya*) (PKM 430.1; cf. NKC 547.2–548.5). From the PKM one can learn that a man is capable of efficient action (*artha-kriyârthin*) (PKM 25.18–20), in the case of which "the root of activity" (*pravṛtti-mūlā*) is "obtaining an admirable object" (*upādeyârtha-prāpti*) in accordance with "human will" (*puruṣêcchā*) (PKM 26.3–4; cf. 402.20). In other places in the text, Prabhācandra considers human nature during the discussion with the Mīmāṁsā philosophy on the non-human origin (*apauruṣeya*) of the Vedas (PKM 391.7–403.13) and during the investigation into the concept of the omniscient person (*sarva-jñā*) (e.g. PKM 247.13–265.9). In the context of linguistic convention, human beings impose various restrictions – resulting from the limitations of their mind – on the understanding and interpretation of words and signs, one of which is volition.

5. Conclusions

Prabhācandra's reflection on linguistic convention in the form in which it was presented in both texts, PKM and NKC – along with the entire spectrum of references to (and the critique of) the achievements of representatives of other Indian philosophical schools – is a part of a broader discussion on language and meaning. Although the NKC presents a more complex argument, the analysis contained in the PKM 427.22–431.9 can still be considered valuable. It is structured in a layered way and takes the form of numerous alternatives examined in order to determine the exact nature of inherent semantic power that is the power of the relation between words (and signs) and objects signified by them. By analysing these alternatives, Prabhācandra seems to reject what he considers to be erroneous ways of describing this relation, moving closer to the desired characterisation of it. Recognising the permanence of this relation, or its momentary or intermittent nature, that would indicate how persistent is the attribution of objects to the signs and names by which we communicate, allows one to assess how coherent and consistent our image of reality is, and how much it is subject to transformation under the influence of various factors.

Analysis of Prabhācandra's treatise does not indicate that he is interested in the question of whether the formulas for the use of language can show a higher or lower degree of conventionalisation (resulting from the process of the clarification of meaning). Ultimately, Prabhācandra defines the nature of the inherent semantic power in accordance with the theory of the multidimensionality of reality (*anekânta-vāda*) – it is neither completely impermanent, because it expresses itself by the uninterrupted succession, nor completely permanent, because the object to which the words and other description units refer does not have a once and for all defined and established form; and because the changing form requires the constant repositioning of a given object in new frames of

references. Any modification in this kind of relation implies an alternation of the whole context, and it forces flexibility to adapt understanding to the variability of the relations of this kind (linguistic convention being renewed or built anew). Moreover, the relation between words (signs) and signified objects cannot be dependent in the absolute sense on anything permanent or impermanent. Prabhācandra proves that both the worldly (*laukika*) word and the Vedic (*vaidika*) one – which demonstrate the object by virtue of linguistic convention associated with an inherent semantic power (these both factors are inseparable) – should be accepted, because, as he stresses, no other "explanation" (*prakāra*) is plausible. All these factors and restrictions have an impact upon the possibility of the apprehension of the real thing and the assessment of the truthfulness of its cognition.

Linguistic convention is a complex phenomenon consisting of the procedure of meaning reconciliation coexisting with a natural manifestation of meanings by the language itself and – as something that people learn, acquire and pass on to others – it is a factor that stabilises the meaning of words, sentences and larger expressions. At the same time, in a sense, it evolves along with the transformation of the relationships between objects endowed with efficacy. It is, above all, reliant on man, who being both perfect (as potentially omniscient) and imperfect (as bound by the ties of *karman*) plays a limited but indispensable role – because without him, this agreement on how to relate to objects in the world would not have come into being at all, and concurrently because of them, it is restricted in different ways – and simultaneously it is dependent on the context as capable of being grasped and interpreted under certain conditions. An authoritative person determines how an object is referred to and described, recognising the connection between the object and the word in a defined framework (e.g. the ultimate structure of reality in the perspective of the paramount goal of human life) and attempting to grasp the ontology of objects (sources and principles of its existence), as well as their epistemology and eschatology.

Funding

The article is funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, under the project "The Theory of Meaning in the Jaina Philosophy of Language (11th–17th c. CE)," no. 2022/44/C/HS1/00097.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their valuable comments. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Małgorzata Wielińska-Soltwedel and Prof. Ołena Łucyszyna for their substantive comments, significant corrections and insight. I am solely responsible for how I responded to the suggestions.

Abbreviations

DT	Siddhasena Divākara, *Dvātriṁśika*. See: Krause (1948).
LT	Akalaṅka Bhaṭṭa, *Laghīyas-traya*. See: (1) Śāstri (1939), (2) Śāstri (1991).
MS	Jaimini, *Mīmāṁsā-sūtra*. See: Jha (1979).
MŚV	Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Mīmāṁsā-śloka-vārttika.* See: Tailaṅga (1898–1899).
NA	Siddhasena Mahāmati, *Nyāyâvatāra*. See: Balcerowicz (2008).
NAV	Siddharṣigaṇin, *Nyāyâvatāra-vivṛti*. See: Balcerowicz (2008).
NKC	Prabhācandra-sūri, *Nyāya-kumuda-candra*. See: Śāstri (1991).
NV	Akalaṅka Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāya-viniścaya*. See: Śāstri (1939).
PĀ	Māṇikyanandin, *Parīkṣâmukha*. See: Jain (1964) and Shastri (1990).
PĀLV	Anantavīrya, *Parīkṣâmukha-laghu-vṛtti*. See: Jain (1964).
PKM	Prabhācandra, *Prameya-kamala-mārtaṇḍa*. See: Shastri (1990).
PNTĀA	Vādidevasūri: *Pramāṇa-naya-tattvâlokālaṅkāra*. See: Motīlāl (1926–1930).
PSa	Akalaṅka Bhaṭṭa, *Pramāṇa-saṅgraha*. See: Śāstri (1939).
PSā	Kundakunda, *Pravacana-sāra*. See: Upadhye (1964).
SRK	Vādidevasūri, *Syād-vāda-ratnâkāra*. See: Motīlāl (1926–1930).
TS	Umāsvāmi, *Tattvârtha-sūtra*. See: Sastri (1944).

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The Unfolding Logic of the Pali *Anatta-Lakkhaṇa Sutta*, and the Issue of Control

Peter Harvey

Abstract: This article explores how the phases of the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* relate to each other and to those it is said to have been taught to – ascetics who had just become stream-enterers after being taught the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta.* It is shown not to be about explicitly teaching that "there is no Self" but about inducing a radical letting go of all things taken as "mine", "what I am" and "my Self". As its hearers become arahats, the overcoming of the ingrained but vague "I am" conceit is a key aim of the sutta. The article critiques certain points in Ferenc Ruzsa's analysis of the sutta, especially his argument that the Pali version of it must be inauthentic due to its claim that the *khandha*s are non-Self because they cannot be controlled at will, while what is Self could be controlled at will.

Keywords: *anattā* meaning, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the "I am" conceit, Self, asceticism, *dukkha*, "inner controller", the nature of control, *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta*, *Khemaka Sutta*, *Cūḷa-saccaka Sutta*

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An earlier issue of this journal contained an article by Ferenc Ruzsa, "The Buddha's no-self argument: A drastic emendation" (Ruzsa 2024). Ruzsa's article develops a careful, interesting and in-itself logical analysis. However, it includes some questionable assumptions, in terms of how the *anattā* teaching operates within the Pali suttas and related texts, and on the type of control and its lack that are relevant to the *anattā* teaching. Hence I wish, in this article, to develop a contrasting interpretation that I see as making better sense of the material discussed in Ruzsa's article.

The teachings in the Pali *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59/SN III 66–68) are said in the Vinaya (Vin I 13–14) to have been given by the Buddha to five ascetics after they heard and practised according to his first teaching, the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta*.[1] On hearing the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa* teachings, all five then became arahats.

The key ingredients of these teachings are:[2]

1. "Form, bhikkhus, is non-self (*rūpam bhikkhave anattā*). Now were this form self, it would not tend to affliction (*rūpañ ca bhikkhave attā abhavissa nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya*). It would be possible to have it of form, 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus (*labbhetha ca rūpe Evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahosīti*)'. But inasmuch as form is non-self, therefore it tends to affliction (*Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave rūpam anattā tasmā rūpam ābādhāya saṃvattati*), and it is not possible to have it of form (*na ca labbhati rūpe*): 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'" After saying this of form (*rūpa*): material form, particularly of one's body, the same is then repeated for the other four *khandha*s, "aggregates" or, perhaps better "bundles", of which a person is comprised: feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness.
2. Then it is said for each of the *khandha*s, in turn, "x", "What do you think, bhikkhus, is x permanent or impermanent?" – "Impermanent, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent painful or pleasant?" – "Painful, venerable sir." – "Is what is impermanent, painful, and of a nature to change (*Yam panāniccaṃ dukkham vipariṇāmadhammaṃ*) fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self (*Etam mama eso ham asmi eso me attā ti*)'?" – "No, venerable sir." – "Therefore, bhikkhus, any kind of x whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all x should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self (*netam mama neso ham asmi na me so attā ti*).'"

1 SN 56.11/SN V 420–424, Vin I 10–12.

2 Mostly following the translation of Bodhi (2000: 901–903), but with small changes.

3. "Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences weary disenchantment (*nibbindati*) with form... feeling … perception … volitional activities … consciousness. Wearily disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is liberated. In the liberated there comes the knowledge: 'Liberated' (*Nibbindaṃ virajjati virāgā vimuccati vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti*). He understands: 'Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.'"
4. That is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those bhikkhus delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the bhikkhus of the group of five were liberated from the intoxicating inclinations by non-clinging (*anupādāya āsavehi cittāni vimucciṃsū ti*).

Here we see that the elements of this teaching are:

1. Anything that is "self" (in some sense) would not involve affliction/ illness – in effect, *dukkha*[3] – and it would always be controllable so as be just as one wants it to be. But none of the five *khandha*s is "self", so each of them does involve affliction and is not controllable so as be just as one wants it to be; that is, as the *khandha*s each involve affliction etc., they cannot be "self".
2. Each *khandha* is impermanent, hence *dukkha*, painful; what is impermanent, *dukkha* and of a nature to change is not fit to be regarded as: "This is mine, this I am, this is my self." Moreover, *all* instances of them should be seen as: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self."
3. and 4. Hence there should be *nibbidā*, a weary disenchantment with them all – Bodhi (2000: 902) translates it as a "revulsion" towards them – and non-attached dispassion towards them, hence attainment of liberation from all deep-seated defilements.[4]

So here we see the Buddha teaching the five people he had previously practised harsh asceticism with, and as a result of hearing this teaching these five all become arahats. In the suttas, people only become arahats if they have previously become at least stream-enterers, as the Vinaya version of the passage describes them as having done in saying that they attained the dhamma-eye (Vin I 12–13), for one who attains the dhamma-eye is said to end the first three of the ten spiritual fetters (AN I 243), just as it is said that a stream-enterer does.[5]

[3] AN V 110 talks of afflictions (*ābādhā*) of the body as various kinds of disease, and even hunger and thirst. Ud 4 describes Mahākassapa as "afflicted, subjected to *dukkha*, severely sick (*ābādhiko hoti dukkhito bāḷagilāno*)".

[4] One of the *āsava*s being the intoxicating inclination to *bhava*: *being* something, having a certain identity.

[5] MN I 34, MN I 141, DN I 156, DN II 200.

The first argument in the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* (from now on: ALS) includes a focus on "affliction", i.e., *dukkha*, which is the key focus of the previous *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta* (from now on: DCPS). The second argument focusses on the impermanence, then *dukkha* and changeable nature of each *khandha*, then their being not mine/I/self, leading on to weary disenchantment with all kinds of each of the *khandha*s, and arahatship. The DCPS focused on various aspects of life, summarised as the five "bundles of grasping-fuel" (*upādāna-kkhandha*s) being what is *dukkha*, painful, and how this arises conditioned by craving. The ALS begins with the affliction/*dukkha* that comes from not being able to fully control the five naturally changing *khandha*s, which is linked to them being non-self. As the DCPS says, an aspect of what is *dukkha* is "not to get what one wants" (SN V 421).

The *anattā* teachings is not as such a direct denial of Self

While Ruzsa's article uses both "no-self" and "nonself" as the meaning of the term *anattā*, the first is wrong, and the second needs analysing as to its connotations. *Anattā* is a noun, applied in apposition to a broad range of things that are non-self. It is not, as such, a doctrine that there is "no self", though when it is said *sabbe dhammā anattā*, "everything is non-self",[6] this clearly *implies* that there is no such thing as "self" in a certain sense (permanent, essential, which one may render as "Self").

Ruzsa, though, sees that in the "second *anātman* teaching" of the ALS, the Buddha is "not arguing against a psychological concept of self – he is rejecting a very specific metaphysical idea […] The idea attacked is that there is an eternal Self in us and it is essentially joyful" (Ruzsa 2024: 219), and "the *anātman* doctrine, is central to the Buddha's teaching. This is basically the only clear metaphysical tenet he had" (Ruzsa 2024: 223). *Anattā* as a teaching that "there is no Self" may have become a "metaphysical tenet" in later Buddhism, but that is not how it functions in the suttas. The ALS does not work by refuting a religio-philosophical teaching of a Self, but is a practical strategy to induce a letting go of clinging to anything as supposedly what one truly and essentially is (or has – see below). This can be seen by what the conclusion of the sutta is: any example of any of the five *khandha*s should be seen as "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self." This wise seeing then leads a person to experience *nibbidā* – a weary, disenchanted revulsion with each *khandha*, so as to become liberated. The conclusion is not "So you see, there is no Self."[7]

6 E.g. Dhp 279, MN I 228, AN I 287.

7 Cf. Wynne (2010: 112) says that the ALS "appears more like an enquiry into phenomenal identity rather than a direct negation of the Upaniṣadic *ātman*".

Indeed at SN IV 400–401, the Buddha does not accept either that "s/Self exists" or "s/Self does not exist".[8] MN I 8 sees the wrong views "there is for me a s/Self" and "there is not for me a s/Self" as *both* arising from unmethodical speculation on whether or what one was in the past, whether or what one will be in the future, or thinking, as to the present, "Now am I? Now what am I?" That is, preoccupation with "I" even leads to the idea that "I" do not exist. Thus, if the Buddha had said "s/Self does not exist", he would have been legitimising such preoccupation. He thus did not see it as a true statement, or choose to say that "s/Self exists" is *false*.[9]

As I put it in Harvey (1995: 43–45):[10]

> (2.2) The "tone" of the not-Self teaching is seen in numerous passages, indicating that anything subject to the "three marks" (being impermanent, *dukkha* and not-Self) should not be grasped at, but be dropped like hot bricks. […]
>
> (2.3) […] Given that a Self is not asserted, nor explicitly denied, and that seeing things as not-Self is so important, it becomes apparent that the concept of "Self", and the associated deep-rooted feeling of "I am", are being utilized for a spiritual end. The not-Self teaching can in fact be seen as a brilliant device – a skilful means – which uses a deep-seated human aspiration, ultimately *illusory*, to overcome the negative products of such an illusion. Identification, whether conscious or unconscious, with something as "what I truly and permanently am" is a source of attachment; such attachment leads to frustration and a sense of loss when what one identifies with changes and becomes other than one desires. The deep-rooted idea of "Self," though, is not to be attacked, but used as a measuring-rod against which all phenomena should be compared: so as to see them as falling short of the perfections implied in the idea of Self. This is to be done through a rigorous experiential examination: as each possible candidate is examined, but is seen to be not-Self, falling short of the ideal, the intended result is that one should let go of any attachment for such a thing. The aim of seeing things as not-Self, then, is to make one see that this, this, this... *everything* one grasps at, due to identifying it as "Self" or "I", is *not* Self, such that one should *let go* of it, which letting go brings *nibbāna*. Contemplation of phenomena as impermanent,

[8] As discussed at Harvey (1995: 38–40).

[9] Wynne (2010: 139–142) argues that the reason the suttas do not deny the existence of "the self" is that existence (and hence its opposite, non-existence) are problematised in these texts, being the products of conceptualisation. A passage relevant here, not cited by Wynne, is from the *Kaccāyanagotta Sutta* (SN12.15, at SN II 17): in the flow of conditions, there is neither "existence" (*atthitā*), as things constantly cease, nor "non-existence" (*natthitā*), as new but related things constantly arise.

[10] Though I then used "not-Self" instead of "non-Self" as the translation for *anattā*, and used "personality-factor" as the loose translation for *khandha*.

> *dukkha* and not-Self is a way of undermining craving for and clinging to such phenomena. By seeing things "as they really are", attachment and its attendant suffering will be undermined.
>
> (2.4) One uses "not-Self", then, as a reason to let go of things, not to "prove" that there is no Self. There is no need to give some philosophical denial of "Self"; the idea simply withers away, or evaporates in the light of knowledge, when it is seen that the concept does not [validly] apply to *anything* at all […]. A philosophical denial is just a view, a theory, which may be agreed with or not. It does not get one actually to examine all the things that one really *does* identify with, consciously or unconsciously, as Self or I. This examination, in a calm, meditative context, is what the "not-Self" teaching aims at. It is not so much a thing to be thought about as to be *done*, applied to actual experience, so that the meditator actually *sees* that "*all dhamma*s are not-Self", "Self is not being apprehended" [MN I 138]. A mere philosophical denial does not encourage this, and may actually mean that a person sees no need for it.[11] One can, then, perhaps see the Self idea as fulfilling a role akin to a rocket which boosts a payload into space, against the force of gravity. It provides the force to drive the mind out of the "gravity field" of attachment to the personality-factors. Having done so, it then "falls away and is burnt up", as itself a baseless concept, which arises as part of the unsatisfactory personality-factors.

What I refer to as the "deep-seated human aspiration, ultimately *illusory*" of Self has various expressions: not just in the Upaniṣadic idea of *Ātman* and the Jain and Ājīvaka ideas of *Jīva* (Life-principle), but also an idea implicit in more everyday ideas of self/I/me, and it is seen to be gradually shed along the path to enlightenment.

Ruzsa (2024: 219) says that "In all his no-self arguments the Buddha (in contrast to some later Buddhists) never addresses the question of whether the common-sense or psychological notion of 'I' or 'self' is useful, realistic and correct or not." In fact, the suttas often talk of developing a more wholesome self (see Harvey 1995: 54–63), while seeing self, in the sense of "oneself" as containing no Self-essence, albeit recognising that the idea of such an essence was explicitly part of several religious systems at that time, and also implicitly there in all unenlightened people.

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[11] This can be seen as a kind of pragmatic reason for not denying Self. Wynne (2010: 140) questions whether this is enough of a reason if many passages indicate that such a denial is appropriate. He thus argues that the reason is that the texts see "existence" and "non-existence" as problematic concepts (see note 9 above). Be that as it may, asserting such a denial would move people's attention away from critically examining the process of, and focusses of, taking things as I/me/mine.

Anattā is not just about Self, but also about anything related to or possessed by "it"

As regards the five ascetics that the Buddha taught, it is unclear what their religious orientation was. The five were Koṇḍañña (Aññā-Koṇḍañña), Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma and Assaji (Vin I 12–13). Koṇḍañña was the first to attain the dhamma-eye, and Assaji was the last of the five (Vin I 13). The commentaries report that Koṇḍañña

> was the youngest of eight brahmins who read the signs on Gotama's body on the day of the name-giving festival. The four others were children of four of the other brahmins. They had been advised by their fathers to watch Gotama's career and to join him should he renounce the world. This they did, and all five joined in the austerities of Gotama at Uruvelā.[12]

That they came from brahmin backgrounds does not mean that they still adhered to Brahmanical ideas. Their harsh asceticism could be a sign of their being influenced by Jain and/or Ājīvaka (Skt. Ājīvikas) ideas. In any case, once they had attained the dhamma-eye, they would have ended the first three of the spiritual fetters (*saṃyojana*) of the ten that an arahat is finally without. One of the first three fetters, overcome at stream-entry, is *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (Skt. *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), "personal-existence view" or "Self-identity view", which is to mistakenly take any of the five *khandha*s[13] as being Self, Self as possessing it, as being within Self, or having Self within it (e.g. *rūpaṃ attato samanupassati. rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ, attani vā rūpaṃ, rūpasmiṃ vā attānaṃ*).[14] This clearly implies that seeing something as non-Self negates all of these views.

The first three fetters, including *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*,[15] are said to be intoxicating inclinations (*āsava*s) "abandoned by seeing" by wise attention to the four realities for the noble ones (*ariya-sacca*s), i.e. by seeing "This is *dukkha*", "This is the origin of *dukkha*", "This is the cessation of *dukkha*", and "This is the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*" (MN I 9). One can see this as accomplished by experiential "right view" (MN I 48). This implies that the five ascetics, after hearing the DCPS and being transformed by it, had shed any *views* about any of the *khandha*s being Self or related to Self, i.e. any conscious or implicit beliefs on this. But they still had some residual attachment to the *khandha*s and anything that might be related to them, and needed to become disenchanted with all this. They did not still need to be persuaded of some *view* about Self.

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12 DPPN II 104, based on Ja I 57, 67, 81, 82; Dhp-a I 87.

13 Which is what the term *sakkāya* refers to (MN I 299).

14 MN I 300. SN III 3 adds, "He lives obsessed by the notions, 'I am form, form is mine (*Ahaṃ rūpam mama rūpan ti pariyuṭṭhaṭṭhāyī hoti*).'"

15 The other two being vacillating doubt (*vicikicchā*), and clinging to rules and vows (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) (e.g. DN III 216).

Ruzsa assumes that if something is non-Self, this just means it is not-Self, not a Self. However, it means more than this, as is clear from "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self." While the term *anattā* only occurs in the first part of the argument in the ALS, not the second, it does occur in parallels to this, such as at SN III 22: "form is *dukkha*. What is *dukkha* is non-Self. What is non-Self should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self.'" So what is *anattā* is not just not Self but also not mine. This is in line with the non-acceptance of the types of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*. Indeed, some passages emphasise that each of the *khandha*s is "not yours" (*na tumhākaṃ*, SN III 33–34, MN I 140–141).

SN IV 82 and 129 also say that the senses (including mind), their objects and related forms of consciousness (i.e. the eighteen sensory *dhātu*s) are "not yours" as they are "neither Self nor what belongs to Self (*attā vā attaniyaṃ vā*)". So what is *anattā* is neither of these.[16] At MN I 138, it is accepted that Self and what belongs to Self are a pair: if there were one, there would be the other (*Attani vā bhikkhave sati attaniyam-me ti assāti … Attaniye vā bhikkhave sati attā me ti assāti*). But as neither "are apprehended as true and established (*saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne*), then this standpoint for views, namely, 'That which is the Self is the world; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not of a nature to change; I shall endure as long as eternity' – would it not be an utterly and completely foolish teaching?"

We also see at SN IV 54: "'The world is empty, the world is empty (*suñño loko, suñño loko*)' is the saying, revered sir, how far does this saying go?" – "Since, Ānanda, the world is empty of Self or what belongs to Self (*suññam attena vā attaniyena vā*), therefore is it said that the world is empty", this being explained in terms of the eighteen sensory *dhātu*s being empty of these. And at Sn 1119, Mogharāja is taught that to see the world as empty is to uproot *attānudiṭṭhi*, the view of Self, which sounds like *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, and indeed it is treated in a parallel way to it at SN III 185–186: each arises by clinging to the *khandha*s.

This all aligns with *anattā* not just being about things not being Self; and by implication, when ALS says "Now were this form Self", "Self" can be seen to implicitly include what "belongs" to it (on which issue, see further below, pp. 67–68). Of course this kind of blurring is often found in how people speak about themselves, e.g. "You hurt my feelings, you hurt me." And of course the suttas see Self-views as only concerning the *khandha*s: all who "consider Self in various ways consider it as all these five *khandha*s, or as a certain one of these

[16] In a series of suttas, it is said that one should abandon desire (*chanda*) for whatever is impermanent, or *dukkha*, or non-Self, or what does not belong to Self (*anattaniya*, SN III 76–78). While this distinguishes not-Self from what does not belong to Self, it is done in separate suttas, and can be seen as a way of ensuring complete coverage. Of course what is impermanent is also *dukkha.*

(*pañcupādānakkhandhe samanupassanti etesaṃ vā aññataraṃ*)" (SN III 46). So, all the *khandha*s are seen as Self or, for example consciousness is regarded as Self and the other *khandhas* as belonging to it.

The "I am" conceit[17]

Now let us focus more on the second of the arguments in the ALS. The ALS was given to stream-enterers who had overcome *views* about Self, so what further change in them was it aimed at inducing? Beyond the first three fetters, including Self-identity view, the next two fetters are desire for sense-pleasures (*kāmacchanda*) and ill-will (*vyāpāda*). With the first three fetters, these make up the five lower fetters,[18] which are ended by the non-returner.[19] Further, there are the five higher fetters, which are then ended by the arahat: attachment to the "form" aspect of the jhānic level (*rūpa-rāga*), attachment to phenomena of the formless level, restlessness, conceit (*māna*), and ignorance.[20] Of these last seven fetters, 1–4 relate to either attachment or aversion, restlessness is an example of the hard-to-control-ness of the mind, and ignorance is ingrained delusion, a lack of full direct knowing of *dukkha*, its origin, its cessation, and the way to this (SN II 4).

"Conceit" is "the 'I am' conceit" (*asmi-māna*) (MN I 139, DN III 273), which is said to be eliminated by a developed perception of impermanence by contemplating, for each *khandha*, what it is, its origin (*samudaya*) and its passing away (*atthagama*) (SN III 155–157). The "I am" conceit is sometimes expressed in terms of thinking "I am superior (*Seyyoham asmī ti*)" or "I am equal (*Sadiso ham asmī ti*)" or "I am inferior (*Hīnohamasmī ti*)" (SN IV 88). These three conceits, in the form of self-centred comparisons, come from not understanding the *khandha*s as impermanent, *dukkha*, of a nature to change, and not mine, I or Self; seeing them thus leads to weary disenchantment with them (SN III 48–49). The second part of the ALS, with its parallel wording, is clearly concerned with this.

It is also said that to have true understanding of any type of any of the five *khandha*s is to see it as:

> "This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my Self." That's how to know and see so that there's no I-making, mine-making, or underlying tendency to conceit for this consciousness endowed body and all external stimuli

[17] Wynne (2010: 114) sees this as "self-consciousness", in the sense of "a person's awareness of his own 'identity,' 'acts' and 'thoughts'", which "reflexive awareness" has affective and cognitive aspects.

[18] DN III 234, AN IV 459, SN V 61.

[19] MN I 34, MN I 141–143, DN I 156, DN II 200.

[20] DN III 234, AN IV 460, SN V 61.

> (*saviññāṇake kāye bahiddhā ca sabba-nimittesu ahaṃ-kāra-mamaṃ-kāra-mānānusayā na hontīti*).[21]

Conceit is said to come from *clinging* (*upādāya*) to the *khandha*s (SN III 105), and it is due to clinging that one considers "This is mine, this I am, this is my Self" (SN III 181–182). A person who is beyond vacillating doubt (*vicikicchā*) (i.e. a stream-enterer) sees all examples of the *khandha*s as "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self"; the arahat sees this too, but more fully, and so overcomes all clinging (MN I 234–235). It is also said that one escapes each *khandha* (and hence its *dukkha*) by abandoning desire and attachment (*chanda-rāga*) for it (MN III 18); indeed to go beyond the state of a non-returner, one must abandon attachment (*rāga*) for any of the *khandha*s (SN III 56–58).

The "I am" conceit is more deep-seated and lingering than *views* about what is "Self" or related to it. This is made clear in the *Khemaka Sutta* (SN 22.89/ SN III 126–132). In this, the ill monk Khemaka, when asked by other monks if he "regards anything as Self or as belonging to Self among the five bundles of grasping-fuel (*Imesu āyasmā Khemako pañcasu upādāna-kkhandhesu kiñci attānaṃ vā attaniyaṃ vā samanupassasīti*)" (SN III 127,27–29), says that he does not. The other monks then think he must be an arahat, but he says that he is not. He explains:

> Friends, "I am" has not yet vanished in me as regards these five bundles of grasping-fuel, but I do not regard (any of them) as "This I am" (*Api ca me āvuso pañcasu upādāna-kkhandhesu asmīti avigataṃ*[22] *ayam aham asmīti ca na samanupassāmīti*).
>
> (SN III 128,33–35)

Khemaka is then asked "when you speak of this 'I am' – what is it that you speak of as 'I am'? (*Yam etam āvuso Khemaka asmīti vadesi kim etam asmī ti vadesi*). Do you speak of form as 'I am', do you speak of 'I am' as apart from form? (*Rūpam asmīti vadesi aññatra rūpā asmīti vadesi*)", and the same as regards feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness (SN III 129,21–23). That is, whether, as regards this "I am", he speaks of it as *being* form, or as *apart from* it. Khemaka explains that he did not see "I am" as being any of the *khandha*s or as apart from them, and repeats, "Friends, 'I am' has not yet vanished in me as regards these five bundles of grasping-fuel, but I do not regard (any of them) as 'This I am.'" He then gives a simile: one would not say

[21] MN III 19, SN III 80.

[22] *avigataṃ* is Bodhi's correction from *adhigatam* in the Pali Text Society edition (Bodhi 2000: 1083, n. 176). On a parallel passage (SN III 46–47) Bodhi (2000: 1057, n. 61) gives his reason for preferring *avigataṃ* to *adhigataṃ*: at AN III 292, "the affirmative occurs, *asmi ti kho me vigataṃ*". This is in a passage which says that "It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that when 'I am' has been discarded, and one does not regard [anything as] 'This I am', the dart of doubt and bewilderment could still obsess one's mind."

of a flower that its scent belongs to a specific part of it, petals, stalk or pistils; it belongs to the whole flower (SN III 130). He goes on to explain that, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters (which would make him or her a non-returner),

> in relation to the five bundles of grasping-fuel, there lingers in him a residual conceit "I am", a desire "I am", an underlying tendency "I am" that has not yet been uprooted (*upādāna-kkhandhesu anusahagato Asmīti māno Asmī ti chando Asmīti anusayo asamūhato*). Sometime later he contemplates the rise and fall (*udayabbayānupassī*) in the bundles of grasping-fuel: "Such is form, such is its origin (*samudayo*), such is its passing away (*atthagamo*); … [and likewise for feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness]."
>
> (SN III 130–131)

which leads to the uprooting of the "I am" conceit, desire and latent tendency. He likens this to how a laundryman might clean a soiled garment, but leave a residual smell of cleansing agents on it. This would dissipate once the garment's owner put it in a sweet-smelling casket (SN III 131). His hearers delighted in his explanation, and both they and Khemaka became arahats. Presumably, the parallel to getting rid of the residual smell of cleansing agents would be the repeated contemplation of the impermanent rising and falling away of instances of the *khandha*s, which would dissipate the sense of "I am" still lingering around even "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self (*netam mama neso ham asmi na me so attā ti*)", as in ALS and elsewhere.

So:

- Khemaka is a non-returner, who does not see any of the five *khandha*s as "Self or belonging to Self", so as to not see any of them as "This I am", yet he still has a general sense of "I am" in relation to them.[23]
- He neither sees this "I am" as being any of the *khandha*s, or as apart from them, like a flower's scent is not the scent of any specific part of it, while not being separate from the flower as a whole.

[23] Wynne (2010: 120), in discussing the *Khemaka Sutta*, says: "Khemaka knows that he should be detached from the conditioned experience of the five aggregates… But he is unable to do so because of his automatic tendency to identify with conditioned experience in the form of the notion 'I am.' Although Khemaka knows what he should know, according to Buddhist doctrine, and so does not intentionally identify with the five aggregates, his identification with them runs deeper in the form of a sense of subjectivity (*asmī ti*) that takes them as its locus." But ending the "I am" conceit is not primarily about further cognitive non-identification with the *khandha*s. It is not about transcending any *view* on the *khandha*s – this has already been done – but about an affective change: letting go of a vague, subtle and deeply ingrained sense of I/me/mine, which is like a smell hanging around them while not being about them as such. Its focus is not on "*this* is what I am".

- So while Khemaka lacks the Self-identity view that is abandoned at stream-entry, he still has the fetter that is the conceit "I am", that only an arahat has ended.
- But arahatship comes when there is contemplation of the impermanent origin and passing away, the rise and fall, of the five *khandha*s, which ends the "residual conceit 'I am', desire 'I am', underlying tendency 'I am'".

The arahat is a person with no sense of "I am" (except in a purely conventional sense, e.g. "I am Ānanda"[24]), and sees the *khandha*s as non-Self, but not one who holds the view "there is no Self" (or "there is Self").

Conceit and feeling

There are interesting passages which link the sense of "I am" particularly to feeling (*vedanā*), which is of course the immediate condition for craving and then grasping in the list of the twelve *nidāna*s of conditioned arising. SN III 46–47 says that when the mind is "contacted by a feeling born of ignorance-contact (*avijjā-samphassajena ... vedayitena puṭṭhassa*)", there occurs "I am", "This I am (*Ayam aham asmīti*)", "I will be", "I will not be", "I will consist of form", "I will be formless", "I will be percipient", "I will be non-percipient", "I will be neither…". But these do not occur once ignorance is abandoned.

This link to feeling is explored in detail at DN II 66–68 in the *Mahā-nidāna Sutta* (DN 15). Here, three concepts of Self are discussed:

1. "My Self is feeling (*vedanā*)."
2. "No, my Self is not feeling, my Self is without experience (*appaṭisaṃvedano*)."
3. "No, my Self *is* not feeling, nor is it without experience, my Self *feels*, is of a feeling nature (*attā me vediyati, vedanā-dhammo hi me attā*)."

The first of these is refuted as feeling is changing all the time, between being pleasant, unpleasant and neutral, and Self cannot change, or be a mix of changing things. The second is refuted on the grounds that in the complete absence of feeling, there would be no sense of "I am". The third is refuted on the grounds that if all kinds of feeling came to cease, there would be no sense of "This I am (*Ayam aham asmīti*)"; that is, there would be no feeling as the *this* that an "I am" which feels requires to support it.[25]

[24] "No knots exist for one with conceit abandoned […] Though the wise one has transcended the conceived, he might still say 'I speak', he might say, too, 'they speak to me'. Skilful, knowing the world's parlance, he uses such terms as mere expressions" (SN I 14–15).

[25] Wynne (2010: 134) comments: "the third critique points out the problem of hypostasising the inner perceiver into a transcendent entity, whereas the second critique points out the problem

So the sense of "I am" or "This I am" only arises when feeling exists. As they thus depend on feeling, which is itself non-Self, they are themselves non-Self, from the principle mentioned at SN IV 130: "How will the eye, which is arisen from what is non-Self, be Self? (*anatta-sambhūtā bhikkhave cakkhuṃ kuto attā bhavissati*)." So the sense of "I am", an essential aspect of a supposed Self, turns out to actually be non-Self.

Thus:

1. thinking "This I am" is to have a "Self-identity" view: identifying Self with, or relating it to, a specific *khandha*, especially, but not only, feeling.
2. thinking "I am" is a more deep-rooted conceit, more a vague attitude than a conceptualised view, which can exist even after 1) is destroyed, but not once arahatship is attained.

That is, both Self-identity view and then the sense of "I am" evaporate under the light of (cognitive and emotional) knowledge developed on the path to arahatship. An arahat has feeling, but does not misinterpret this so as to hold the conceit that he or she is a permanent, substantial Self which feels sense-inputs from things that are other than Self. For him, feeling is simply observed to arise as a conditioned process. When he considers "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self", he is not alluding to any real Self or I which is not the *khandha*s (i.e. "apart" from them, p. 64) or owner of the *khandha*s. Any *view* of Self is abandoned at stream-entry, and the vague and ingrained sense of "I am" falls away at arahatship.

The issue of "control"

We now put the spotlight on an aspect of ALS's first argument: "Now were this form Self, it would not tend to affliction. It would be possible to have it of form, 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'" Above (p. 62), I argue that "Self" here can be seen to implicitly include "what belongs to Self". Tse-fu Kuan, however, disagrees:

> […] the Buddha's non-Self idea is not just about something not being Self, but also it not being "what pertains/belongs to Self" (*attaniya*). […] Even so, *attā* (Self) and *attaniya* (what belongs to Self) could not refer to the same thing. "What comes under control" may refer to *attaniya*, whereas Self (*attā*) is the "inner controller" […]. According to the above

of individualising the transcendence of conditioned experience. Since notions of a self within conditioned experience or beyond it are both negated, this dual analysis would seem to leave no room for any sort of intrinsic identity."

> discussion, however, the Theravāda tradition seems to have confused *attā* with *attaniya* in their interpretation of Self […].
>
> (Kuan 2009: 162–163)

Yet Anālayo (2015: 16, n. 22) argues against this point, citing the different Self-related views in Self-identity view: a *khandha* is Self, is possessed by it, is contained in it, or contains it. Further, he cites an interesting passage from a Chinese parallel (SĀ 110[26]) to the *Cūḷa-saccaka Sutta*, a Pali sutta which echoes a section of the ALS (see below pp. 71–72):

> [The Buddha] asked again: "What is impermanent, *dukkha* and of a nature to change, would a learned noble disciple herein see it as a self, as distinct from the self [in the sense of being owned by it],[31] as existing [within the self, or the self] as existing [within it]?"[27]

And a later section of SĀ 110 says,

> Aggivessana, I tell my disciples: "Whatever bodily form, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, sublime or repugnant, far or near, it should all be contemplated as it really is as not-self, not distinct from the self [in the sense of being owned by it], as not existing [within the self, nor a self] as existing [within it]."[28]

Be that as it may, Kuan says:

> According to these canonical passages [from Pali ALS and the *Cūḷa-saccaka Sutta*], the supposed "Self" can be interpreted as "something subject to mastery" or "what comes under control" – if something is to be counted as one's Self, it must be subject to one's volitional control. This interpretation of "Self" […] seems to confuse Self (*attā*) with what belongs to Self (*attaniya*) and is contrary to the Brahmanical idea of "Self" (*ātman*) as the "inner controller".
>
> (Kuan 2009: 169)

> It is not because Self is *under control* that it is called the "inner controller", but it is because Self "*controls*" things (perhaps including Self itself) that it deserves the position as the "inner controller". The nature of "Self" is "controlling" rather than "being controlled".
>
> (Kuan 2009: 163)

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26 SĀ 110 at T II 36a28, Anālayo (2015: 70) at T II 35a17 to 37b25.

27 SĀ 110 at T II 36a28, Anālayo (2015: 70). His note 31 says: "[T]he supplementation of '[in the sense of being owned by it]' suggests itself from SĀ 109 at T II 34b20, where the question 'how is form regarded as "distinct from self"?,' 云何見色異我, receives the reply '[by] regarding form as "this is mine"', 見色是我所."

28 SĀ 110 at T II 36c18, as at Anālayo (2015: 74).

The key source for the "inner controller" idea is *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.7.[29] Uddālaka Āruṇi says to Yājñavalkya that he had once asked Patañcala Kāpya: "[...] do you know the inner controller (*antaryāmiṇam*) of this world and the next, as well as of all beings, who controls them from within (*yo'ntaro yamayati*)?" (3.7.1). Kāpya had said he did not. Yājñavalkya then says: "if a man knows […] who that inner controller is – he knows *brahman* […]". He goes on to say (3.7.3): "This self (*ātman*) of yours who is present within but is different from the earth,[30] whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, and who controls the earth from within (*pṛthivīm antaro yamayati*) – he is the inner controller, the immortal (*ātmāntaryāmy amṛtaḥ*)." This is then repeated, replacing each reference to "the earth" with each of a list of items, grouped under three categories (3.7.4–23):

- "with respect to the divine sphere": "the waters", "the fire", "the intermediate region", "the wind", "the sky", "the sun", "the quarters", "the moon and stars", "space", "darkness", "light";
- "with respect to beings": "all beings (*-bhūtam*)";
- "with respect to the body (*ātman*)": "the breath", "speech", "sight", "hearing", "mind", "the skin", "perception (*vijñāne*)", "the semen".

Note here that the *ātman* is seen as the "inner controller" of both things within a person and of aspects of the cosmos, though it is not clear in what sense it "controls" them.

Like Kuan, Ruzsa's article also particularly critiques the part of the ALS non-Self argument that says that *if* something were Self, one could control it so as to be "thus" and "not thus", and also that if it were not-Self, one could *not* so control it. He argues for there having been a fault in textual transmission, and an early misunderstanding, as the Self of Brahminical thought is the "inner controller" (*antaryāmin*), not anything controlled by it. If the ascetics were people who drew on this perspective, then it is a relevant issue to raise. Ruzsa's article's Abstract (2024: 215) says:

> The first part of the Buddha's second sermon, "The Characteristic of No Self", is extremely problematic. It does not fit the cultural context, philosophically it is silly, it does not agree with the Buddha's central doctrines, and it contradicts the second part of the same short text. Moving a single word ("not") up a sentence we get a clear and coherent argument; this must have been the original text. The Chinese version corroborates this.

[29] Here from the Olivelle translation (1996: 41–44), with Sanskrit added from Radhakrishnan (1953: 224–230).

[30] Cf. in the *Khemaka Sutta* (above, p. 64), Khemaka does *not* accept an "I am" which is "apart from" the *khandha*s, i.e. different from them.

Ruzsa hence argues that in the ALS, a *na*/not had got moved, and the original text would have said that what is Self can *not* be controlled, and what is non-Self *can* be controlled:

> The factual premise that I cannot control my *skandha*s is not true, and the supposed rule that my self must be under my control is anything but evident. […] I can control my body – stand up, take a walk etc. […] my cognition by thinking of something else. This is obvious, so probably the idea is that I cannot change my *skandha*s, I can only control their activity. But even that is not true. I can modify my body through diet or exercise, my imprints in therapy or through meditation, my cognition by learning.
>
> (Ruzsa 2024: 220)[31]

However, while *some* control can be exercised over the non-Self *khandha*s (Skt. *skandha*s), this is limited. And like the Buddha before his enlightenment, the five ascetics who heard the DCPS, after they had digested its message, knew that the right way was the middle way, which avoids the "painful, ignoble, unbeneficial" extreme of harsh asceticism (SN V 421). They had been trying to rigorously and minutely *control* themselves, body and mind (MN I 242–246), but once they attained stream-entry, they knew that they could not prevent craving and *dukkha* by trying to do this. So they would implicitly know not to accept the view that there was a genuine "inner controller".

In any case, controlling is an action, and any action brings a small change to the actor, which changes could accumulate in undesired ways. To avoid this, the controller would need to also control itself, by making small adjustments to its state. This may not be included in Upaniṣadic teachings, but it surely makes good sense, and the Buddha was certainly happy to make critiques and adjustments to traditional ideas.

In Buddhist practice, even deep states of meditative stillness, such as the fourth *jhāna* and the state of no-thingness are "conditioned (*abhisaṅkhataṃ*) and volitionally produced (*abhisañcetayitaṃ*). But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation (*nirodha-dhamma*)"[32] – that is, what is conditioned and shaped by volition – itself changing, impermanent – is unstable. These meditative states are very subtle, but still need to depend on subtle volitional support. The Buddha had been taught by Āḷāra Kālāma to attain the state of no-thingness prior to his enlightenment, perhaps as an experience of Self, but he rejected it as it did not lead to "disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace […] to *nibbāna*" (MN I 164–165).

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[31] By "imprints" he means *saññā*s, usually translated as "perceptions", and by "cognition" he means *viññāṇa*, usually translated as "consciousness".

[32] MN I 350–353 and AN V 343–347.

So if there is an "inner controller", seen as "Self", it would still need to ensure it was "thus", in accord with what it wished to be.

The teachings to Saccaka

Ruzsa examines the *Cūḷa-saccaka Sutta* (MN 35, from now on, CSS) as it echoes the "not controllable so not Self" argument of the ALS. He argues that Self as the inner-control*er*, and not something that is control*ed*, means that the text as we have it is a corrupt "inauthentic" one (Ruzsa 2024: 228).

In this sutta, it is said that a person named Saccaka meets the monk Assaji, who was one of those who the Buddha taught his first teaching to, followed by the ALS (Vin I 13–14). Saccaka asks Assaji how the Buddha disciplines (*vineti*) his disciples, and is told that he teaches that each of the *khandha*s is impermanent and is non-Self, and that "all conditioned states are impermanent, everything is non-Self (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā sabbe dhammā anattā*)" (MN I 228). Saccaka is displeased with this teaching and resolves to prove the Buddha wrong. So he goes to him and asks him what he teaches. The Buddha repeats what the monk had said. Saccaka then says that both the growth of plants and strenuous works depend on, and are based on the earth. In the same way, a person has form, or any of the other *khandha*s as Self, and based on each of them he produces good or bad karma (*rūpattā 'yaṃ purisapuggalo, rūpe patiṭṭhāya puññaṃ vā apuññaṃ vā pasavati ...*; MN I 230). He then says that for him, as for most people, "Form is my Self (*rūpam-me attā*), feeling is my Self (*vedanā me attā*), perception is my Self, volitional activities are my Self, consciousness is my Self" (MN I 230). The "as for most people" suggests that he is not stating an exact, philosophical view. The Buddha then asks him, if, like a king who can exercise power in his own realm to execute, fine or banish, Saccaka can "exercise power regarding that form (*vattati te tasmiṃ rūpe vaso*), 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus'", and similarly for the other *khandha*s. That is, are they in his controlling power (MN I 231)? Saccaka refuses to answer twice until he sees he must, and he then admits he has no such power. The Buddha then says that this contradicts him saying that the *khandha*s are his Self. The Buddha then gets him to agree that each *khandha* is impermanent, hence painful, of a nature to change, and hence not mine/I/Self, exactly as in the ALS (MN I 232). He also gets him to understand that if he resorts to what is *dukkha*, and takes it as mine/I/Self, he will not understand and destroy *dukkha* (p. 233). The Buddha says Saccaka is like one who has been looking for heartwood in a plantain tree, which has none. So this sutta uses exactly the "not controllable so not Self" as the ALS.

Before discussing this passage, it is worth reflecting on what kind of religious perspective Saccaka may have had. He is addressed in the sutta by his clan name,

Aggivessana,[33] as is Dīghanakha in the *Dīghanakha Sutta* (MN I 497–501). Dīghanakha tells the Buddha that his view is "Nothing is acceptable to me" probably in the sense that no view can satisfy him, so he was perhaps a sceptic and free-thinker.[34] So Saccaka may have also been something of a sceptic, more in tune with what "most people" think rather than a refined philosophical view. In the *Dīghanakha Sutta*, Dīghanakha becomes a stream-enterer, after giving up his sceptical view, and Sāriputta becomes an arahat.[35]

In the CSS and *Mahā-saccaka Sutta* (MN 35 and 36), Saccaka is described as a "Nigaṇṭha's son" (*Nigaṇṭhaputto*, MN I 227 and 237), which might either mean that he was a disciple of Nigaṇṭha Ñātaputta, the Jain leader, or the son of Jain parents.[36] But at the end of MN 36, this keen debater says that he is delighted at the way the Buddha always remained calm even when criticised, unlike others he had debated with: Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakuddha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, and even Nigaṇṭha Ñātaputta (MN I 250). He did not become a disciple of the Buddha, though, perhaps because he was already *sādhusammato*, "highly honoured" (MN I 227), as were the above six *samaṇa* teachers (DN I 48, SN IV 398). He seems to have been a person with his own convictions.

The six teachers and their beliefs are described in the *Sāmañña-phala Sutta* (at DN I 52–59). Kassapa, Gosāla and to some extent Kaccāyana are seen as Ājīvaka teachers (Basham 1951), Kesakambalin as a materialist, Belaṭṭhiputta as a skeptic, and Ñātaputta as the Jain leader. It is possible that Saccaka was familiar with the teachings of all of these, but did not go along fully with any of them. Kuan points out that neither of the Chinese parallels to the *Mahā-saccaka Sutta* (MN 36) mention these six *samaṇa* teachers, and that

> [i]t is rather doubtful that Saccaka could have engaged all the six "heretical" teachers in debate. This could simply have been composed in a mechanical way just as many other passages in the Canon. This does, though, demonstrate an uncertainty as to how to classify Saccaka's views.
>
> (Kuan 2009: 166, n. 24)

Kuan plausibly argues that Saccaka could not have been a Jain, as shown by his assertion that the first four *khandha*s were Self (Kuan 2009: 165, 166, 169). Taking the *khandha*s as permanent entities is close to some teachings of the

33 DPPN I 14, "Probably the name of a brahmin clan."

34 Bodhi (in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995: 1276, n. 731) argues that he is likely to have been a "radical sceptic of the class satirically characterised at MN 76.30 as 'eel-wrigglers'".

35 Of interest here is that Sāriputta had also been introduced to the dhamma by Assaji (Vin I 39).

36 DPPN II 994–995, on the basis of MN-a. I 450, says that both his parents were Nigaṇṭhas, and skilled debaters. He had four sisters, older than him, who ordained after a discussion with Sāriputta, and became arahats.

Ājīvakas, though (p. 167). The Ājīvaka teacher Gosāla is referred to by Saccaka in MN 36 (MN I 238) as an example of a person who practised fasting and various limitations on modes of eating. He is seen as holding a fatalistic view, regarding beings as being driven by an impersonal destiny through a fixed series of rebirths, with no personal power over this process (DN I 53–54). Kaccāyana believed in seven uncreated, unchanging elements: the "bodies" (*kāya*) of earth, water, fire and wind, plus pleasure, pain and the life-principle (*jīva*), with decapitation just separating some of these elements, not destroying any (DN I 56). Kassapa taught that there are no karmic effects to bad or good actions (DN I 52–53). In the sutta after the ALS (i.e. SN 59.60), Kassapa is said to teach that there is no cause or condition for the defilement or purification of beings (SN III 69), part of the view ascribed to Gosāla (at DN I 53–54). Kuan (2009: 168) points out that taking the seven elements as unchanging would be akin to a claim that the *khandha*s were permanent entities, and "Saccaka is very likely to have been an adherent of the Ājīvikas, despite his title being related to Jainism" (Kuan 2009: 169).

However, Saccaka is unlikely to have been a follower of the ideas of the Ājivaka Gosāla, as the latter taught that one has no power to control anything. If this were so, why would Saccaka be so reluctant to accept that the *khandha*s cannot be controlled to be "thus" and "not thus"?

In any case, Anālayo (2015: 66, n. 22) argues that Saccaka could indeed have been a Jain as, when he says the *khandha*s "are" Self, this is likely to mean that Self is what possesses them (rather than being them, containing them, or being in one of them, as in the other modes of Self-identity view). This is because, argues Anālayo, at MN I 230, Saccaka

> indicates that according to his self-conception a person *rūpe patiṭṭhāya puññaṃ vā apuññaṃ vā pasavati*, "with bodily form as the basis engenders merit and demerit" […]. This suggests Saccaka's view to be that the five aggregates are adjuncts of the self […]. In fact, the use of the expression *patiṭṭhāya* clearly harks back to the simile of the earth, […] so that the aggregates are to the self what the earth is to beings.

Indeed, one of the two Chinese versions of CSS (SĀ 110), says "Aggivessana, whoever is the owner, would he not be totally free to do anything he likes?" (Anālayo 2015: 66). That is, if the *khandha*s belonged to Self, they would be in its full control.

We can now assess the "not controllable so not Self" argument of both the ALS and CSS. There are two Chinese versions of the former sutta, SĀ 33 and SĀ 34.[37] Kuan's translation of part of SĀ 33 (Kuan 2009: 169) is:

[37] SĀ 33 (T II no. 99 pp. 7b–7c) and SĀ 34 (T II no. 99 pp. 7c–8a). Cf. SĀ 86 and 87 and Tsai (2007: 122–123).

> If material form were Self, illness and suffering should not arise in material form, and likewise it should *not* [be possible to] intend with regard to material form thus: "Let it be thus; let it not be thus." Because material form is without Self, illness and suffering arise in material form, and it *is* possible to intend with regard to material form thus: "Let it be thus; let it not be thus."
>
> [The same is said of the other four aggregates. The italicisation has here been added by me to highlight two significant differences from the Pali version].[38]

Ruzsa (2024: 226–227) points out that

> [t]he whole argument seems to match word by word the Pali text, except for the transposition of the word "not". Therefore, we can assume that there were two traditions of the argument, (1b) found in more versions, (1b") surviving only in these two Chinese translations. Since we found (1b) very problematic, while (1b") is quite plausible, we could rest assured that (1b") is original, while (1b) is an early corruption.

Here, 1b is the Pali version of the argument and 1b" is the version which says that what is Self cannot be controlled at will to make it "thus" or "not thus". "An eternal Self would be unchanging. But you can control and change the *skandha*s, so they cannot be the Self, and they cannot be parts of it" (Ruzsa 2024: 223).

Ruzsa (2024: 227 n. 19) sees Kuan's above translation from SĀ 33 as:

> a slight variation on the "lack of control" interpretation that says: "the Self is able to change as it wishes", while Kuan's Chinese would say: "the Self can always be the way that it wishes to be, therefore it is pointless to wish it otherwise". Kuan does notice the difference between the Chinese and Pali versions, but he does not see that the Chinese is the exact opposite of the Pali.

However, the quoted extract from SĀ 33 does not seem a good argument in its context. If one were able to control form and the other *khandha*s as one wished, *why* would they "tend to affliction"? Surely the affliction of *dukkha* comes from the *inability* to have the *khandh*as be as one wishes, this being in tension with craving. Similarly, why would them being controllable, albeit

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[38] Ruzsa (2024: 226) gives the Chinese: "*Ruò sè shì wǒ zhě, […] bù yìng yú sè yù lìng rú shì, bù lìng rú shì. Yī sè wú wǒ gù, […] dé yú sè yù lìng rú shì, bù lìng rú shì.* 若色是我者，[…] 不應於色欲令如是、不令如是。以色無我故，[…] 得於色欲令如是、不令如是。Anālayo's rendering (2014: 4) is very close: 'If bodily form were the self, […] there should not be the wish for bodily form to be in this way and not to be in that way. Because bodily form is not self, […] one gets the wish for bodily form to be in this way and not to be in that way.'"

non-Self, be a reason to be disenchanted with them? The logic of the sutta breaks down. Indeed Tsai's detailed study of Chinese parallels to the Pali ALS (Tsai 2007: 146: English Abstract) says:

> A total of 13 documents are examined on three levels, including 9 versions of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, the explanatory passages on the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* found in the *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra*, as well as 3 versions of the *Cūḷasaccaka Sutta*, since their narrative structure closely resembles that of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*. The results of this multilevel analysis shows that the Pali version is in fact the original teaching of the Buddha, and that the Chinese version of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* in the *Khandhavagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* is corrupt. The final section is an attempt to determine when and how this corruption came about.

The spectrum of types of control

Ruzsa only considers two parts of the spectrum of things which can be seen as "control" of the body or of aspects of the mind. At the end of the spectrum is absolute control:

> We could try to understand "control" in the sense of "absolute and unlimited control", and then the statement [that what is non-Self cannot be controlled] would be true: I cannot fly and I cannot change my body into a squirrel. However, the wording of the text makes it extremely improbable. "It is not possible to have it of the *skandha*s: 'Let them be thus; let them not be thus'." It is categorical denial, the sentence cannot mean that "It is not always possible".
>
> (Ruzsa 2024: 220)

Ruzsa does not see absolute control as what is relevant, here. Rather, it is what is at the near end of the spectrum of control: control to move and develop one's body, and to think and decide. Ruzsa sees it as making most sense to say: the *khandha*s are non-Self as they *can* be controlled in this way. He sees the Pali ALS as most plausibly saying as a reason for the *khandha*s being non-Self, "I cannot change my *skandha*s by mere volition, by simply wishing it" (Ruzsa 2024: 220), but he does not see the contrasting statement as acceptable: "my self is what I can control by mere volition" (p. 221). Moreover:

> It seems that in Indian philosophy it came to be generally accepted that a changing entity is perishable, so all eternal things must be essentially unchangeable. In any case, we never hear of the position that "the Self is eternal, but it can change itself by willing it". Why would the Buddha argue against a position that no-one held? […]
>
> If the Buddha is attacking here a position worth attacking, a position that at least some people accept, then this freedom is not absolute. Realistically

> it can mean only that I can change myself within limits, and often it needs willpower, much effort and practice.
>
> But the Buddha cannot be denying this – for it is not only true, but, more importantly, this is the central tenet of Buddhism.
>
> (Ruzsa 2024: 222)

Ruzsa sees it as highly unlikely that the Buddha would say that one can change oneself by spiritual practice if he had also said you cannot change/control oneself, i.e. "Understanding that you have no power to change yourself, you can change yourself" (Ruzsa 2024: 222). Yet the suttas repeatedly emphasise how all processes of body and mind are conditioned, by various factors, which is the key reason that they are not controllable at will. But the more it is understood how they are conditioned, the better one can develop the ability to work with the conditions to bring about the best change, culminating in experience of *nibbāna*, the unconditioned. Even the Path to the end of *dukkha* is conditioned, being the best of all conditioned states (AN II 34).

Buddhism emphasises that anything subject to conditioned arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) depends on various inner and outer conditions. The conditioned nature of the mind means that one can decide to meditate and try to get the mind into a state of gathered concentration and calm … but the mind often does not do what one wants it to do:

> Irrigators lead the waters; fletchers fashion arrow-shafts; carpenters bend the wood; the wise control themselves (*attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā*, Dhp 80).

Yet:

> The flickering, fickle mind, *difficult to guard, difficult to control* (*durakkhaṃ dunnivārayaṃ*) – the wise person straightens it as a fletcher an arrow (Dhp 33).
>
> The mind is hard to check, swift, *inclines wherever it wants* – the control of which is good; a controlled mind is conducive to happiness (*Cittassa damatho sādhu, cittaṃ dantaṃ sukhāvahaṃ*, Dhp 35).

And even if a calm, still state is developed by patient practice, it often still fluctuates, is impermanent and can be disrupted; as all mental states are conditioned, they are subject to such changes. One can do things to help oneself be happy, but one cannot just tell the mind to stay happy, such that it then did as it was told. One can influence this flow of conditions, but one cannot just order the mind, or body, to be as one's desires and cravings want it to be. And it is in this mis-match of wants and realities that *dukkha* arises. The conditioned and changing *khandha*s often behave in undesired ways, hence there arise various kinds of "affliction".

One can wisely work at balanced self-control, but one has to work with inner and outer conditioning factors; one cannot just say of any *khandha*s, "Let it be like this, not that." There is no magic wand, and forceful attempts at self-control, in a "control-freak" way, themselves have bad side-effects. Realistic beneficial control is middle way guidance.

Hence the Buddha said to the monk Soṇa, who had been a skilled lute player, that when a lute's "strings are neither too tight nor too loose but adjusted to a balanced pitch", the lute would be "well tuned and easy to play". He then advised that, in a parallel way, "if energy is aroused too forcefully, this leads to restlessness, and if the energy is too lax, it leads to laziness", on hearing which, Soṇa balanced his spiritual faculties and became an arahat (AN III 375). As an example of the importance of not trying too hard, in a controlling way, is Ānanda, when he was trying to become an arahat so that he would be eligible to attend the next day's monastic council after the Buddha had died. He meditated nearly all night but failed to reach his goal, so decided to lay down to sleep; but even before he was lying flat on his bed, arahatship came (Vin II 386). That is, his goal came when he stopped trying too hard. The Buddha's pre-enlightenment ascetic period, as described in the *Mahā-saccaka Sutta* was an attempt at rigid control, "Suppose, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrain, and crush my mind with mind" (MN I 243), yet at the end, he thought "But by this racking practice of austerities, I have not attained any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones" (MN I 246). So, the idea that the *khandha*s cannot be controlled at will is very relevant to spiritual practice, even though one can work at making them less uncontrollable.

Admittedly at MN I 120, one of the five ways of dealing with unwholesome thoughts is "with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain and crush mind with mind". However, this forceful way is only a last resort – as it can trigger restlessness, as described above – when four more analytical or diversionary ways have been tried in turn but failed, and the mind is clinging with determination to a negative state like a dog gnawing at a bone.

So there is some control over body and mind, but it is limited. As regards the spectrum of control referred to above, while one can move one's arm, this control is constrained if the arm is strained or injured, or old and weak, and while one can do things to support one's health, one cannot prevent oneself ageing or at some point dying.

Indeed, while a king has control over the punishment of law-breakers in his realm, he, like everyone else, does not have full control over his own body and mind, so he cannot prevent himself ageing, getting ill, and dying, these being

key concerns in the suttas.[39] The CSS and one of its Chinese parallels, SĀ 110, say that the *khandha*s are non-Self as one cannot exercise control over them in a way that parallels how a king has power over those in his kingdom. But this is a simile with a comparison. What of an actual king and his *khandha*s? The *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to CSS[40] refers to such a king's power, but rather than next going direct to saying the *khandha*s are non-Self, it first says that an actual king still cannot stop himself becoming aged. The *khandha*s of both him and everyone else are impermanent, non-Self (Kuan 2009: 159–160). Most explicitly (with italicisation from Kuan):

> The Blessed One said: "*A wheel-turning king can always act according to his own free will in his kingdom. Why is he unable to get rid of ageing, illness and death? The 'Self' is not subject to ageing, illness or death. The 'Self' is permanent, and should be the way that it wishes to be.* Is this doctrine correct?" On that occasion the Niganṭha's son was silent without replying. …
>
> (Kuan 2009: 161)

While the *Ekottarika-āgama* version lacks the statement that one cannot make any of the *khandha*s "thus" or "not thus", this passage makes the same point, and is very clear about the relevant kind of thus-making: the non-existent control that would make any of the *khandha*s be free of ageing, illness and death.

Kuan comments on the above quote:

> […] although a wheel-turning king may control others, he has no full control over himself and is not autonomous, enjoying no absolute freedom. The implication is that, as even a powerful wheel-turning king has insufficient control over his aggregates to be able to stop them ageing and dying, how much more so does that apply to everyone else. For such a king or anyone else, the aggregates are not a self-controlling unageing Self, nor the possessions of a Self. There is no absolute freedom within them, and they are "impermanent and subject to change" (par. 11c), and

[39] In the *Ariya-pariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26), it is said that the Buddha's spiritual quest had been to find what was beyond the limitations of things subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement: the "unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled security from bondage, *nibbāna*" (MN I 163). The final link in the sequence of Conditioned Arising is "ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, unhappiness and distress […] such is the origin of this whole bundle of *dukkha*" (SN II 1). And in the DCPS, the *ariya-sacca* of *dukkha* is these painful (*dukkha*) phenomena: "birth […] aging […] illness […] death […] union with what is displeasing […] separation from what is pleasing […] not to get what one wants […] the five bundles of grasping fuel" (SN V 421).

[40] *Sūtra* 10 of chapter 37, at T II 715c–716c.

> hence cannot be counted as "Self", which by definition is not subject to ageing, illness or death, is permanent, and should be the way that it wishes to be (par. 10c).
>
> (Kuan 2009: 166–167)

One may express this by saying that a supposed Self would be "inner controller" of aspects of body and mind, but as regards itself, it would not age and die. One could explain this situation by saying either:

1. It is naturally free of ageing and death, so has no need to wish itself to be "thus" and not "thus", or
2. Its controlling activities would bring small changes to itself, so to prevent these accumulating to lead to ageing and eventually death, these would need to be controlled, so that it remained "thus" rather than "not thus". An "inner-controller" has work to do on what it controls, but also on itself; and both take effort.

Hence, some of the differences between some versions of the texts, as regards whether a Self does not, or does need to control itself. Either way, though, one cannot stop the ageing, sickness and death of the constantly changing conditioned *khandha*s; one cannot prevent the small changes that lead to this, only slow them.

The differences between the Pali ALS and CSS and some of their Chinese parallels may also be because of the ambiguity in what kind of control, "Let it be thus, let not be thus" means. The spectrum of possible types of control are:

1. One can move an arm or think of something. These are normal abilities, though even these can be limited by injury or physical or mental illness.
2. One can become physically stronger, or develop a skill. These take some persistent practice, rather than something which happens just because one wishes it; and even the wish for it to be so may vary between being strong, weak or absent.
3. One can work on developing calm mental stillness by meditation. However, it is difficult to prevent stray thoughts intruding, and even when these are absent, there can still be small fluctuations in the calm. The process of meditative training certainly makes it evident that the mind is restless, a bunch of conditioned and hard-to-guide processes. Attempts at wilful control rarely have beneficial effects, and restlessness – fed by too much energy – is one of the five higher fetters that only an arahat transcends.

4. Absolute control over what one is – one could change oneself into anything, just by wishing it. This is not possible, though some arahats develop psychic powers of, for example, having multiple forms, and appearing and disappearing. The karma of non-arahats influences what they are reborn as, but many different karmas may be the dominant influence on what a being is in any one life.
5. The *khandha*s being made to be beyond ageing, illness and death. At arahatship, a person experiences *nibbāna*, that which is beyond ageing, illness and death. If both deep calm and incisive insight are developed, and arahatship is attained, while the body and other conditioned states still die, there comes to be entry to that which is beyond ageing, sickness and death. Yet the *khandha*s remain subject to these.

Of these types of control, it is generally the case that the *khandha*s can be controlled in type 1 way, so as to be "thus" and "not thus" by wishing it. This is also applies, in a slower and faltering way, to type 2. Type 3 control – relevant issue for Buddhist meditation – works in a limited and spasmodic way, with lack of control being common, and *complete* type 3 control being impossible. Type 4 is not possible: psychic powers only influence how one *appears*, and karma and wishes can only make a certain kind of rebirth *more likely*. Type 5 is impossible, as the *khandha*s are themselves never beyond ageing, sickness and death, though the mental ones can know *nibbāna*, which is beyond ageing, sickness and death.

It remains interesting that the only places in the Pali suttas and Vinaya that one gets the argument that the *khandha*s are non-Self as they cannot be controlled is the ALS, Vin. I 13–14, CSS, and an early commentary included in the fifth *Nikāya*, the *Culla-niddesa*. On "regard the world as empty" at Sn 1119, it cites the section of ALS about it not being possible to make the *khandha*s "thus" and "not thus", and then says (Nidd II 279):

> Moreover, in ten ways does he regard the world as empty (*suññato*). He considers material form [and the other *khandha*s] as devoid, as hollow, as empty, as non-Self, as without an overlord (*anissariyato*), as incapable of being made as one wants (*akāmakāriyato*), as incapable of being had (as one wishes) (*alabbhaniyato*), as insusceptible to the exercise of power (*avasavattanato*), as other (*parato*), as variegated.
>
> (As translated in Kuan 2009: 162, n. 8)

By comparison, "the characteristic expression 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self' and its negation occur 347 times" (Ruzsa 2024: 225). This may, again, be due to the ambiguity of what kind of control "let it be thus […] not thus" refers to.

Conclusion

So, the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* was a teaching given to five people who had been performing harsh asceticism, seeking to master and control the body and thus the mind. After the Buddha taught them the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta*, they came to see that a more balanced "middle way" was what was really needed. They also gained insight into the *khandha*s as *dukkha/*painful/unsatisfactory, demanding desire as what caused this, and the way beyond this. Hence they attained the dhamma-eye and became stream-enterers, so as to no longer view any of the *khandha*s as an essential, permanent Self, a possession of such a Self, contained in Self, or containing Self; they no-longer had *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, Self-identity-view.

The *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* then got them to see that the *khandha*s also were *dukkha* because they are impermanent, and as impermanent, *dukkha*, and of a nature to change, no aspect of them, however subtle, can rightly be seen as "This is mine, this I am, this is my Self". This led them to experience a weary, disenchanted revulsion with the *khandha*s, hence a complete end to attachment to or craving for them, so as to become arahats. They had already abandoned any *view* linking any *khandha* to a supposed Self, but now also abandoned the deeper and vaguer conceit of "I am". This was not about gaining a *view* "There is no Self", but about not taking *anything* as *mine*, what *I am*, or *my Self*. They abandoned Self-ing, whether cognitively or emotionally. The *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* is about this, not the exposition of a "metaphysical tenet", that "There is no Self", as Ferenc Ruzsa presumes.

Furthermore, Ruzsa argues that the most authentic form of the sutta would not have said: "But inasmuch as form is non-Self, therefore it tends to affliction, and it is *not possible* to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'" He argues that it would have said the opposite: "But inasmuch as form is non-Self, therefore it tends to affliction, and it *is possible* to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'" This is because he says one *does* have control over what one's body and mind do. But this does not explain why the processes of body and mind, the *khandha*s, "tend to affliction", i.e. are *dukkha*, nor why there should be weary disenchantment with them. He overlooks the range of limitations on one's degree of control over body and mind. Yes, this can be increased, as within Buddhist practice, but the conditioned, "changing by nature" *khandha*s often arise in ways that are in tension with one's desires, preferences and craving; a key reason why they are *dukkha*. Ruzsa's related argument is that it is odd for the sutta, as we have it in Pali, to say that for something that was genuinely Self, such as bodily form, there could be the wish "Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus."

This is because the most influential idea of Self in the Buddha's day was that found in the *Upaniṣad*s, and this saw Self as the "inner-controller" of all aspects of a person and the world. Hence the Self was seen as control*er*, not as something control*ed*, by making it "thus" and "not thus". However, controlling is an action, and actions bring small changes to the agent of the action; so a controller would change, and to remain as it was, stable and eternal, it would need to control itself, not just what belonged to it. And in any case, seeing a *khandha* "as Self" could have included taking it as "belonging to Self", within its sphere of immediate control.

So the Pali form of the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* makes good sense within the context of the suttas as a whole. Nevertheless, the fact that its aspect of "what is not controllable is non-Self" is found only four times in the Pali suttas and Vinaya may be because there is a range of senses and types of "control": it is a somewhat ambiguous concept. Yet it includes aspects very pertinent to meditative practice.

Abbreviations

ALS	*Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta.*
AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya.*
CSS	*Cūḷa-saccaka Sutta.*
DCPS	*Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta.*
Dhp	*Dhammapada.*
Dhp-a	*Dhammapada* commentary.
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya.*
DPPN	*Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, G. P. Malalasekera, 2 vols, 1937, Pali Text Society.
Ja	*Jātaka* and its commentary.
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya.*
MN-a	*Majjhima Nikāya aṭṭhakathā*/commentary.
Nidd II	*Culla-niddesa.*
SĀ	*Saṃyukta Āgama*, in Chinese translation.
Skt.	Sanskrit.
Sn	*Sutta-nipāta.*
SN	*Saṃyutta Nikāya.*
T	*Taishō* canon of Chinese Buddhist texts.
Ud	*Udāna.*
Vin	*Vinaya.*

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The Visit of the Sixteen Brahmin Ascetics in the Buddhist Art of Kucha: Visual Representations and Literary Sources

Ines Konczak-Nagel

Abstract: This study analyses the iconographic motif of the "Visit of the Sixteen Brahmin Ascetics" in Kuchean cave paintings, depicting the Buddha surrounded by Brahmin ascetics. While Alfred Foucher identified analogous representations from the Gandhāra region as visual translations of the *Pārāyaṇavagga*, the Kuchean murals reflect distinctive Central Asian narrative traditions preserved in the *Xianyu jing*, *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* and *Maitrisimit*. Characteristic iconographic elements include a pairing of elderly and youthful Brahmins (possibly Bāvari and Maitreya) alongside prostrating ascetics. Examining seven examples, the study demonstrates how the narrative was adapted to emphasise Maitreya's significance within local Buddhist traditions, particularly in the decorative programme of Kizil Cave 114, which reconfigures conventional iconographic hierarchies.

Keywords: Kuchean Buddhist paintings, Brahmin Ascetics, Sixteen Pārāyaṇas, Bāvari, Maitreya

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In the main chamber of Kizil Cave 114, positioned directly above the entrance within the lunette on the front wall, is a narrative painting depicting the seated Buddha surrounded by Brahmin ascetics (**Drawing 1**).[1] The Brahmins are distinguished by their characteristic topknots, with several bearing flasks in their left hands. They are rendered as figures of varying ages, shown in attitudes of attentive listening, paying homage and prostration before the Buddha. Monika Zin has identified this composition as representing an iconographic motif occasionally encountered in Gandhāran art, where it is conventionally termed the "Sixteen Pārāyaṇas" (Zin 2023: 499).

Drawing 1. Kizil Cave 114 (Gebetmühlenhöhle), main chamber, front wall lunette, *in situ*. Drawing by Monika Zin.

Researchers participating in the currently active project "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road", directed by Zin at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig, have identified this iconographic motif in further examples of Buddhist cave paintings in Kucha. The present study aims to examine both the textual sources that may elucidate these visual representations and other documented examples of this iconographic theme.

The motif of the Buddha attended by Brahmin ascetics was first identified by Alfred Foucher over a century ago in a Gandhāran relief from Takht-i-bahi depicting the Buddha seated in the centre of a rocky landscape.[2] In the lower register, positioned before the Buddha's seat, seven ascetics are represented. Although some figures have suffered damage, their physiques indicate figures

[1] Drawing reproduced in Zin (2023: drawing 16). Painting reproduced in *Kizil Grottoes* (1983–1985/1989–1997: II, pl. 121).

[2] Foucher (1918: 256, fig. 432). The relief is housed in the Peshawar Museum (no. 1151a–c). See also Quagliotti (2005: 273, no. II.1).

of varying ages – both elderly and younger individuals – with some bearing walking sticks. All appear distinguished by the characteristic topknots and direct their gazes up towards the Buddha. Foucher designated this representation "La réunion des seize Pārāyaṇas", implying an assembly of Brahmin ascetics belonging to the *pārāyaṇa* tribe. Foucher further identified the *Pārāyaṇavagga* of the *Suttanipāta* as the textual source for this representation.[3]

While scholarly consensus maintains that the term *pārāyaṇa* in the *Pārāyaṇavagga* denotes the soteriological path of the Brahmin ascetics rather than their belonging to a certain group,[4] it appears that in other works referencing the *Pārāyaṇavagga*, or a version thereof, the term was indeed interpreted as designating a group identity. The Sri Lankan *Mahāvaṃsa* thus includes *pārāyanakasamiti* (meeting with the *pārāyanaka*s) within a sequence of pivotal events immediately preceding the Buddha's decision to enter *nirvāṇa* following a three-month period.[5] In Kumārajīva's translation of Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* (*T* 201), the Buddha declares that he expounded the *dharma* to various audiences, including the sixteen *pārāyaṇa*s (*shiliu boluoyan* 十六波羅延).[6] Both textual sources appear to have informed Foucher's designation of the depicted subject as "La réunion des seize Pārāyaṇas". Following Foucher, this designation became accepted for these scenes.[7]

The most widely recognised version of the underlying story informing these representations derives from the *Pārāyaṇavagga*, a collection of verses constituting the fifth section of the *Suttanipāta* (see fn. 3). This text recounts how the Brahmin ascetic Bāvari, who dwelt in the southern territories (*dakkhiṇāpatha*,

3 *Suttanipāta*, ed. pp. 190–223, vv. 976–1149; English trans.: Norman (2001: 127–145). For a summary of this story, see Lamotte (1958: 380–381, 776; 1988: 346–347, 699–700).

4 The term *pārāyaṇa*, translated as "going to the far shore" (Norman 2001) or "the way to the beyond" (Bodhi 2017), carries dual significance. It may refer to the physical journey undertaken by the sixteen ascetics to meet the Buddha, but, more importantly, denotes the soteriological goal they achieved through his teachings: *apārā pāraṃ gaccheyya bhāvento maggam uttamaṃ, maggo so pāraṅgamanāya, tasmā Pārāyanaṃ iti* (*Suttanipāta*, ed. p. 219, verse 1130; English trans.: Bodhi 2017: 345; Norman 2001: 143). Alternative interpretations of the term *pārāyaṇa* are "the highest (farthest) point, final aim, chief object, ideal" (Rhys Davids and Stede 1921–1925: 505).

5 *Ālavakaṅgulimāla-apalāladamanaṃ pi ca, Pārāyanakasamitiṃ, āyuvossajjanaṃ tathā* (*Mahāvaṃsa*, ed. p. 242, verse 30,84; English trans.: Geiger 1912: 205–206). Turnour, in his 1889 translation of the text, interpreted *pārāyanaka* as "the Pārāyana brahman tribe (at Rājagaha)", see Geiger (1912: 206, note 2).

6 *T* 201, ed. vol. 4, p. 296a22–23; French trans.: Huber (1908: 205).

7 Although Zwalf usually designates this iconographic motif as the "Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics", he also provides the alternative label "Pārāyaṇika [*sic*] *brāhmaṇa*s" (Zwalf 1996: cat. nos. 222, 245). For a catalogue of Gandhāran reliefs depicting "The Sixteen Pārāyaṇas", see Quagliotti (2005: 273–275). For discussion of another possible depiction of this subject, with additional bibliography on Gandhāran representations of this theme, see Jessie Pons's contribution to this volume (Pons 2025).

Deccan), dispatched sixteen disciples to the Buddha with questions he himself was unable to resolve. Prior to their departure, Bāvari instructed his disciples that the Buddha could be recognised by his thirty-two *lakṣaṇa*s and his capacity to respond to unspoken questions concerning their master. The sixteen disciples subsequently journeyed to Magadha, where the Buddha was then residing. Upon their encounter with the Buddha, he immediately addressed their unspoken questions regarding Bāvari, confirming, amongst other particulars, that their master possessed three specific *lakṣaṇa*s: the long tongue, the *ūrṇā* and concealed genitalia.

The text thereafter presents sixteen sections, each containing one disciple's questions to the Buddha regarding the objective of his teaching and the means of attaining it. These begin with the questions of Ajita (*Ajitamāṇavapucchā*), followed by the questions of Tissa Metteyya (*Tissametteyyamāṇavapucchā*),[8] and proceed systematically through all the named disciples. Piṅgiya, the most elderly and infirm member of the group, posed the final questions concerning the transcendence of birth and decay. All disciples with the exception of Piṅgiya attained arhatship following receipt of the Buddha's responses. Piṅgiya, however, returned to express his newfound devotion to the Buddha, though the text does not explicitly specify the recipient of this declaration – most probably his master Bāvari. The Pāli commentarial tradition records that the Buddha manifested before Piṅgiya and Bāvari upon perceiving that their faculties had achieved maturity, appearing in the form of a golden radiance. According to this tradition, Piṅgala subsequently achieved arhatship, while Bāvari attained the status of non-returner (*anāgāmin*).[9]

The *Pārāyaṇa* appears to be of considerable antiquity and may have existed as an independent text before its incorporation into the *Suttanipāta*.[10] Parallel versions are preserved within the *Kṣudraka* divisions across the canons of various Buddhist schools (Lamotte 1957), while numerous canonical and non-canonical sources use explicit references to the *Pārāyaṇa* (*Boluoyan* 波羅延) or preserve quotations drawn from its verses (Jayawickrama 1976: 148–150).

The existence of a commentary in the Gāndhārī language explaining specific verses of the *Pārāyaṇa* points to the text's familiarity within Gandhāran

[8] Ajita and Maitreya (Pāli: Metteya/Metteyya) are variously attested across several Buddhist traditions. While certain texts – primarily early Mahāyāna sources – treat these as alternative appellations of the future Buddha, both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools maintain their distinction as separate figures, the latter designating Ajita as future King Śaṅkha and Maitreya as the coming Buddha. For a comprehensive treatment of this question, see Karashima (2018).

[9] See the commentaries on vv. 1032–1149 in the *Paramatthajotikā* II (ed. pp. 586–608) and *Cullaniddesa* (ed. pp. 6–56); English trans.: Bodhi (2017: 1233–1327).

[10] Jayawickrama (1976: 148–150); von Hinüber (1996: 49).

Buddhist circles,[11] though whether this necessarily implies transmission of the entire work itself in Gāndhārī remains uncertain. Indeed, it would scarcely be remarkable if only selected portions of the text were transmitted, particularly given that certain verses – most notably the questions of Ajita – constitute frequently cited textual units appearing across several non-Mahāyāna works in diverse languages, as well as within certain Mahāyāna compositions, such as the *Yogācārabhumi* (Enomoto 1989: 34).

A comparable situation pertains to the fragmentary *Pārāyaṇa* remains in Sanskrit recovered at Kizil.[12] The severely fragmentary nature of these texts precludes any definite determination of whether this text was transmitted in Sanskrit in its entirety or merely in selected portions.

Nevertheless, that a story related to the *Pārāyaṇa* circulated in the Xinjiang region is attested by its incorporation into the *Xianyu jing* (*The Wise and the Foolish*),[13] a collection of tales reportedly compiled by Chinese monks who encountered these stories during a quinquennial assembly (*pañcavārṣika*) in Khotan.[14] This Central Asian story diverges from the Pāli *Pārāyaṇa* in several noteworthy respects – while it employs the latter's narrative framework, it can hardly be considered a direct transmission of the Pāli text itself. Rather, it should be understood as a discrete composition that draws upon familiar structural elements and is variously termed the "Bāvari Story" or the "Story of the Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics". A relatively minor variation in this Central Asian story is the characterisation of Bāvari (Bopoli 波婆梨) as possessing merely two *lakṣaṇa*s: blue hair and a long tongue. Of considerably greater significance, however, is the conspicuous omission of the doctrinal questions posed by Bāvari's disciples to the Buddha – interrogations which constitute the most substantial portion of the Pāli *Pārāyaṇa* – and the pronounced emphasis accorded to Maitreya (Mile 彌勒) amongst the sixteen disciples. In the *Xianyu jing*, Maitreya receives repeated nominal mentions and assumes a central role within the narrative framework, while the remaining fifteen disciples are referenced collectively as "Maitreya and the others" (*Mile deng* 彌勒等), without individual identification.[15] The text records that following the Buddha's

[11] Six sections of a Gāndhārī commentary on early Buddhist verses explain passages from the *Pārāyaṇa* concerning the questions put to the Buddha by Bāvari's disciples Ajita, Mettagū, Jatukaṇṇi and Posāla; see Baums (2009: 44, 50, 358–362, 389–395, 403–441, 561, 567–568, 569–573).

[12] Sander and Waldschmidt (1980: 236–238); Wille (1989: 198–200).

[13] *T* 202, ed. vol. 4, pp. 432b–434a; English trans. in Ji (1998: 7–13). The Bāvari story is summarised in Lamotte (1958: 780–781; 1988: 704). The Tibetan and Mongolian versions of *The Wise and the Foolish* (*Xianyu jing*) do not include this story.

[14] For a thorough study of the textual history of the *Xianyu jing*, see Mair (2012).

[15] In his English translation, Ji renders the Chinese name for Maitreya (Mile 彌勒) with the Tocharian A name equivalent of Metrak, thus translating *Mile deng* 彌勒等 as "Metrak and the others"; see Ji (1998: 7–13).

responses to their unspoken questions regarding their teacher Bāvari, the sixteen Brahmin ascetics prostrated themselves with their heads and faces touching the ground, whereupon all became *śramaṇa*s. Piṅgiya then returned to Bāvari to provide him, his former teacher, with a comprehensive account. Upon receiving this report, Bāvari was overcome with sorrow, for while he yearned to encounter the Buddha personally, his advanced age of one-hundred-and-twenty years and physical frailty precluded him from undertaking the demanding journey to Śrāvastī. The Buddha, perceiving Bāvari's thoughts, visited the ascetic at his abode and expounded the *dharma* to him. Thereupon Bāvari attained the status of an *anāgāmin*.

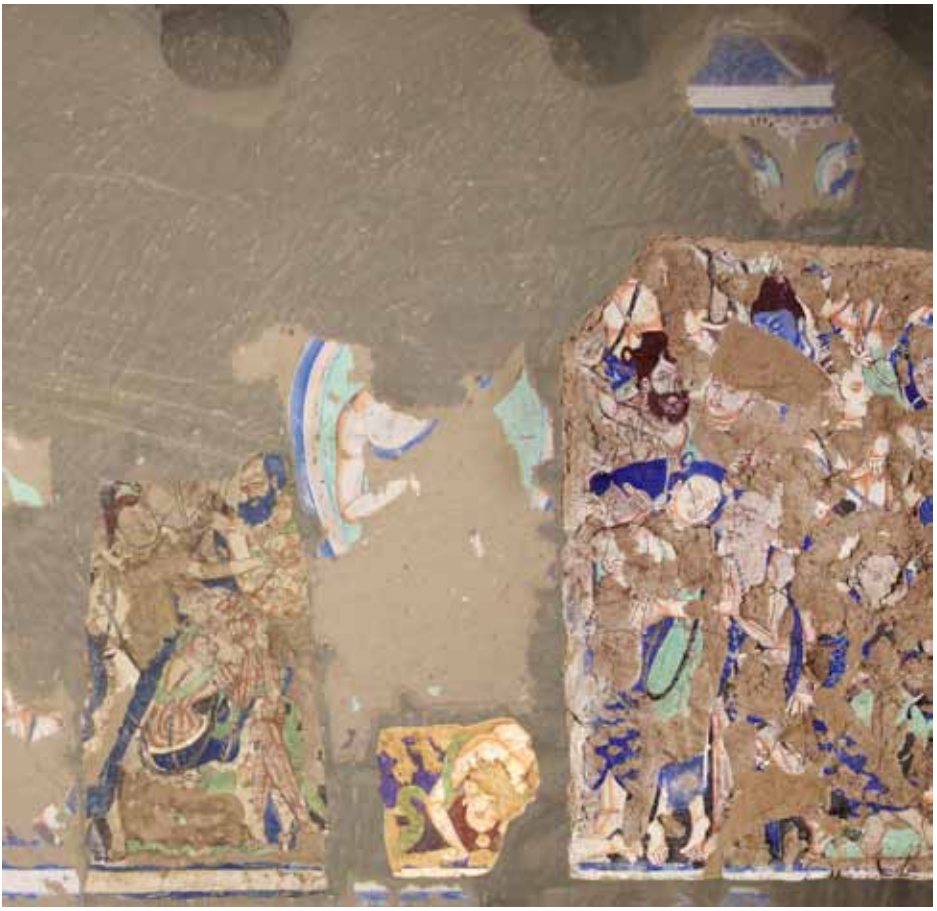
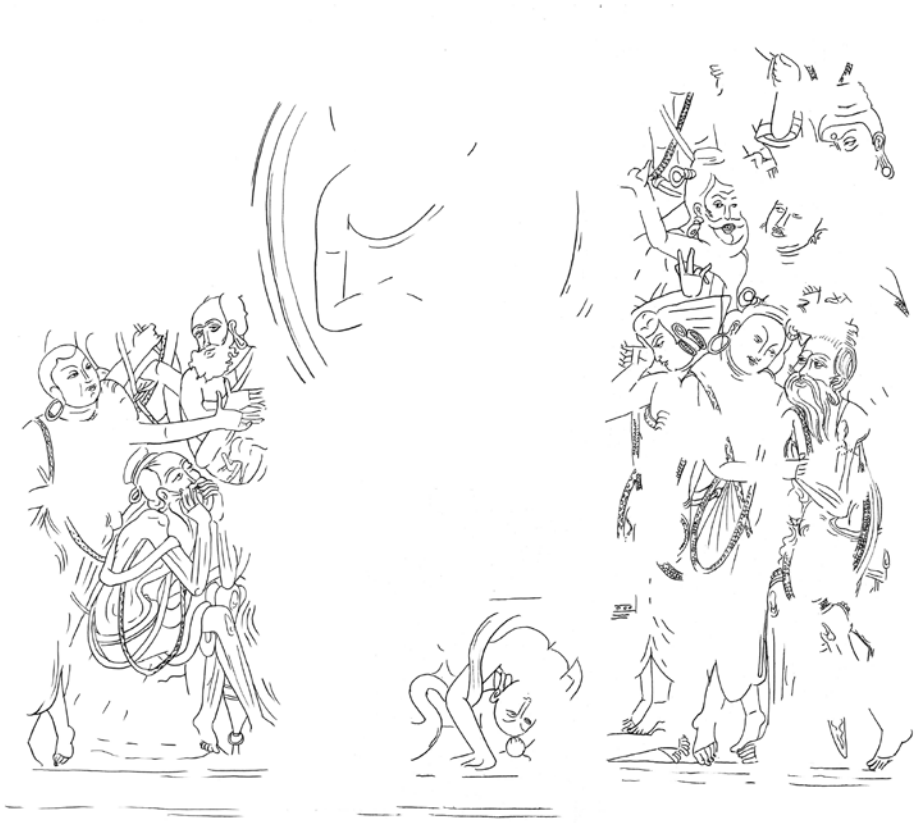


Fig. 1. Kizil Cave 224 (Māyāhöhle, 3. Anlage), main chamber, left side wall, reg. 1, no. 2. Reconstruction based on surviving fragments: central Buddha figure *in situ*; left and lower central portions at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C., Gift of John Gellatly (nos. 1929.8.325.15, 71.1 x 40.7 cm; 1929.8.325.16, 27.7 x 27.9 cm; CC0); right portion in Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (no. III 9189, 58 x 83 cm).



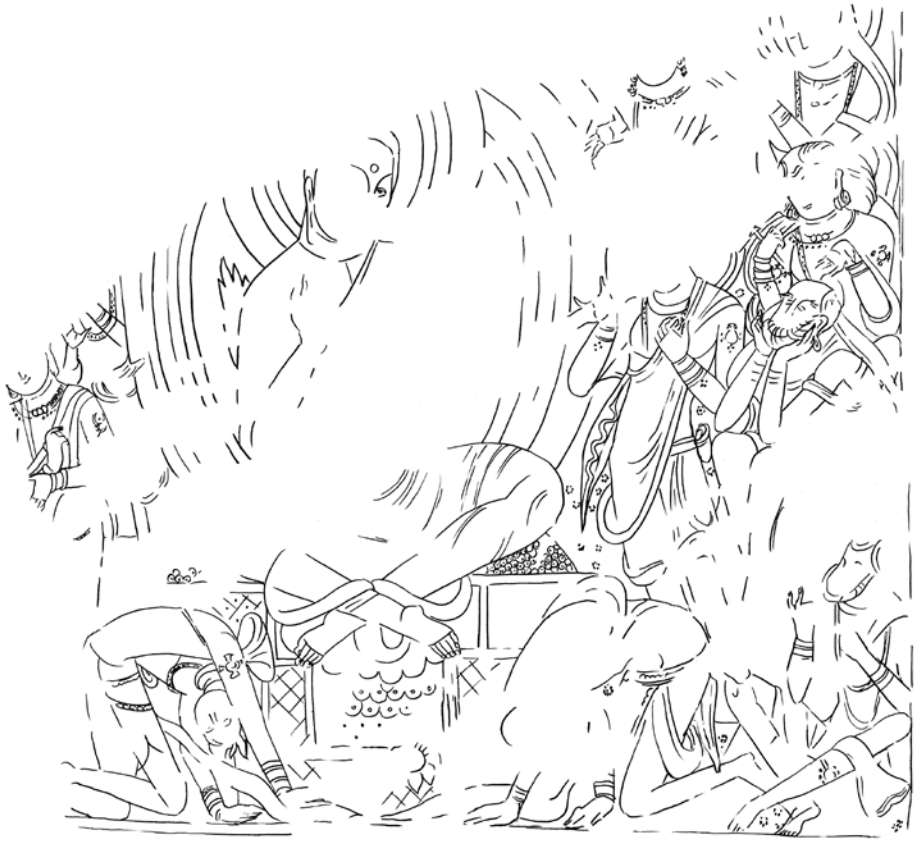
Drawing 2. Drawing of Fig. 1 by Monika Zin.

This textual account concerning the prostration of the sixteen ascetic Brahmins before becoming *śramaṇa*s finds iconographic expression in the Kuchean artistic tradition, where the prostration of at least one Brahmin figure constitutes a recurring visual motif. The extant representation preserved in Kizil Cave 114 (Drawing 1) and the composition formerly adorning the left wall of the main chamber in Kizil Cave 224 (**Fig. 1**, **Drawing 2**)[16] – of which only portions of the central Buddha remain *in situ* – exhibit comparable iconographic approaches. Each depicts a single kneeling Brahmin ascetic prostrated before the Buddha's seat, his head touching the earth in precise accordance with the description preserved in the *Xianyu jing*. The representation adorning the right side wall in the main chamber of Kizil Cave 63 (**Drawing 3**),[17] while sharing thematic affinities with the composition from Kizil Cave 224, presents a distinct

[16] For an alternative reconstruction of the painting, omitting the lower central portion, see Zhao et al. (2020: II, 722–723, fig. 50). For the original *in situ* description, see Grünwedel (1912: 174, d 2).

[17] The painting is documented in a photograph from the German Turfan Expeditions (1906–1914), preserved in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (no. B 1635).

iconographic treatment of this theme. Here, two Brahmin figures are positioned on their hands and knees before the Buddha's seat in attitudes of reverence, their heads directed towards, though not in direct contact with, the ground.



Drawing 3. Kizil Cave 63 (Kāśyapahöhle), main chamber, right side wall, reg. 1, no. 3, *in situ*. Drawing by Monika Zin.

Of particular significance in the wall paintings from Kizil Caves 114 and 224 is one distinctive iconographic motif: the representation of a youthful Brahmin[18] attending to his elderly companion, grasping his hand while simultaneously encircling his shoulders in what constitutes an apparent gesture of support as they approach the Buddha. In Kizil Cave 114 (Drawing 1), this paired arrangement occupies the leftmost portion of the composition. The younger figure is depicted with vigorous physical features, presenting a stark contrast to his aged counterpart, who appears enfeebled and bent with the weight of the

[18] The youthful Brahmin appears in ascetic vestments only in Kizil Cave 114 (Drawing 1); in all other instances discussed in this article, this figure is depicted wearing standard Brahmin attire.

years, distinguished by a lengthy beard and relying upon a gnarled walking staff held in his right hand. Immediately adjacent to this grouping, positioned directly beside the Buddha, the elderly Brahmin ascetic is rendered anew, seated upon a seat of lesser elevation than the Buddha's, adopting a posture of concentrated attention. Whether the young Brahmin ascetic prostrate before the Buddha constitutes a second rendering of the figure from the Brahmin pair remains a matter for conjecture; nevertheless, the apparent correspondence of armlets would appear to support such an interpretation. In Kizil Cave 224 (Drawing 2), this Brahmin pairing contains a comparable counterpart in the composition's rightmost edge. Here too, the elderly Brahmin ascetic – again characterised by his flowing beard – receives dual representation, with his second appearance depicting him seated in focused attention beside the Buddha in the painting's left portion.

Further corroboration of the consistent deployment of this Brahmin pair as an iconographic motif in conjunction with one or two prostrating Brahmin figures emerges from a now-lost painted section formerly adorning the right wall in the main chamber of Kizil Cave 205, which survives only in a drawing by Grünwedel (**Drawing 4**).[19] In this composition, the paired figures reappear alongside a prostrate figure positioned behind them, the latter bearing ear ornaments identical to those of the younger figure in the pair. Grünwedel, who provided a condensed description of the entire composition – now in a severely deteriorated state – identified the younger figure of the pair as potentially feminine, recording: "ein alter bärtiger Brāhmaṇa, eine Büßerfrau (?) heftig umarmend, daneben liegt eine männliche Figur platt auf der Erde" (an elderly bearded Brahmin vigorously embracing a penitent woman (?), beside them a male figure lies flat on the ground; Grünwedel 1912: 164, *f*' 4). Grünwedel's documentation presents considerable interpretative challenges and contains apparent inconsistencies. His report implies that the prostrate figure was positioned beside the Brahmin pair, while his drawing indicates placement behind them. One possible explanation of this discrepancy is that his drawing constitutes a form of collage, depicting a prostrate figure behind the Brahmin pair that was originally placed beside them to the viewer's left of the Buddha, though this would represent a highly unusual departure for Grünwedel's otherwise systematic documentation methods. More perplexing still is Grünwedel's description of a male figure lying flat on the ground, as his drawing depicts the prostrate figure kneeling with the right leg bent at a right angle, the foot firmly planted, and the head bowed to touch the ground while facing rightwards. The figure therefore adopts a prostrate attitude

[19] For extant remnants of the painting *in situ*, see *Kizil Grottoes* (1983–1985/1989–1997, vol. 3, pl. 108); Zhao et al. (2020: II, 596, fig. 3). A 1907 photograph from the Pelliot Expedition shows identical deterioration (Musée Guimet, Paris, no. AP7098; https://guimet-photo-pelliot.fr/notice/notice.php?id=432 [accessed 7 August 2025]), indicating major loss between Grünwedel's 1906 documentation and Pelliot's visit. The damage may have resulted from the Third German Turfan Expedition's extraction attempts, though this remains unverified.

Drawing 4. Kizil Cave 205 (Māyāhöhle, 2. Anlage), main chamber, right side wall, reg. 1, no. 4, left portion of the painting, now largely destroyed. Drawing by Albert Grünwedel (1912, fig. 374).

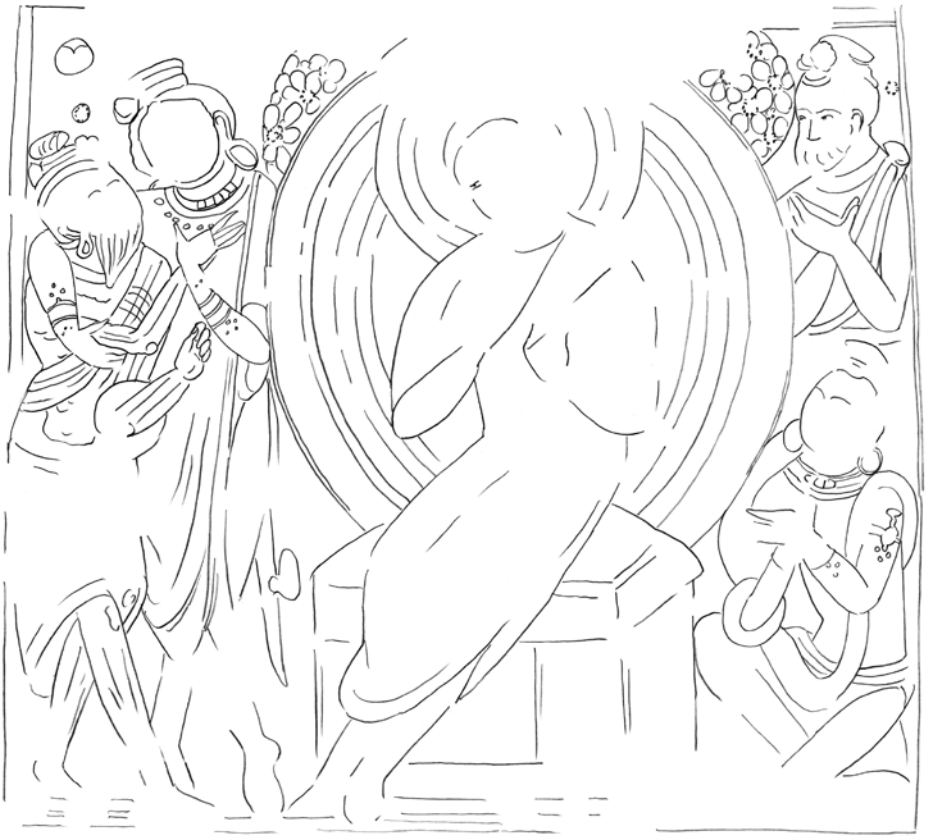
from a kneeling position rather than lying completely flat. Additionally, among the surviving *in situ* remnants of the painting, the rightward-oriented feet of a prostrate figure that was placed to the viewer's right of the Buddha remain discernible, thus indicating that the head of this figure was directed leftward. This evidence may suggest the original presence of two prostrate figures, comparable to the arrangement found in Kizil Cave 63 (Drawing 3); yet no second prostrate figure features in Grünwedel's textual description. Furthermore, this prostrate figure to the right of the Buddha was not depicted flat but rather with bent legs, indicating that he likewise cannot correspond to the one Grünwedel described as lying "platt auf der Erde". These discrepancies notwithstanding, the presence of the Brahmin pair, the prostrate figure(s), and Grünwedel's documentation of additional Brahmins within the broader compositional framework provide compelling evidence that this painting once depicted the visit of the sixteen ascetics. The identical ear ornaments worn by both the younger figure of the pair and the prostrate figure documented in Grünwedel's drawing may suggest that the youthful Brahmin ascetic appears twice within the composition: once as part of the pair and again in prostration before the Buddha.

Fragmentary remains preserved on the right wall of the main chamber in Kizil Cave 17 retain only the Brahmin pair in complete form, in what was evidently a larger composition (**Drawing 5**).[20] Behind this pair, part of an additional figure remains visible, with hands elevated to chest level in what appears to constitute a reverential gesture with the palms presumably clasped together. The lower right section of the extant portion contains what may represent the vestige of a figure in prostration, comparable to that depicted in the painting from Kizil Cave 205 (Drawing 4). Given the iconographic correspondence with other examples containing this motif, this evidence further suggests that the original composition represented the visit of the sixteen ascetics.

The distinctive character of the Brahmin pair proves sufficiently recognisable that other paintings may be identified as depicting this story of the sixteen ascetics' visit even in the absence of prostrate figures, as exemplified by a scene adorning the left wall of the main chamber in Kizil Cave 99 (**Drawing 6**). This representation, considerably more modest in scale than the other depictions at Kizil, accommodates merely four Brahmin ascetics flanking the Buddha, owing to its restricted dimensions. Particularly noteworthy in this painting is the apparent departure from iconographic schema observed in the aforementioned works: while the elder member of the Brahmin pair typically appears twice – once among the group and again in a seated position beside the Buddha – here it is the younger figure who receives this dual treatment, with both representations of the youthful Brahmin ascetic exhibiting similar ornamental details, including annular ear ornaments, armlets and necklaces.

[20] The painting is reproduced in Tan and An (1981: I, pl. 56); Zhao et al. (2020: II, 120, fig. 7).

Drawing 5. Kizil Cave 17 (Bodhisattvagewölbehöhle), main chamber, right side wall, reg. 1, no. 4, left portion of the painting *in situ*. Drawing by Monika Zin.



Drawing 6. Kizil Cave 99, main chamber, left side wall, reg. 3, no. 5, *in situ*. Drawing by Monika Zin.

The left wall of the main chamber in Kizilgaha Cave 13 may preserve another representation of the story of the sixteen ascetics' visit (**Drawing 7**), though the severely deteriorated state of the painting renders this attribution provisional. Yet, several features lend credence to this interpretation: the central Buddha appears surrounded by various Brahmin ascetics identifiable by their distinctive topknots, while an aged Brahmin wearing a long flowing beard is seated beside the Buddha. However, other aspects of the composition challenge this identification: notably, the absence of any prostrate figure despite sufficient compositional space for such a representation, and the apparent lack of the distinctive pairing of young and elderly Brahmin ascetics that characterises other examples of this iconographic type. Nevertheless, given the deteriorated state of the painting, it cannot be excluded that this pair was originally depicted, for instance, in the right portion of the composition.

Drawing 7. Kizilgaha Cave 13, main chamber, left side wall, reg. 2, no. 1, *in situ*. Drawing by Monika Zin.

In summary, the Buddha sermon scenes discussed above feature Brahmin ascetics, identifiable by their distinctive topknots, among other characteristics, and are depicted – with the sole exception of Kizil Cave 114, where the painting occupies the lunette above the main chamber entrance – on the side walls of the main chambers alongside other Buddha sermon scenes. Characteristic iconographic motifs include a Brahmin pair comprising an elderly and a youthful figure, with the younger one apparently guiding and supporting the elder, as evidenced in Kizil Caves 114, 224, 205, 17 and 99 (Drawings 1–2, 4–6). It remains plausible that in Kizil Cave 63 and Kizilgaha Cave 13 (Drawings 3, 7), this motif was originally present in the deteriorated portions of the paintings. A further recurring motif consists of one or two prostrate Brahmins positioned before the Buddha, as observed in Kizil Caves 114, 224, 63, 205, and possibly in Kizil Cave 17 (Drawings 1–5). The Brahmins surrounding the Buddha and those in prostration correspond to the story of the sixteen Brahmins' visit to the Buddha, as recounted in the *Xianyu jing* (*T* 202; cf. fn. 12), wherein these figures enter the Buddhist order after receiving the Buddha's answer to their unspoken question regarding their teacher Bāvari. Of particular significance in this story, which differs in such fundamental aspects from the Pāli *Pārāyaṇa* that it ought

not to be entitled as such, is the figure of the Brahmin Maitreya, the future Buddha. Given this emphasis upon Maitreya, it is conceivable that the youthful Brahmin depicted in these paintings represents this figure, possibly appearing twice in some cases within the same composition: once as part of the Brahmin pair and again in an attitude of veneration, either prostrate before the Buddha (Drawings 1, 4) or seated beside him with hands clasped in a reverential gesture (Drawing 5).

What the *Xianyu jing* fails to elucidate is the precise identity of the pair of Brahmin ascetics. One may posit that these figures represent Maitreya accompanied by his teacher, the Brahmin ascetic Bāvari – whose considerable age the *Xianyu jing* records as one-hundred-and-twenty years – with Maitreya conducting him to the Buddha's presence. Such an interpretation would, nevertheless, constitute a departure from the textual narrative, which explicitly states that Bāvari did not accompany his disciples upon their journey to the Buddha, but rather remained at his dwelling in the southern regions. It would appear that the Kuchean artists may have sought to conflate distinct episodes from the broader narrative cycle, particularly the subsequent occasion when the Buddha himself visited the aged Bāvari, thereby enabling Maitreya's teacher to receive the Buddha's instruction. This encounter appears to find representation through the figure of the elderly Brahmin seated beside the Buddha, receiving his discourse (Drawings 1–2), whereupon he attained the status of an *anāgāmin* and achieved liberation from rebirth in the Kāmadhātu.

This interpretation finds corroboration in other evidence suggesting that the relationship between Maitreya and his teacher Bāvari held particular significance in the Tocharian A *Maitreyasamitināṭaka*,[21] which similarly incorporates the story of the sixteen ascetics. The inclusion of this account in both this text and its Old Uyghur counterpart, the *Maitrisimit*,[22] demonstrates that the story circulated not merely throughout the broader region of present-day Xinjiang, but specifically along the Northern Silk Road networks. Both texts centre upon the future Buddha Maitreya and incorporate the story of the sixteen ascetics within Act or Chapter II, respectively, which concerns Maitreya's path to becoming a monk. The intimate bond between Maitreya (Metrak) and his teacher Bāvari (Bādhari) receives particular emphasis in a surviving fragment of the *Maitreyasamitināṭaka*, which describes how Bāvari grasped Maitreya's hand before the sixteen disciples departed for the Buddha. The passage portrays

[21] The story of the sixteen ascetics survives in the fragmentary Tocharian A *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* manuscript recovered from Shorchuk, see Ji (1998: 68–142). Initial manuscript fragments were discovered by the Third German Turfan Expedition in 1906, with forty-four additional fragmentary leaves found in 1974 (Ji 1998: 1).

[22] Thomas (1990). Fragments of the *Maitrisimit* containing the story of the sixteen ascetics has been discovered in Hami.

Bāvari's tearful expression of distress at both the imminent separation from his disciples and his own inability to encounter the Buddha and receive his teaching.[23]

Although only fragments of the story survive in both the *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* and the *Maitrisimit*, the extant passages suggest that the account was considerably elaborated, thereby distinguishing these versions from that preserved in the *Xianyu jing*. In what other respects these versions differed remains an open question owing to the fragmentary state of the *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* and the *Maitrisimit*. The absence of the concluding portions renders it impossible to ascertain how these narratives ended. One might conjecture that the missing sections described Maitreya's escort of his teacher Bāvari to meet the Buddha, thus allowing the elderly Brahmin to witness the Buddha's discourse, as portrayed in the Kuchean paintings. It remains equally plausible, however, that the pictorial source was derived not from the *Maitreyasamitināṭaka*/*Maitrisimit* recensions, but rather from a now-lost textual tradition containing such an episode. That additional versions of this narrative circulated throughout Central Asia is evidenced by Old Uyghur fragments recovered at Bezeklik (Murtuk).[24] While these cannot be securely attributed to any specific work, one may reasonably assume that the text derives from an antecedent lost version of the story, whether in Chinese or one of the Central Asian vernaculars (Zieme 1997: 743; 2003: 31).

In conclusion, the positioning of the sixteen ascetics' story within the entrance lunette of Kizil Cave 114's main chamber (Drawing 1) merits particular attention as a significant deviation from established iconographic conventions, as Zin has previously observed (Zin 2023: 499). This cave displays a decorative programme that stands as an exception in Kuchean art. Most notably, the principal niche in the rear wall, which commands immediate visual attention upon entering the chamber, presents a meditating Bodhisatva adorned with nimbus and mandorla rather than the conventional Buddha figure.[25] This figure may be identified

[23] Ji (1998: 82–83). This fragment (no. YQ II.4) belongs to a manuscript of the Tocharian A *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* recovered at Shorchuk (Qigexing) near the Buddhist temple ruins in 1974 and is housed in the Xinjiang Museum, Urumqi. See also CEToM YQ II.4, https://cetom.univie.ac.at/?m-yqii4 [accessed 8 August 2025].

[24] The Old Uyghur Bāvari story survives in fragments from a chapter devoted to Maitreya's life within a larger text collection. These fragments were recovered during the Third German Turfan Expedition (1906–1907) and are housed in the Depositum der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, under the class marks U 1945 + U 2028 + U 1188, Mainz 699. For editions, translations and analysis, see Zieme (1997: 745–753, 2003: 33–44, 2005: 533–534); Wilkens (2010: 31, 302–306, cat. nos. 412, 416); Cengiz (2024: 2–16).

[25] For reproductions of the main chamber's rear wall niche, see *Kizil Grottoes* (1983–1985/1989–1997: II, pl. 120); *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China: Kucha* (2008: pl. 35); *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China* (2009: I, pl. 162); Zhao et al. (2020: I, 266, fig. 1).

with considerable confidence as Maitreya himself. The implications of this iconographic choice extend throughout the chamber's visual organisation. Given that Maitreya already occupies the position of greatest prominence as a great Bodhisatva in the main niche, the entrance lunette requires alternative treatment. Conventionally, this space would accommodate a Bodhisatva depicted in Tuṣita heaven, awaiting an auspicious moment for descent to earthly Buddhahood. Instead, this location houses the narrative of the sixteen ascetics' visit to the Buddha, which recounts Maitreya's assumption of monastic vows during his final earthly existence prior to his prophesied descent as the future Buddha. The linear arrangement of the seven former Buddhas beneath this scene, comprising the six Buddhas of the past together with Śākyamuni, reinforces the concept of Buddhist succession and emphasises the unbroken continuity of *dharma* transmission across cosmic epochs.

Acknowledgements

I'm deeply grateful to Dr. J. Keith Wilson, June and Simon K.C. Li Curator of Chinese Art at the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington D.C., and to Tellie Simpson, Rights & Reproduction Coordinator, for their generous assistance in confirming the CC0 copyright status of the Kizil Cave 224 painting fragments discussed in this paper, which are housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum as part of the John Gellatly Collection.

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T — *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 [Taishō Edition Tripiṭaka]. Ed.: Takakusu et al. (1924–1934).

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T 202 *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, **Damamūkanidānasūtra* (*Nj.* 1322; compiled by Huijue 慧覺 et al. 445 CE), ed. vol. 4, pp. 349a–445a.

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Exploring Gandhāran Relic Rituals and Veneration II: Ritual Vignettes on Gandhāran Pedestal Reliefs

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Abstract: It has long been recognised that the pedestals of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues from the ancient region of Gandhāra depict, to some extent, scenes that echo ritual practices that were normative for the region. While they have been the focus of assessments in recent years, this paper presents some of the results of an ongoing systematic analysis of 326 statue pedestals within the wider context of Gāndhārī donative inscriptions and Chinese travelogues. Dating broadly from the second century CE onwards, this paper argues that the pedestals were a new venue to visually reinforce ritual efficacy and normative practices. The paper sheds light on the conventions used on this visual frame and the actions of figures represented within them. By doing so, it demonstrates that the image corpus reflects patterns in the epigraphic corpus that lays emphasis on the individual as well as communal ritual practices of donors with both familial and non-kinship networks.

Keywords: Pedestals, relics, rituals, Gandhāra, Buddhism, gender, community

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1. Introduction

Ancient Gandhāra, encompassing parts of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been the focus of both systematic and illicit excavations for over two centuries. The investigations have yielded a substantial corpus of material related to its visual culture. Collectively referred to as Gandhāran art, this corpus includes stone and stucco statues and reliefs depicting scenes from the Buddha's life, ritual praxis, and decorative motifs. Based on diverse research traditions, Gandhāran art has attracted and sustained scholarly attention since the early nineteenth century.

In recent decades, scholarship has made significant progress in understanding the socio-political functions of Gandhāran art within its Buddhist context. These advances have occurred alongside the discovery of textual materials, including donative inscriptions and manuscripts in the Gāndhārī language.[1] The data relevant to our present discussion is limited to donative inscriptions,[2] which can be found on a variety of objects including metal objects, stone reliquaries, architectural and sculptural material in schist, and terracotta pots and lamps. Gandhāran manuscripts attest to the rich literary tradition of the region. However, the fragments edited so far do not preserve any accounts that may be useful in studying how ritual and veneration practices were conducted, or at least conceptualised, in Gandhāra.[3] For rituals, we should turn to the inscriptions, although a vast majority of these inscribed objects originate from poorly documented or unknown contexts. Many were acquired through the antiquities market, complicating efforts to correlate the places mentioned in inscriptions with known archaeological sites in Gandhāra. Nonetheless, dating formulas and palaeographic features provide a basis for estimating the period in which donations were recorded. When fully preserved, the inscriptions offer a combination of information regarding donors and their socio-cultural milieu. Typically formulaic in structure, they state the date of the donation, the principal donor(s), any accompanying co-donors, the nature of the donated object(s), aspirations, and the beneficiaries with whom the donor(s) shared

1 Gāndhārī – a local Middle Indo-Aryan language written in the Kharoṣṭhī script – was widely used in Central Asia from the third century BCE to the fifth century CE.

2 This article does not deal with birch bark manuscripts, dating as early as the end of the first millennium BCE, but this body of evidence has made a significant impact on our understanding of Buddhism in the region, see Salomon (1999).

3 This is because conserving and reading birch bark manuscripts preserved as scrolls is an arduous process that involves patching fragile pieces together. Based on the scrolls found in a clay pot presumably from Haḍḍa, Salomon argues that some of them were presumably *dharma* relics (Salomon 2009: 28–29). Ritual and veneration are examined together as the gestures of veneration are placed within the ritual context. A discussion of the relationship between the two within Buddhism can be found in Trainor (1997: 159–165).

merit.[4] Using an interdisciplinary methodology that combines texts and images, this paper sheds light on the visual presentation of ritual activities. It is an exercise in studying how ritual performance, and donor and devotee groups were presented on Gandhāran pedestals by interpreting them alongside texts with phenomenological questions in mind.[5]

In order to make sense of Gandhāran art, it is customary to turn to the travelogues of the seventh century Chinese monk Xuanzang (玄奘, c. 602–664 CE) and to some extent Faxian (法顯, 337–422 CE), which are particularly valuable for studying the continuity of Buddhist religious praxis. Chinese monks travelled to places outside of the Chinese Empire, such as parts of Central and South Asia, to study Buddhist doctrines and visit sites associated with the Buddha *vita*.[6] Their preserved accounts offer valuable insights into the religious landscapes, monastic institutions, rituals, and doctrinal developments of the regions they traversed.[7] Since the nineteenth century, these records have played a critical role in identifying Buddhist sites and interpreting archaeological remains. In the context of Gandhāra, they have proven especially useful for tracing the development of Buddhism,[8] such as the strategies used to implant the religion through localising narratives that translocate places associated with the Buddha's biography from the Gangetic plains to the Swat Valley.[9]

Among these travelogues, Xuanzang's *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* (大唐西域記, *Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang*) describes some of the rituals observed in Gandhāra during his visit.[10] However, the level of detail concerning specific rituals varies across the text. As such, a combined approach – drawing on literary,

[4] While the complete examination of the inscriptions addressed here is beyond the scope of this paper, I provide their Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscription (CKI numbers) in this section to facilitate their retrieval. The most recent editions of the inscriptions and their associated bibliography can be found on https://gandhari.org/ created by Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass.

[5] The basis of this paper derives from a work published seven years ago by Oskar von Hinüber, which presented an overview of inscriptions related to joint donations made by kinship groups (von Hinüber 2018). Using a handful of inscriptions, von Hinüber studied the composition of average families in an attempt to estimate their approximate size in early India. He further analysed the relationship between image and inscriptions representing family groups. The present article revisits von Hinüber's central theme while simultaneously expanding the methodology to visual and epigraphic data from Gandhāra.

[6] For an overview of the Chinese travellers as well as the impact of the records on history and archaeology in the 19th century, see Deeg (2018, 2019).

[7] Although questions remain on the veracity of the records. For example, Deeg (2007) has questioned whether Xuanzang has really been in Mathura.

[8] Kuwayama (2006). On the question of relics, see Behrendt (2003) amongst others.

[9] Broadly on literary strategies in Gandhāra, see Deeg (2011, 2021) and Neelis (2014, 2019).

[10] The act of seeing the relics and the relic's response is highlighted in Lakshminarayanan (2024: 101–115).

visual, and archaeological sources – is essential to enhancing the interpretive value of all available data. Before delving into the epigraphic and visual data from Gandhāra, let us turn to the Chinese travelogues for a brief overview. We will see how, despite the lack of specific details, the texts provide a strong basis for studying ritual practices in Gandhāra. Moreover, the subsequent paragraphs offer clarifications on certain behavioural elements evident in our visual corpus and, based on the Chinese texts, we can speculate on their meaning within the ritual context.

Xuanzang's observations include a discussion of nine physical expressions of reverence common in South Asian religious practice, several of which are archetypal and are reflected in the Gandhāran visual record.[11] For instance, two expressions of reverence such as the act of bringing the palms together in *añjalimudrā* and kneeling down on one knee are the most common attitudes of figures in contact with the Buddha and his relics. According to Xuanzang, such expressions were not limited to reverence for the Buddha but were also used to convey hierarchical relationships, such as those between senior and junior monastics. This hierarchy is mirrored in Gandhāran reliefs, particularly pedestals, where the central figure (the Buddha or a Bodhisattva) and objects (relics such as bowl, turban, reliquary) are rendered on a larger scale and surrounded by smaller, reverent figures.

The Chinese sources also indicate that both monastics and lay devotees[12] commonly venerated the Buddha and his relics through donations, flowers, and incense.[13] According to the *Da Tang Xiyu Ji*, flowers were said to rain from the sky as crowds competed to make offerings on ritual days (T.2087. 878c.5). While the act of using flowers and incense in veneration seems straightforward, the texts often lack details about the nature of the donations themselves.[14] Donations are referenced, sometimes across centuries, without specifying the objects or practices involved.[15] This textual ambiguity echoes a recurring

[11] T.2087. 877c.12. According to Deeg (unpublished manuscript), some of the gestures are difficult to interpret even within the Chinese context.

[12] In the case of *Youfang jichao* 遊方記抄 by Huichao (慧超), the lay people are composed of the king, the officials and other common people (Fuchs 1938: 448).

[13] The importance of perfumes, from both flowers and incense, in veneration practices despite being forbidden for use by renunciated and pious Buddhist devotees is underlined by Ching (2014).

[14] *Luoyang qielan ji* (洛陽伽藍記, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*) mentions events from the Buddha's previous lives as a Bodhisattva that took place in the Swat Valley such as his generosity as Viśvantara who donated his children and as Mahāsattva, who donated his body to a starving tigress (T.2092.1019c.18). In this text, the region is said to produce a variety of flowers during winter and summer and the monks and lay offered the flowers to the Buddha.

[15] For instance, the bowl of the Buddha passed through different kingdoms, received donations for centuries and arrived in the kingdom of Persia (*Da Tang Xiyu ji* T.2087. 879c.5). It was

interpretive challenge in visual analysis: determining what constitutes an act of donation.

For the purposes of this study, two methodological concessions have to be made based on the nature of our source. Firstly, the categories of "devotees" and "donors" are treated as functionally equivalent. Whether figures are depicted offering incense or flowers or simply paying respect, they are collectively analysed as "donors".[16] Secondly, the lack of inscriptions on the vast majority of the pedestals means that we must consider figures as ahistorical generic donor figures. Where inscriptions are present, we can identify specific historical donors and sometimes situate them within broader networks of Buddhist patronage. In contrast, as we will see in the subsequent section, ambiguity is not part of our epigraphic data. Wherever fully preserved, Gāndhārī inscriptions explicitly state the name of the donor, the object donation, and in some cases, donors' network within the Buddhist religious landscape.

2. Communal and Individual Donors in Gāndhārī Inscriptions

In his study of family units, Oskar von Hinüber (2018) discussed a well-known Gāndhārī inscription of the donor Helagupta. This inscription, written on a copper plate in the latter half of the first century CE, presents a detailed cross-section of his family.[17] It mentions three generations of Helagupta's family, some of them alive, and others deceased at the time of the donation. According to the text, the donor Helagupta was the son of Demetrios and Sudarśanā who also had a daughter named Rāmadattā. Helagupta was married to Sumāgadhā and had several children (sons: Adura, Arazanda, Adramitra, Adravharna, Demetrios, and Mahāsammata; daughters: Kāśīkā, Supraguptā, Sudarśanā, and Suprajñā). The family had a mix of Indic, Greek, and Iranian personal names. Based on their names alone, it is difficult to deduce the ethnic composition of this family. This is generally the case within the corpus of Gāndhārī inscriptions. Donors, regardless of their ethnicity, seem to have had a rich pool of names available to choose. In the case of Helagupta's family, "if the succession of names mirrors

venerated and given donations for centuries before it was passed through different kingdoms. In *Luoyang qielan ji*, these donations seem to have been nets of pearls. After the *stūpa* was built, king Kaniṣka gave it a net made of pearls, however, he is said to have buried the net in a cauldron so that it may be protected from theft by *nāga*s (*Luoyang qielan ji* T.2092.1021). In contrast, Xuanzang only mentions donations regarding the Kaniṣka *stūpa* (*Da Tang Xiyu ji* T.2087.879c.15; Deeg 2004).

16 Distinctions made between donor and devotee in the visual context is highly debatable. Needless to say, donors are certainly devotees. However, using donors as an analytical category is consistent with current practices in Buddhist studies, see Kim (2020), Lakshminarayanan (2023).

17 CKI 564. This inscription has been expertly discussed in Falk (2014) and for the latest edition and translation, see Salomon (2020).

the succession of births, then we can deduce that the first born all have Iranian names, while the 'foreign' languages come last" (Falk 2014: 11). Moreover, the naming convention also aligns with practices on the subcontinent, where children are often named after their ancestors, resulting in the repetition of names across successive generations. For instance, two of Helagupta's children are named after his parents, Demetrios and Sudarśanā.

Such elaborate inscriptions naming multiple generations are not commonly featured in the Gāndhārī epigraphic corpus. In contrast to Helagupta's inscription, smaller family units appear in our corpus. These units consist of the donor's immediate relatives, even if their names are not mentioned. This is the case of the Ramaka inscription found on a stone relic chamber from an unidentified site in Bajaur, Pakistan, dating to 16/17 ce. The inscription states that Ramaka, son of Mahāśrava, established a relic in the honour of his unnamed parents, wife and two sons, Mahavarma and Mahiṃdra.[18] It is not clear why the two sons are named while the other family members remain unnamed. It is possible that these unnamed individuals were not physically present during the donation ritual, perhaps even deceased by the time Ramaka established the donation.

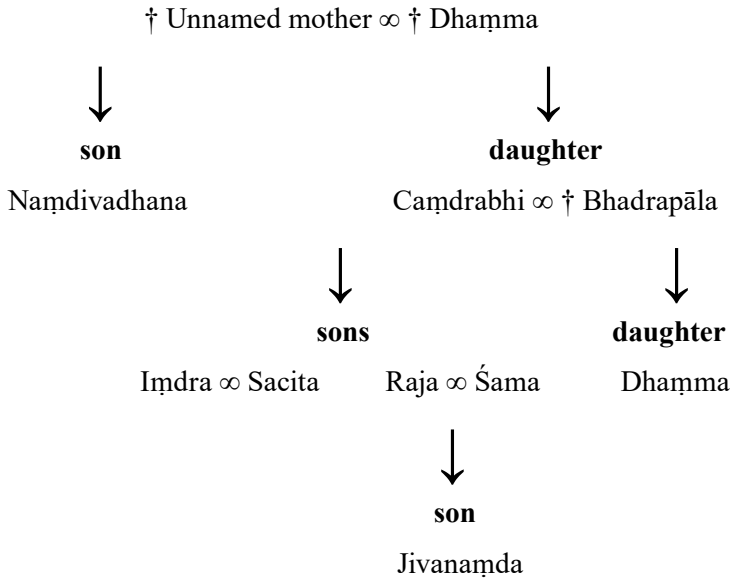
Unnamed, but mentioned individuals are also part of other inscriptions, such as the Ariaśrava inscription dating to 40/41 ce.[19] Carved on a deep schist spherical reliquary, the text states that Ariaśrava, wife of Siaseṇa, established the relic donation with her sons Dhramaruya and Dhamaüta (Skt. Dharmagupta) and other unnamed sons along with her daughter, Aruprava, wife of Labu, and other unnamed daughters. The inscription mentions the names of three of her offsprings, Dhramaruya, Dharmagupta, and Aruprava, and it is clear that she had more children based on the references to them, albeit without names. One reason for not mentioning their names could simply be related to the spatial constraints of the medium on which the inscription occurs. The inscription was carved inside of the lid and the base, exhausting the space available on the spherical reliquary. However, we can also suggest a pragmatic reason, perhaps the unnamed members were not present during the donation ritual.

We may be able to evaluate this suggestion based on the Caṃdrabhi inscription, which details the names of some of her family members and allows us to ascertain the composition of the family unit at the time of the donation ritual (CKI 172). In this inscription, dating to 76/77 ce, the donor Caṃdrabhi, the wife of Bhadrapāla and daughter of Dhaṃma, established a relic donation in Kalawan, Taxila, with her brother, Naṃdivadhana, her sons Śama and Sacita, her daughter Dhaṃma, her two daughters-in-law Raja and Iṃdra, as well as

[18] CKI 251. The donor also honours the governor and other officials; however, this part of the text is not legible.

[19] CKI 358. For female donors such as Ariaśrava and Caṃdrabhi, and their role as Buddhist donors, see Lakshminarayanan (2023).

her grandson Jivanaṃda, son of Śama. While it is not explicitly mentioned, we may infer that the donation was not performed with members of her family who were deceased (although the possibility that they simply were absent for the donation ritual cannot be completely discarded). Thus, the names of her father and husband only serve as identity markers, and her mother's name is entirely omitted. Instead, the donor shares her merit with all beings (*savasatva*), a formula found in a number of inscriptions.[20] Based on the available information, we can reconstruct some parts of Caṃdrabhi's immediate family as follows:



This suggestion brings up some questions related to the temporality of the inscriptions vis-à-vis the donation ritual in Gandhāra, principally, when were the inscriptions composed and carved? We will return to this question in the next section in relation to images, but for the moment, let us turn to the *vinaya* texts that detail some of the rules governing inscriptions. Based on some *vinaya*s, one may deduce that the donation ritual, for example, the ritual act of pouring water in the hands of the recipient, ended with the carving of a donative inscription.[21] Such practices are reflected by the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* and have already been discussed at length by Gregory Schopen (2004: 19–44). According to this *vinaya*, when Ajātaśatru donated his father Bimbisāra's furnishings to a monastery, several issues related to their possession and display by the monastic community arose. The Buddha addressed each of these issues by formulating specific regulations, including one that required the objects to be labelled as donations from King Bimbisāra. The practice of recording donations

[20] For instance, CKI 251, 358, 564, 147, 245, 158 to name a few.

[21] Wezler (1987). For the use of ewers in the donation context, see Falk (2012: 49–53).

in this narrative "carries the seed of what will grow into full-blown formulae for the *transfer of merit*" (Schopen 2004: 25; italics by author). The formulaic nature of the rule corresponds to what we know regarding donative inscriptions prevalent across the Indian subcontinent. Over time, this practice may have further evolved to include a variety of information beyond the donor's name. By reading our inscriptions in light of such rules in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, we can only hypothesise that inscriptions were recorded after the donation was complete and could therefore reflect, more sincerely, aspects of the ritual including the presence of various participants.

Let us also consider other groups of donors that are not always linked by familial ties. The earliest inscription of this type dates roughly to 10/9 BCE (CKI 455). The text, written on a gold sheet, states that a company (*sahayara*; Skt. s*ahacara*) of men named Kuḍiyas established a *stūpa* in Haḍḍa.[22] The benefit of the donation is shared amongst the mothers, fathers and daughters of the Kuḍiya companions. The inscription provides a list of 22 individuals, amongst whom there are two sets of brothers (Buddhagiri and Saṅghamitra, sons of Buddhadeva; and Mahālabdha, Supaṇḍita, Mahāzanda and Mahādeva, sons of Mahādeva).[23] On the whole, the disparate individuals are united by their affiliation with the Kuḍiya *sahacara* and subsequently, the act of establishing this donation. The list of names of the 22 individuals and their parents reflects the trend already highlighted by the Helagupta inscription. The diversity in their names has led Falk to astutely remark that "the Kuḍiya group is composed of families with a rather different religious and social background, which, however, does not exclude an ethnic unity" (Falk 2020–2021: 119).

Other inscriptions also paint a similar picture of donors coming together through non-kinship affiliations. For instance, an inscription on a short cylindrical stone dating roughly 25/26 CE states that a relic donation was established by three men: a donor whose name is not preserved but identified as the son of Dhramila, Sabhakaa, son of Kumuka, Saareṇa, the son of Dasadija (CKI 266). The inscription does not state if the donors had any familial or entrepreneurial connection.[24] Another inscription on a stone relic-chamber dating to 144/145 CE,

[22] For the Kuḍiyas companions, see also CKI 61. Other *sahacara*s (companions) are mentioned in CKI 47 (name not preserved; CKI 829 (Asparakṣida); CKI 156 (Dronivaḍra); CKI 51 (Pipalakhaa); CKI 45 (Vadhitira).

[23] A complete analysis of the inscription as well as a discussion on the name Kuḍiya can be found in Falk (2022). On questions surrounding the authenticity of the inscription, see Salomon (1999: 144), Baums (2012: 201; 2018: 58).

[24] It should be noted that the last line of the inscription states that the relics were also established the great king Kopśakasa in Tramaṇa. Other inscriptions from the unknown site of Tramanosa are CKI 255 (Relic Inscription of Utara) and CKI 327 (Relic Inscription of Mahazada, Krini and Śamasabaha). According to Salomon, Trama and its variants refer to a capital city or an administrative centre of the Apracas (2007: 274–275). This suggestion cannot be confirmed

the Lala inscription, mentions a number of male participants involved in the donation without explicitly stating their relationship (CKI 149). This inscription from Manikyala, Pakistan, states the names of four male individuals: Lala established several relics along with Veśpaśia, Khudacia, and Burita. Some other individuals are mentioned as part of the retinue of the donor but are not named.

Another inscription in which no familial relationships are mentioned is the Budhapriya inscription dating to 171/172 CE (CKI 511). Written on a spherical earthenware container from Jalalabad, Afghanistan, the text states that a monastery was established by Budhapriya, Budadeva, Zadasara, the monastery master Sagila, Bhatamuḍaya, and Budhavarma. The short inscription does not state the relationship between the male donors and based on the aforementioned inscriptions; they need not belong to the same family.

Similar donative inscriptions consisting of individuals without kinship links are also attested outside of Gandhāra, particularly in earlier periods from Sanchi and Bharhut in Northern India. These inscriptions, written in Brāhmī and referring to lay men, women, monks and nuns without explicit kinship connections, have been viewed by Thapar as a consequence of "a deliberate act of choice [that] can be seen when a community decides to donate wealth and labour towards the building of a monument that encapsulates its religious beliefs and social values [and] where the patron is not a single person but a recognisable group" (THAPAR 1992: 19). The relationship between the individuals is generally framed as *goṣṭhī*s (*goṭhī*) or "corporate bodies" that are understood to be assemblies "possessing some sort of power, probably social and economic at its heart".[25] In comparison, the extant Gāndhārī epigraphic corpus do not speak of *goṣṭhī*s, only of *sahacara*s (companions), which could be interpreted in the same vein as corporations. Given the lack of direct references to the relationship between some individuals in our inscriptions, we can only hypothesise that these individuals, despite the lack of familial ties, pooled their resources together to establish their donations.

In contrast, the most common inscriptions in the corpus are short and they mention the name of a single donor.[26] For example, a donative inscription of unknown date and preserved *in situ* at Jaulian, Pakistan, states that the donation was made by only one donor, a monk named Dhaṃmamitra, who was also

based on the available evidence. Moreover, the last line could also be associated with a previous dedication associated with the same relics.

25 For an overview of the term in different periods, see MILLIGAN (2019: 4).

26 Even with a single donor, a longer inscription can provide the conditions associated with the donation as well as the donor's motivations. On an inscription referring to a re-establishment of relics which were first established around 150 BCE, only the Apraca king Vijayamitra (II) is mentioned as a donor (CKI 176).

a city-dweller (Skt. *nāgaraka*).[27] On the Indian subcontinent, the appearance of such relatively short inscriptions are known from as early as the third century BCE. These short inscriptions generally state the name of the donor as well as other socially relevant information such as their gender, status or their place of origin.[28] According to Matthew Milligan, short inscriptions preserve a different intentionality of the record keeper, in contrast to the longer inscriptions that predominantly date to the later periods. Milligan further hypothesises that these inscriptions may have been the precursors to more elaborate inscriptions recording complex ritual characteristics. In Gandhāra, there appears to be no clear chronological distinctions between short and long donative inscriptions. The coexistence of both types within the epigraphic corpus suggests a closer relationship between the text and the object on which it was inscribed, rather than an evolution in the way ritual activities were recorded.[29]

Besides individual donors, couples such as Prince Iṃdravarma from the Apraca royal family and his wife were present in the ritual landscape as early as the first century CE. A silver sheet inscription found within a schist container in an unknown site from Bajaur, Pakistan, states that Utara, the wife of Iṃdravarma I, together with her husband established the relics of the Buddha.[30] In a later inscription of unknown date and written in pointillé style on two silver goblets in the first century CE, the text states that a relic donation was established by Prince Iṃdravarma (II) of the Apraca family along with his wife (CKI 241). In this text, the donors honour a number of beneficiaries from the royal family with their donation such as *stratega* (Apraca heir) Iṃdravarma (I) and his wife Utara, the former king Vijayamitra and his wife. More generally, the text also refers to the whole community of relatives of the Apracas and all beings with whom the donors shared their merit.

The Gāndhārī epigraphic corpus is replete with donor groups, familial and corporate, that are linked together by their donative capacity and agency. The active participation of such groups is not limited to the textual material.

[27] CKI 78. For the translation, see Konow (1929: 95). To this list we can add several donor monks from Jaulian inscriptions, such as CKI 74. 75, 77, 79, 80, 81 as well as other from Termez in CKI 663, 664, 748, 749, 897 in which monks appear as donors alone.

[28] For an analysis of the ritual significance of inscriptions, regardless of their length, in the early period, see Milligan (2013).

[29] Spatial constraints seem to be a significant factor contributing to the length of the inscriptions. For instance, inscriptions on metal plates such as those of the Oḍi king Seṇavarma (CKI 249), Patika (CKI 46); Balanaṃdi (CKI 147), Helagupta (CKI 564) and Caṃdrabhi (CKI 172) are considerably longer. In comparison, inscriptions on objects with constraints on space due to their smaller surface areas tend to be short, for example, on lamps such as CKI 68 (Dharmarajika Lamp inscription), CKI 175 (Utmanzai Lamp inscription) amongst others.

[30] CKI 265. The text mentions the name of Utaraüta, Pupidria, Uṣaṃvea as well as Śreṭha, mother of the meridarch. It is not clear what relationship these individuals had with the donors. The donors also honour Viṣuvarma, the king of the Apraca as well as Rukhuṇaka, his wife.

Indeed, innumerable stone and stucco images representing figures in the act of donating and venerating are ubiquitously recovered from Gandhāran Buddhist sites. However, such images are classified as representing "generic" scenes and grouped together with other themes, thus escaping a more systematic analysis (Pons 2019: 15). This subsequent section lays the groundwork for such an analysis by focusing on one group of images: the pedestals of statues.

The following section of this article provides a broad outline of the pedestals classified within my UK Research and Innovation Horizon Europe Guarantee Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowship project titled *Gandhāran Relic Rituals and Veneration Explored* (GRAVE) at Cardiff University.[31] Pedestals are a specific visual frame located below the statues of seated and standing Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.[32] Generally, they are rectangular in shape and are delimited on both sides by decorative motifs such as Gandhāran-Corinthian pilasters or decorative furniture legs. Within this visual frame, relics such as the Buddha's bowl, turban, fire altars, incense burners, as well as seated Bodhisattvas, are centrally placed. Lay and renunciate figures flank these central entities on either side and perform a variety of actions. Based on 326 pedestals studied within GRAVE,[33] this section presents how male and female figures are arranged on these pedestals and how their interactions with relics and other objects are visually communicated. Subsequently, it also highlights the small group of nine pedestals with inscriptions that provide further insight into not only the visual compositions, but also the production of Gandhāran statues.

3. Visualising Donors on Gandhāran Pedestals

Our examination of ritual praxis in this section is deeply rooted in visual culture. Showing rituals on a static medium obliged sculptors to synthesise the actions, and pedestal reliefs privilege a specific moment that may have meaningfully appealed to the viewer. Thus, discerning the subject of the pedestal reliefs requires attention to their content, ritual setting, iconography, and their broader context. To do so, GRAVE's visual approach focuses on three elements: figuration, configuration, and presentation (Hölscher 2014). Figuration focuses on the physical characteristics of the figures, their clothing, attributes, gestures,

[31] The objectives of GRAVE can be found in Lakshminarayanan (2024: 87). The classification of the data, as well as the relationship between the pedestals and their statues is part of a forthcoming article.

[32] The relationship between the pedestals and statues also warrants a systematic study. This lacuna has also been identified in Rhi (2023). However, this topic deserves to be explored at length but doing so would take us outside of the scope of the present paper. An analysis of the pedestals and their relationship to the statues is part of a forthcoming article.

[33] This number continues to expand, however, the patterns observed and enumerated in this article remain constant.

and actions. Configuration deals with types of relics (primary and secondary), and the constellation of objects used in relic veneration. Presentation deals with how the ritual is presented to the viewer with careful consideration of its content and context. Using this approach, GRAVE explores rituals such as circumambulation, donations, processions, and festivals including dance and music to understand how images express behaviour and types of ritual accoutrements to promote communal and individual veneration. In this section, we are concerned with figuration, mainly the way in which figures are presented and grouped together.

To study figuration, pedestals are an important source for two main reasons. Firstly, they provide a large data set to study the way in which donor figures are represented. Secondly, the importance of pedestals as a visual frame is well established, particularly in the study of medieval Buddhist art. Claudine Bautze-Picron (1995, 2014) has persuasive highlighted how human characters were consistently relegated to the periphery of images, notably on the pedestals of Pāla period sculptures (circa 8th–12th ce). Studying statues from Eastern India, Bautze-Picron demonstrated that both lay and monastic figures, including families, in smaller proportions, ornamented pedestals in devotional gestures. On some pedestals, inscriptions identify them as donors, associating them with historical individuals. Moreover, statues and their pedestals can be studied in the framework of hierarchical scaling (Kim 2016: 206). Based on the repetitive structure of the pedestals, Jinah Kim suggested that they delineate the human realm and distinguish it from the realm of the statue, the Buddha realm. Providing distinct places for the two realms may have allowed artists to visually augment the activities of the contemporary "real" time in which the donors' actions take place. The pedestals have the ability to render the statue as "a place of exchange between two spheres, divine and human" (Bautze-Picron 2014). Thus, the actions on the pedestals are centred on rituals that mediate between the human and Buddha realms.

Amongst the statues with rectangular pedestals in Gandhāra, two types of imagery can be identified.[34] The first type consists of bases with decorative motifs, and the second type consists of bases with a central figure or object surrounded by figures. 83 pedestal reliefs were grouped together within the first type, and they depict floral and geometric motifs such as upside-down lotuses,[35]

[34] The classification of bases follows established practices within the field of Buddhist art, mainly apparent in medieval Buddhist art such as in Bautze-Picron (1985).

[35] 1902,1002.47, 1913,1108.18 (British Museum, London); 75–1024 (National Museum, New Delhi); 939.17.8 (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto); 5856 (Bihar Museum, Patna); G.132/A23188, N.S.3925/A23233 (Indian Museum, Kolkata); I 418 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin) amongst others. The lotus seat, according to some textual material, particularly those considered to be Mahāyāna, such as the *Da zhidu lun* (大智度論 Skt.**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*; *Treatise on the Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*) T. 1509. 25:

a row of rosettes,[36] and leonine legs with pleated fabric[37] amongst others (**Figs 1** and **2**).

The second type of pedestals are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.[38] This discussion is not without significant caveats. Some of these are inevitably part of any study on Gandhāran art; and relate to questions of provenance and chronology. Amongst the pedestals studied within GRAVE, only a small fraction can be associated with an excavated site. Many come from the Peshawar Valley, particularly sites that were part of the early excavations such as Sahri-Bahlol, Loriyan Tangai, Charsadda, Jamalgarhi and Takht-i-Bahi. In these cases, exact location of the statues within the site is not always easy to ascertain.[39] Due to the complex nature of our data, only a general context is provided for them. That is to say, the statues decorated chapels, niches or placed around the circumambulation area and were visible to the devotees (**Fig. 3**).[40] However, a large part of the data consists of pedestals whose provenance is not known.

Hand-in-hand with provenance, conclusions based on chronology are also difficult to make at this stage. Many of the early excavations were conducted without much regard for stratigraphy and other relative dating methodologies. Since an estimation of chronology based on style and iconography is challenging to make outside of the Swat Valley, GRAVE's corpus is simply dated as belonging

115c-16a, was considered to be a tender, pure and fragrant and so, superior to a mat, which was for ordinary people ("Question. – Il pourrait s'asseoir sur une natte (manca, khatvâ) ; qu'a-t-il besoin de ces lotus ? Réponse. – 1. La natte est le siège habituel des gens du monde (*loka*) et des laïcs (*avaddtavasana*) [mais non pas du Buddha]. De plus, les lotus sont tendres (*slaksna*) et le Buddha veut manifester sa force miraculeuse (*rddhibala*) en s'asseyant dessus sans les froisser" in Lamotte 1944: 464–465).

[36] I 449 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin); 13.96.17 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); 1880.218 (British Museum, London); 1969.61 (Clevland Museum of Art, Clevland); 29-68-1 (Penn Museum); 48-3-55 (National Museum, New Delhi); 939.17.13 (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto); AO 2908 (Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris); B60S132+ (Asian Art Museum, Los Angeles) amongst others.

[37] I 446, I 4893, I 497 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin); 1880.105, 1880.186, 1886,0319.2, 1899,0715.4, 1902,0520.2, 1904,1217.5 (British Museum, London); 1887.08.6327 (Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm); 25.267 (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore); 340-1907, IM.4-1911, IPN.2603, IS.83-1960, IS.112-1961 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London); 4857/A23211, 4871/A23462, GD133 (Indian Museum, Kolkata); 543 (Swat Museum, Mingora); 939.17.10 (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto); 1127 (Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh); Inv.-Nr. RVI 3 (Rietberg Museum, Zurich) amongst others.

[38] Amongst them 83 pedestals are damaged. Damaged pedestals could present a partially preserved scene (for example, PM 1533, BM 1892,0801.11, MET 2014.188, Indian Museum 5005/A23185) or could be completely effaced (for example, BM 1880.73, Walters Art Museum 25.123, Government Museum and Art Gallery Acc. no. 19).

[39] For instance, the majority of statues with pedestal reliefs come from Stūpa 1 and Chapel 16 from Jamalgarhi.

[40] For the general typology of these statues based on stylistic features, see Rhi (1994, 2008).

Fig. 1. Statue of standing Bodhisattva Maitreya with a decorated pedestal, Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, France © Musée national des Arts asiatiques, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 2. Statue of seated Bodhisattva Maitreya with a decorated pedestal, Indian Museum, India © Indian Museum, Kolkata. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

to a broad period falling between the second and the fourth centuries CE. This chronological period is substantiated on the results from excavations recording early examples of Buddhist art in the Swat Valley. The early artistic evidence from Swat Valley sites, such as Butkara I, Saidu Sharif I and Panr I, do not consist of statues with decorated pedestals. Whenever preserved, the pedestals of statues in the earliest dated Gandhāran artistic style, also known as drawing

Fig. 3. Shrines surrounding the main *stūpa*, Takht-i-Bahi, Pakistan © A. Martin. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

style, are plain and undecorated.[41] For this reason, we can safely advance that

[41] The corpus from Swat Valley, mainly Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I, has been divided by Faccenna into three groups based on the styles. Amongst the three, the first group is called "stile disegnativo" and is associated with the earliest phase of images due to "its fine parallel grooves showing a feeling for line prevailing over the somewhat summary, fattened rendering of the volumes of the bodies, the figures displaying a certain angularity" (Filigenzi et al.

elaborately decorated pedestals did not appear in Gandhāran art around the first century CE and can only be attributed to subsequent periods.

Overall, the reliefs follow a repetitive presentation structure with figures executing similar actions towards the central zone. The figures are generic; meaning their physiognomy is not varied within the composition (**Fig. 4**). Their clothing can only be described as Indic comprising of an *uttarīya* and *parīdhāna* (upper and lower body garments respectively), with the exception of a handful of pedestals depicting groups of figures in Kuṣāṇa attire (wearing a tunic and trousers).[42] The abstract facial character of the figures suggests that they are not portraits in the western sense but may be visual types that identify them as specific types of donors and devotees. When there are differences between the figures, even subtle, we can ascertain information that is not provided by our textual sources.[43]

Fig. 4. Pedestal of a missing statue comprising a large family group of donors, unknown provenance © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The majority of the figures on the pedestals are human, and both renunciate and lay are equally represented. When monks and lay figures appear together, the composition does not differentiate between them. They are depicted in the same

2003: 290). This style not only displays some affinity to Indian art in the Śuṅga periods, but the group belonging to this style do not depict the Buddha in the human form (Taddei 2006: 44–45). The base with a ritual scene from Butkara I belongs to the later period and can be found in Faccenna (1962–1964: PL. CCCX Inv. no. 2465).

42 For example, BB20-K-1 (The National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul) and GRS/B-B/SL.17 (Indian Museum, Kolkata).

43 Rhi (2023: 14–15), based on relief panels and statue bases, identifies typological dissimilarities between the figures and presents their order. He states that the differences between them are due to the fact that "monotonousness in the appearance of Buddha images overall would have made them indistinguishable from one another" (Rhi 2023: 18).

Fig. 5. Statue of standing Bodhisattva with pedestal comprising six donors, unknown provenance, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. CC0 1.0 Public Domain.

size, with equal attention to detail, and perform the same actions, suggesting a lack of hierarchical arrangement. The renunciate figures, many of them monks, perform their actions alongside the lay and do not always mediate or facilitate them. For instance, the pedestal of a standing Bodhisattva image from the Metropolitan Museum depicts six figures venerating an enthroned reliquary (**Fig. 5**).[44] The three figures on the right of the reliquary are monks, as suggested by their *saṃghāṭi* (outer robe of Buddhist monastic attire). One of them extends a thick garland towards the reliquary, echoing the offering of flowers that is repeatedly featured in literary sources. The three figures on the left are a monk, a female figure and possibly a nun.[45] The mixed categories of figures on the left (male/female, lay/renunciate), already present a panorama of the vignettes on the pedestals.

In comparison, the pedestal of a standing Bodhisattva image from the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh depicts four figures venerating the bowl (**Fig. 6**).[46] There are two female figures who are similarly dressed standing to the right of the bowl. However, their figuration conveys subtle differences (**Fig. 7**). The figure on the right, next to the pilaster, is considerably smaller compared to the female figure immediately next to the relic. They also perform different actions, for instance, the larger female figure offers a flower to the relic, and the smaller figure is depicted in *añjalimudrā* as she holds her offering in her hand. To the left of the bowl, two male figures, lay and monastic, are depicted in *añjalimudrā* and facing the relic. The four figures appear in equal standing, suggesting that the monk is not the officiant of the ritual but a participant at the same level as the other figures.

[44] The reliquary resembles some schist relic caskets unearthed in Gandhāra. Similar reliquaries also appear on the pedestals in G-375, G-381 (Lahore Museum); 81.193 (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).

[45] This is a hypothetical identification that I make based on the attire of the figures. Note that the monks bare one of their shoulders and the figure, identified as a nun, wears a robe that covers both her shoulders. For the attire of nuns and the difficulty in identifying them in visual material, see Lakshminarayanan (2024).

[46] The veneration of the bowl relic commonly appears on the pedestals An inexhaustive list is PM 1014, 1046, 1120, 1373, 1491, 2790 (Peshawar Museum, Peshawar); 13.96.16 (Metropolitan Museum, New York); 3699/A23192, 4896/A23209, 4453/GRS/NW/SL1, G.125A/A23214, GRS/B-C/H-7/SL.5, GRS239 (Indian Museum, Kolkatta); 37.99 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); 87.1153 (National Museum); 939.18.1 (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto); AO 2907 (Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris); 1192, 1218, 1844, 2225 (Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh); G-123, G-450, S-236, S-30, S-394, S-489 (Lahore Museum, Lahore).

Fig. 6. Statue of standing Bodhisattva with pedestal comprising four donors, Sikrai, Pakistan © Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 7. Detail of pedestal in Fig. 6, Sikrai, Pakistan, Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, India © Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

As with the previous illustration, the figures are not always depicted in equal size on the pedestals. In some cases, the size of the figures is impacted by the architectural frame. For example, on Fig. 5, the figures are of varying scale. However, the size of the last figures on either side of the reliquary is clearly impacted by the elongated cornice emerging above the Gandhāran-Corinthian pilasters. In contrast, we can identify pedestal images in which scale was deliberately manipulated to convey internal relationships between figures. In the case of the partially damaged pedestal currently at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, there are four figures venerating a seated Bodhisattva (**Fig. 8**). To the right of the Bodhisattva are three figures, two female figures in Indic attire and one small figure standing between them, a child.[47] The presence of a child amongst donor groups is significant. The two figures closest to the Bodhisattva hold offerings in their hand, the child and the second female figure venerate in *añjalimudrā*. Similarly, a pedestal of unknown provenance from the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh depicts a group of lay men and women venerating the seated Buddha in *abhayamudrā* (**Fig. 9**). On either side of the Buddha are three female figures and three male figures of whom the last figures

[47] Other pedestals with children that are not illustrated in this article are Acc. No. 066 (Museo della Civiltà Romana); I 435 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin); Hargreaves (1921: 20, no. 51); Fussman (1980: PL. VI).

Fig. 8. Pedestal of a missing statue comprising adult and child donors, unknown provenance © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin. CC BY-SA 4.0

Fig. 9. Pedestal of a missing statue comprising adult and child donors, unknown provenance © Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

closest to the architectural frame are children. The donors are organised based on their genders, so the child on the right is male and the one on the left is female.

Unfortunately, the poor condition of the pedestals does not always allow us to identify the gender of the children. Nevertheless, their visual presence enlarges our understanding of the epigraphic evidence. We have already seen how Helagupta, Ariaśrava and Caṃdrabhi established their donations with their family members, sometimes indicating multiple generations. The age of their family members is not mentioned, and it is difficult to deduce them based on the formulaic nature of the inscriptions. The pedestal reliefs with children as part of donor groups suggests that at least some of the family units in Gāndhārī inscriptions could have included children.

It is easy to dismiss the role of children within Buddhist institutions due to the latter's focus on renunciation. However, it is well established that safe childbirth and the health and wellbeing of children were significant preoccupations of lay devotees.[48] The successful integration of the *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī as a protector of children within Buddhist sites all over the subcontinent attests to the strategies exercised by the *saṅgha* to allay these preoccupations.[49] Several images of Hārītī have been found in Gandhāra and the most notable statue of the *yakṣiṇī* is from Skarah Dheri and includes an inscription (**Fig. 10**). This statue and inscription have been the subject of a lengthy analysis by Anna Maria Quagliotti (CKI 133, 1999–2000). Based on its style, Quagliotti assigned the statue to the first century CE and deftly argued that the goddess was likely venerated for her powers of fertility and ability to heal.

Schopen has further argued that children were given to the *saṅgha* as part of a protection ritual, imitating Hārītī as an anxious mother who gave her children to be protected after being converted by the Buddha (Schopen 2014: 131–156). Analysing passages from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, Schopen identified how children were given to monks and nuns for protection, especially if they were ill. When they recovered from their illness, their parents exchanged donations to recover their children, akin to a ransom. This cast the monks and nuns as protectors of the children of lay devotees including that of Hārītī.[50] Whether the

[48] Several inscriptions mention the gift of good health (*arogadakṣina*) as an important motivation for establishing donations. A few examples are CKI 60, 509, 369 (for the donor's own health), 830, 159, 367, (health for all beings), and 161 (health of the father).

[49] The textual references of Hārītī are documented in Peri (1917). For the images and their iconography, see Ahuja (2019). This includes the shrines found in Kauśāmbī and Ajaṇṭa, see Sharma (1958: xxxvi– xlv), Cohen (1998: 8) respectively.

[50] Similarly, in Yijing's *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* (南海寄歸內法傳, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago*, c. 635–713 CE), offerings were made to the goddess to cure diseases and pray for fertility.

Fig. 10. Statue of Standing Hārītī statue with inscription, Skarah Dheri, Pakistan © Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

presence of children in our pedestals allude to circumstances described in the *vinaya* is impossible to confirm at this stage. All that we can conclude based on the available evidence is that our reconstruction of the ritual landscape should include not only adult donors but also their children, who seem to be active participants in the artistic conceptualisation of rituals.

In some of the aforementioned pedestals, the central zone is occupied by the seated Buddha or Bodhisattva. In some cases, the seated Bodhisattva also holds a *kamaṇḍalu* (water pot), an attribute associated with Maitreya.[51] When the seated Bodhisattva without *kamaṇḍalu* is present, the figure is interpreted as Siddhartha Gautama prior to his enlightenment (Rhi 2003: 165). Other pedestals depicting the ploughing episode, a prominent episode in the biography, further support this interpretation (**Fig. 11**).[52]

How can we explain the presence of donor figures in the context of the first meditation of Siddhartha? Some "floating" episodes from the Buddha Śākyamuni's life story became popular and were celebrated as festivals. For each of these festivals, new rules had to be instituted to organise them efficiently and manage the resulting donations. One of the festivals for Siddhartha's enlightenment called the "the Great Worship of the Bodhisattva" was "naturally associated with an image of the seated Buddha in the meditation posture".[53] In the rules related to the "Great Worship of the Bodhisattva", we come across the way in which this image of the Bodhisattva was venerated by donors (Schopen 2014: 390–403). In this text, the lay donor *par excellence*, Anāthapiṇḍada, is said to have created an image of the Bodhisattva after the Buddha authorised it. Subsequently, Anāthapiṇḍada created a processional circuit for the image and provided ornaments to decorate it. This image is explicitly described as the "Bodhisattva Sitting in the Shade of the *Jambu* Tree", connecting it with moments prior to the enlightenment. After several regulations, the image was further adorned with flags, banners and palanquins, and even retinues of monks and nuns, and music was supplied to the procession. Such extravagance attracted, in typical *vinaya* fashion, a great many people who assembled to see it in

[51] Luczanits (2005). On the role of Maitreya as a healer, see Falk (2023). Moreover, Maitreya also appears on pedestals with other Buddhas (Behrendt 2014). Furthermore, there are indications that the Bodhisattva with *kamaṇḍalu* can also represent Siddhārtha in some cases, see Lobo (1991).

[52] They are a seated Siddhārtha statue with a pedestal depicting the ploughing episode in PM_02750 from Sahri Bahlol and a fasting Buddha statue with the pedestal of Siddhārtha meditating near farmers ploughing a field in PM_02756 from Takht-i-Bahi. For the earliest studies including textual parallels, see Horsch (1964), Durt (1982).

[53] Schopen (2005: 132–133). Quote in 133. In contrast, the *Sarvāstivāda vinaya* has often been used to suggest that the Buddha rejected the use of images of his likeness in veneration. To circumvent this rule, Anāthapiṇḍada requested the Buddha if he could make an image of the Bodhisattva, the Buddha prior to his enlightenment (for the discussion of this text, see Rhi 1994: 209). This request was accepted by the Buddha.

Fig. 11. Seated Siddhārtha in meditation, Lahore Museum, Pakistan © The Warburg Institute Iconographic Database. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 12. Seated Bodhisattva in meditation, Sanchi, India © American Institute of Indian Studies. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

procession. With much pomp and circumstance, the image was successful in obtaining an abundance of donations, including flowers and cloth (Schopen 2014: 306–309). Art historical and epigraphic evidence suggest that donating Bodhisattva images was common in the Kuṣāṇa period, both Gandhāra and Mathura.[54] Notably, the inscription on the pedestal of a seated Bodhisattva statue from Sanchi states that a shrine (*gṛha*) was made for the image of the Bodhisattva under the *Jambu*-shade (**Fig. 12**). The shrine for the statue of the type

[54] Notably, the bi-script inscription in Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī states that the Bodhisattva image (*paṭimā*) was the donation (CKI 440 in Falk 2002–2003: 35–36).

Fig. 13. Pedestal relief depicting an open incense burner, unknown provenance

jambuchhāyā (the shade of the *jambu* tree) was installed in the Dharmadeva vihāra (the name of the monastery) by Madurikā, daughter of Khara, sometime in 255 CE (Willis 1999–2000). It is hard to imagine the statue being paraded, needless to say that stone images are significantly heavier than bronze statues that were typically used for processions in the later periods. Nevertheless, the Sanchi statue along with the inscription attest to the persistence of the image type "Bodhisattva Sitting in the Shade of the *Jambu* Tree" in the Kuṣāṇa period. Even when stationary within a niche or a chapel, the statue was likely the focus of ritual activities in the manner echoed by our Gandhāran pedestals.

Besides normative practices, pedestals depicting donor figures alongside the Buddha, Maitreya and other Bodhisattvas could also be interpreted as part of a strategy to collapse different temporalities. According to Jinah Kim, this strategy involves embedding donors within the past, literally placing them within a historical timeline and collapsing the temporal gap between donors and the Buddha (Kim 2020: 209–210). Donor figures were seamlessly placed in auspicious events, including those that would have already occurred and those

Fig. 14. Detail of a pedestal depicting an open fire burner, unknown provenance © Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, A. Lakshminarayanan. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

which were celebrated such as the First Meditation. In the presence of these auspicious events, donor figures perform various activities, namely offering garlands, flowers and clothing and using contemporary accoutrements, namely incense burners (**Fig. 13**) and fire stands (**Fig. 14**). When incense burners and fire stands appear on pedestals, it is not hard to imagine that statues may have been venerated similarly with these objects.[55] They are generally placed on the ground as donor figures symmetrically stand around them in various attitudes. The use of these accoutrements could also be dynamic, for instance, pedestals depict figures holding the incense burner and fire stand in their hands,[56] or

[55] According to Falk (2008: 74–77), fire stands were also used in consecration rites during which some donations such as pearls and gemstones alongside other objects were burnt.

[56] G-254 (Lahore Museum, Lahore) depicts a monk holding a fire stand as a female figure venerates the missing statue. S-225 from the same museum depicts a male figure holding an incense burner as two female figures face the missing statue. The incense burner, unlike the others that are more commonly depicted on pedestals. The metallic incense burners from Gandhāra are the focus of Stone (2004).

Fig. 15. Statue of a standing male figure carrying a fire burner, Butkara I, Pakistan

Fig. 16. Statue of standing Buddha with pedestal comprising one monastic donor, Indian Museum, India © Indian Museum, Kolkata. The CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

even on top of their heads, communicating a more realistic dimension for these objects.[57] Such activities are also consistent with the earliest images from Swat Valley that depict donor figures carrying lamps (**Fig. 15**).[58] The exaggerated proportions of the fire stands and incense burners could only be interpreted as visual prompts. Rather than conveying their actual dimensions, the objects are prioritised in the visual conceptualisation to amplify the ritual activity.

The veneration of the statues themselves, similar to the "Great Worship of the Bodhisattva" festival, is supported by at least 14 pedestals.[59] On these pedestals, the figures directly face the statue above in *añjalimudrā*. More than half of the pedestals only comprise of one figure, while the others comprise two figures, mainly couples. The individual donors are commonly monks (**Fig. 16**), and one exception is a female figure venerating the seated Bodhisattva statue.[60] They echo numerous Gāndhārī inscriptions in which individuals establish donations and, in their donative text, do not mention their kinship or corporate networks. One of the statues, currently in the Lahore Museum, is a seated Buddha with a figured pedestal and an inscription. The latter was carved on the halo that is currently missing. The pedestal depicts a kneeling monk with an incense burner in his hand as he venerates the statue.[61] The inscription was only partially preserved when the statue was found, and it states that the statue was donated by Bosavaṃma. Does the monastic figure on the pedestal represent the donor of this quintessential image? The iconographic characteristic of this monk is also nothing new in Gandhāran art. He wears a pleated *saṃghāṭī* that leaves one of his shoulders bare. It would be impossible to differentiate this figure from the other monastic figures we have so far encountered. The dimensions and physical characteristics in no way allow us to determine if the figure makes allusions to a historically specific donor. Nevertheless, the inscription preserves the name of a single individual, and it is difficult to ignore the possibility that the name could correspond to the depicted figure. Even though the inscription does not state that the donor was a monk, the image may have played a role in communicating

57 GRS/B-C/H-2/SL-10 (Indian Museum, Kolkata) and TC-80 (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo).

58 The portability of these fire stands is further emphasised by BM 1902,1002.29 in which two lay donors seemingly circumambulate a *stūpa* along with two monks. One can certainly wonder if this relief captures a more dynamic representation of the same actions we see on the pedestals.

59 23937 (CSMVS, Mumbai), 49-24 (National Museum, New Delhi), 4915/A23213, GRS191, GRS/NW/SL8, GRS/B-A/H-15/SL.10, 4911/GRS/AR1&3/SL.27 (Indian Museum, Kolkata), G-152 (Lahore Museum, Lahore), I 407 (Staatliche Museum, Berlin), S-225, G-254 (Lahore Museum, Lahore), CHPT 178 (Dir Museum, Chakdara), Hargreaves (1921: no. 202), Acc. no. 848 (Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh).

60 GRS191 (Indian Museum, Kolkata).

61 G-152 (Lahore Museum).

this status.[62] In this way, the visual and textual information may have played complementary yet diverging functions in order to communicate different aspects of the donor. In order to test this hypothesis, the following section deals with eight other inscribed statues from Gandhāra. It will demonstrate that the inscriptions are not entirely disconnected from the visual composition on the pedestal, even if this connection remains elusive.

4. Inscribed Pedestals

Within the corpus, a handful of statues with an inscription are only preserved as pedestals. The text can be found either on the bottom fillet of the pedestal or on the halo, as in the case of Bosavaṃma's statue. Some inscribed images only consist of a few *akṣara*s and do not always lend themselves to a complete analysis. For a full list of inscriptions, see **Table 1**.

Table 1. List of Pedestals with inscriptions

No.	Museum	Provenance	Image	Inscription
1	Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum, Hokuto, Acc. No. 100083	Unknown	Standing Buddha	CKI 256
2	British Museum, London Acc. No. 1890,1116.1	Hastnagar	Pedestal	CKI 124
3	Lahore Museum, Lahore G-152	Unknown	Seated Buddha	CKI 120
4	Lahore Museum, Lahore G-277	Shahr-i-Napursan	Pedestal	CKI 131
5	Private Collection	Unknown	Pedestal	CKI 229
6	Private Collection	Unknown	Pedestal	CKI 192
7	Peshawar Museum, Peshawar Acc. No. 626	Palatu Dheri	Pedestal	CKI 125
8	Indian Museum, Kolkata No. A23482/4908	Loriyan Tangai	Standing Buddha	CKI 111
9	Peshawar Museum, Peshawar Acc. 501	Jamalgarhi	Seated Buddha	CKI 117

The figures on the pedestals only correspond to the information provided by their inscriptions to some extent. For example, let us take the pedestal from an unknown site in Peshawar. On this pedestal, a seated Bodhisattva Maitreya is

[62] Max Deeg argues that there is a high probability that this was a monk: the element *-varman* is frequently found in monastic names in Chinese monk biographies of the 4th/5th century CE from the region, and *bosa* is certainly related to a word derived from *budh* (personal communication, 31.10.2025).

flanked by three figures on either side. On each side are two monks accompanied by two lay male figures. Based on their iconographical features, the lay figures can be interpreted as Indra and Brahma, respectively. Moreover, the three figures are not arranged in a symmetrical manner: the figures on the left are tightly squeezed together with one monk standing behind the other two figures. The metrical inscription on the bottom fillet of the pedestal only provides us a vague reference to the donors.[63] In a poetic manner, the inscription states that the donors had the statue of the great seer (*maharṣi*), referring to the statue that is now missing, made as a donation. Fussman, when trying to interpret the scene on the pedestal, wondered "whether it is not merely an iconographic convention: the figures depicted on the pedestal would, in this case, not be representing any particular story, but serve to render homage to the statue of the Buddha, either sitting or standing, placed above the pedestal" (Fussman 1985: 146). Fussman's suggestion that the inscription is related to the image rather than the base is observable from other inscribed statues.

The Aśoraya Buddha statue, currently in the Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum, offers an interpretive space to examine Fussman's remark. The inscription on the halo of the statue states that the donation, referring to the statue, was made by the female donor Momadatta.[64] Bearing in mind that donative inscriptions and images, due to the nature of the sources, preserve different types of information, let us compare them. The four figures participating in this ritual include an elaborately dressed woman standing on the right, holding a bunch of long stems of flowers in her right hand and an unidentified object in her left hand.[65] Next to her stands a small sized figure, potentially a male child in *añjalimudrā*. On the left side of the incense burner is a relatively smaller sized female figure accompanied by a bearded male figure carrying a bunch of flowers. The pedestal, in effect, could depict a couple on the left side and a female figure, perhaps a mother, and a child on the right. If we consider that the donor, Momadatta, may be the most important figure in the composition, the female figure in larger proportions to the right of the incense burner likely represents the donor.

Who are the other figures? The inscription states that Momadatta, the wife of Balasoma established the donation in the Dharmarājikā [*stūpa*] of Aśoka at the city of Trama. The inscription does not mention any other individuals who may be part of the donation ritual. Even Balasoma is mentioned due to his relationship

63 CKI 229 translated in Fussman (1985: 147).

64 Salomon (2007: 283). The inscription was first read by Bailey (1982: 150–151) and he identified two donor names in the text: Moma, the wife of Balasoma and the unnamed wife of Aṇakara. The latter has been adjusted by Salomon to be read as the *suaṇakarabhayae* (wife of the goldsmith) rather than with the *sa* + name construction of co-donors as *aṇakara bhayae* (wife of Aṇakara).

65 Verardi (1994) interpreted them as leaves used for *homa* rituals.

with the donor rather than as a ritual participant. However, Momadatta is given two identity markers, wife of Balasoma and wife of a goldsmith. The latter has been commonly interpreted as referring to the profession of Balasoma. Conversely, in comparison, the pedestal depicts two women. Stefan Baums in personal communication with this author suggested that the inscription may refer to two women rather than one. If there were two female donors, the image on the pedestal would confirm, at least partially, the information supplied by the inscription.

The complex relationship between the pedestals and the associated inscriptions is borne out by the other examples. Take the Shahr-i-Napursan pedestal currently in the Lahore Museum.[66] The inscription is not complete and Konow suggests that the engraver likely did not have adequate space to insert the last three *akṣara*s (Konow 1929: 124). Nevertheless, it mentions the name of the donor and the beneficiary of the donation. According to the inscription, the donor was Saṃghamitra, a *śramaṇa* (monk) and he shared merit for his own health and the health of another beneficiary named Budhavaṃma (possibly also a monk).

When we compare the details in the inscriptions to the pedestal, several differences emerge. On the pedestal, the central figure is a seated Bodhisattva in *abhayamudrā*. He is surrounded by two renunciate figures on either side. Three of the figures are depicted in *añjalimudrā* and the fourth figure, on the left side, offers garlands. On the one hand, the text provides us the name of two male donors, one of whom is a *śramaṇa*. On the other hand, the image provides us four renunciate figures.[67] Unlike the standing Aśoraya base, where one figure is larger than the others, the Shahr-i-Napursan figures are all the same size. We cannot detect any scale-oriented hierarchy that visually distinguishes the donor from other figures. If we assume that two of the figures are the individuals mentioned in the inscription, the names of the other two members may have been omitted by the engraver of the inscription due to spatial constraints. Similarly, a pedestal of unknown provenance depicts six figures venerating an enthroned turban relic (Fussman 1980: Pl. VI). To the right are three figures, a male figure and two female figures making offerings. On the left, a male and female figure are accompanied by a boy. The inscription states that Śivarakṣida, son of Damarakṣida made the donation in honour of his parents (CKI 192). If one of the male figures on the pedestal is the donor, the other members could be the family members who participated in the ritual.

66 G-277 (Lahore Museum, Lahore) and CKI 131.

67 Amongst them, the figure to the right may be a nun. For the general ambiguity in the attire of nuns in Gandhāran art, see Lakshminarayanan (2024). Similarly, in the case of the standing Buddha statue from Loriyan Tangai, the image depicts four figures (two monastic and two lay male figures) and the inscription mentions two male names, Budhaghoṣa and Saṃghavarma, both likely monks. If the two monastic figures on the base were the donors, the two others may be beneficiaries or other members who participated in the ritual.

The nine pedestals provide us limited meaningful insights. Whether the pedestal figures are portraits of donors or not cannot be settled based on the aforementioned evidence. Scholars such as Robert DeCaroli have argued that the small human figures in early Buddhist art cannot be definitively identified as specific donors (DeCaroli 2015: 78–93). According to DeCaroli, the figures "may simply serve to highlight the importance of the narrative events, sacred sites, or scenes of worship that they typically adorn" (DeCaroli 2015: 80). He identified over 24 inscribed images belonging to the Kuṣāṇa period in Mathura to highlight important developments in the emergence of donor images. He concludes that "there is no direct correlation between named donors and the numbers or types (male or female, monastic or layperson) of 'donor figures' displayed in the sculpture. Even if we extend our comparison beyond the donors and include named beneficiaries, relatives, teachers, or recipients of merit, they still do not match neatly with the figures represented in the artwork. These observations militate against the possibility of an intentional correlation between actual donors and the devotees depicted in stone".[68]

We face similar constraints when studying inscribed pedestals from Gandhāra. Our criteria for associating the inscription with the reliefs are too flexible to be scientific, at least in this author's opinion, and some level of uncertainty is present even when correlations can be identified. To explain the dissonance between the inscriptions and the images, Padma Kaimal suggested "that formulaic donor images were carved before actual donors were found, and thus before inscriptions were added" (Kaimal 1999: 79). This may very well be the case with images being largely generic, and they remained so until donors commissioned an inscription. This would explain why the pedestal reliefs present figures that were not mentioned by the inscription. If the inscription reflected, albeit within a standard formula, the elements of the donation ritual, the reliefs could only be an idealised version that were prepared in advance. Moreover, seamlessly inserting donor figures alongside figures such as the meditating Siddhārtha, Maitreya, Indra and Brahma suggest that the pedestal reliefs were in no way attempting to capture the reality of donative rituals, but the contemporary nature of devotional practices.

4. Summary Conclusions and Further Considerations

This analysis of pedestals of Gandhāran statues revealed that representations of donors and devotee figures were both dynamic and operational. Despite their reliance on standard visual formulas, pedestal images exhibit internal variations, i.e., presenting diverse combinations of figures and objects. The appearance of multiple permutations – monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen employing fire

[68] DeCaroli (2015: 82–89). Quote starts in page 82 and finishes in 89 with the list of pedestals and images occupying pages 83–88.

stands, incense burners, flowers, and garlands – not only in the veneration of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and relics but also of the statues themselves, reflects a considerable degree of visual and ritual flexibility. Although we are unable to determine precisely how the *chaîne opératoire* accommodated these permutations and how donors may have perceived the statues, the themes presented in this article provide a fruitful venue for interpreting the pedestal images as ritual vignettes.

The growing number of donors in Gāndhārī inscriptions is not only matched but is also surpassed by the visual evidence. Any interpretation of the visual material is substantially enriched through comparative analysis with the epigraphic corpus. Gāndhārī inscriptions provide valuable insights into donors and their socio-religious networks, without which our understanding of the visual data would remain incomplete. This is not to suggest that visual sources are secondary or derivative; rather, they are integral components of a complex religious mosaic that operated within the same cultural sphere.

Whereas epigraphic sources explicitly identify the actors involved in ritual activities, images only allude to them. This has led scholars to argue that images "offer guidance to devotees by recommending or approving practices designed to facilitate veneration, and they do this by providing a focus for devotion. This suggests an interest in promoting or supporting devotional forms of worship" (DeCaroli 2015: 34). While this may well be the case, it is important to acknowledge that images could – and often did – perform multiple functions. As compelling ritual vignettes, they would have appealed to devotees in ways that texts could not. On one hand, they may have conveyed behavioural prescriptions; on the other, they may have served to amplify ongoing ritual performances. Understanding how such dynamics played out *in situ* requires a careful consideration of the archaeological contexts in which statues with pedestals were installed at Gandhāran Buddhist sites. This type of contextual analysis remains a scholarly *desideratum*, one that promises to deepen our comprehension of the interplay between visual, textual, and performative dimensions of Gandhāran Buddhism.

Author's note

This article presents the results of my project GRAVE (Gandhāran Relic Rituals and Veneration Explored) at Cardiff University, funded by UKRI (MSCA-Horizon Europe Guarantee) in collaboration with Max Deeg (Cardiff University, UK). It is the second in a series of articles published within GRAVE. I am extremely grateful to collaborators: Jessie Pons (Ruhr University, Germany) for her enthusiastic and insightful comments; and Stefan Baums (Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich, Germany) for patiently "brainstorming" the

inscriptions. My gratitude always to Max Deeg for his comments and generously sharing his translation and commentary on the Chinese texts. Many thanks also to the museums and individuals who shared their images with me and made this publication possible. I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers whose comments allowed me to further sharpen the arguments in this paper. Naturally, all mistakes are my own responsibility.

Abbreviations

CKI	Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions, see Catalog of Gāndhārī Texts, by Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass at https://gandhari.org/catalog (accessed 6 February 2025).
GRAVE	Gandhāran Relic Rituals and Veneration Explored (UK Research and Innovation Horizon Europe Guarantee Project, Cardiff University, Reference: EP/Y031008/1).
Skt.	Sanskrit.
T.	Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō. Ed.: Takakusu and Watanabe (1924–1934).

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 151–170
https://doi.org/10.60018/AcAsVa.jwtg4818

Describing the New in Old Style: Technological Modernity and Natural Imagery in A. R. Rājarājavarma's *Āṅgalasāmrājya*

David Pierdominici Leão

Abstract: The paper focusses on the analysis of selected samples from *sarga* XX of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, a *mahākāvya* composed by A. R. Rājarājavarma in 1897. These portions are centred on a description of the first passenger train introduced in India in 1853, during the regency of Lord Dalhousie (1812–1860). These eight stanzas of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, apart from appearing to be the first testimony in Sanskrit literature to reference a train, seem to be particularly relevant on account of their natural imagery, which interacts at different levels with the poetic depiction of modernity and technology offered in the *mahākāvya*.

Keywords: A. R. Rājarājavarma, Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, modern Sanskrit literature, Lord Dalhousie, East India Company, technology, locomotive

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Biographical overview

Within the galaxy of Indian writers in Sanskrit and Malayalam active at the end of the 19th century, a relevant place is occupied by A. R. Rājarājavarma Koyittanpurān (1863–1918), one of the most important poets during the so-called "Golden Age" of Keralan literature.[1] The author was born into the Parappanāṭ royal family of Caṅṅanāśśēri (Kottayam district), in the Lakṣmīpuram family palace (*koṭṭāram*). The poet's father was Vasudevan Nanpūtiri, a renowned and acclaimed Vedic scholar, while his mother, Kuñcikkāvu Tampurāṭṭi, was the maternal cousin of Kēraḷavarma Valiya Koyittanpurān (1845–1914), an author in Malayalam and Sanskrit and one of the great figures in the literary and cultural life of 19th-century Kerala.[2]

The first years of Rājarājavarma's life were marked by significant changes: after internal turmoil in the royal family, some members moved to Kārttikappaḷḷi (approximately 20 miles from Caṅṅanāśśēri); then, once again, to Harippāṭ with Kēraḷavarma and the rest of the family. The new abode, gained through the aid and intervention of the *rāja* of Travancore, was baptised Anantapuram palace: here Rājarājavarma spent his childhood with his mother and learned uncle.

The future poet's Sanskrit education started under the instructions of Kēraḷavarma, while he was under house-arrest in Harippāṭ due to political intrigues and machinations that deteriorated relations between the author and his patron, the *mahārāja* of Travancore Āyilyam Tirunāḷ Bālarāmavarma (1832–1880). Rājarājavarma spent six formative years (1875–1881) in training under his uncle; during this time, the young boy displayed talent and imaginative genius that would bring him fame later in life.

When Viśākham Tirunāḷ Rāmavarma (1837–1885) succeeded his brother Āyilyam in 1880, Kēraḷavarma was immediately released from house-arrest and moved to Trivandrum, becoming a much closer associate of the new ruler. The uncle brought with him his brilliant nephew, who started to attend regular courses of study at the local high school from 1881 onwards, with particular attention to his pursuing of Malayalam and Sanskrit studies.

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1 In Malayalam, the suffix *-varma* and the titles Koyil and Tanpurān are applied to individuals connected to the notion of royalty and the *kṣatriyavarṇa*. The definition of "Golden Age" was coined in reference to the specific timeframe of Malayalam literature covering the years 1850–1950 (George 1991: 10–11).

2 The summary of the biographical vicissitude of Rājarājavarma is based on George (1991: 13–31). Kēraḷavarma Valiya Koyittanpurān is remembered for the composition of several works in Sanskrit, such as the *Viśākhavijaya* (1883), the *Kṣamāpaṇasahasra* (1878), and the *Yamapraṇāmaśataka* (1875–1880?), all equally important for their revolutionary impact and for the strong connection to their author's biographical vicissitudes. The interested reader may refer to the concise introduction on Kēraḷavarma's life and works – which are beyond the scope of the present paper – in Ramakrishna Pillai (2005: 1–15).

The first poetical compositions in Sanskrit are dated to his university years, such as the *Bhaṅgavilāpa*, written around 1886 after failing a Chemistry exam for his B.A. degree, or the *Vimānāṣṭaka*, about the launch of an air balloon and composed after his M.A. exams.[3] Together with the first poetic trials in Sanskrit, Rājarājavarma started to contribute articles in his native language, Sanskrit, and in English to several periodicals in Malayalam under the suggestion of Kēraḷavarma. Despite the aid and support provided by his uncle and the *mahārāja*, which could have secured him an easy and wealthy life, the author instead entered the Government service in Trivandrum. He was firstly appointed as head of the recently founded *saṃskṛtapāṭhaśālā* in 1890, and in 1894, he became the head of the Sanskrit College (George 1991: 21–22). At this institution, Rājarājavarma devoted his efforts to develop the status of the school and improve the curricular proposal. He was later appointed as the Superintendent of the Vernacular Studies at the Mahārāja's College in 1899, which gave him the possibility of strengthening the role of Malayalam and language studies, reforming the syllabi, and composing books on different subjects (grammar, prosody, poetics) to implement such curricula and the study of the native language of Kerala. In 1910, Rājarājavarma was appointed to the first professorship of Sanskrit and Dravidian Languages in Trivandrum, a position that he would occupy until the end of his life in 1918 (George 1991: 26–29). In this later period are dated some of his most important works: the *Laghupāṇinīya* (1911–1913, in two parts), a *vyākaraṇa* treatise expounding in a simplified way the rules of Sanskrit, Malayalam translations of Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala* and *Mālavikāgnimitra*, vernacular adaptations of several plays by Bhāsa, and the monumental grammar of Malayalam, the *Kēraḷapāṇinīya* (1896; revised edition in 1917).[4]

"The British Empire"

Among the creative works in Sanskrit by Rājarājavarma a prominent position is occupied by the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, a *mahākāvya* in 23 *sarga*s, composed between 1897 and 1900 and published in 1901 in Trivandrum.[5] This poem, the

[3] George (1991: 18, 20); such works will be later collected in the poetic anthology titled *Sāhityakutūhala*, a collection of fourteen minor works on different subjects published in Trivandrum in 1904 (see Subramanian 2008: 35–45).

[4] For an overview of Rājarājavarma's grammatical works, please refer to George (1991: 34–43), for his Malayalam translations of Sanskrit works, see George (1991: 44–48), and, lastly, for his creative compositions in Sanskrit and Malayalam, see George (1991: 49–53). For a more detailed account of the *Laghupāṇinīya*, useful information can be obtained from Subramanian (2008: 64–88); for Rājarājavarma's contributions to Sanskrit literature in general, with a complete list of his works, see Subramanian (2008: 35–58). A complete and updated record of the author's Sanskrit works can be also found in Easwaran Nampoothiry (1972: 86–88).

[5] The first edition of the *mahākāvya* was published at the Bhaskar Press together with the gloss (*ṭippaṇī*) authored by Gaṇapati Śāstrī (1860–1926), the Sanskrit scholar editor of the renowned *Trivandrum Sanskrit Series* and discoverer of Bhāsa's plays.

title of which can be literarily translated as "The British Empire", was composed under the advice and encouragement of Kēraḷavarma for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria (1819–1901) in 1897. In fact, in the preface to the first edition of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, Rājarājavarma commented thus on the genesis of the poem:

> [T]he Angala Samrajya owes its birth to the enthusiasm I felt at the general rejoicing of the Diamond Jubilee, which transported me all of a sudden to the haunts of the Muse.
>
> (Subramanian 2008: 122)

As the title itself suggests, the *mahākāvya* is a historical work that recounts the establishment of British power in India, the creation of the East India Company (1600–1874), and the ascendency of Queen Victoria as Empress of India through the Government of India Act 1858, which enabled the Crown to assume direct control of the Indian territories in the form of the British Raj (1858–1947).[6]

Rājarājavarma modelled the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* on the ancient tradition of the *mahākāvya* genre, structured upon purely encomiastic intent; in order to thus gain the favour of the British elites, the poet resorted to the employment of the Sanskrit language, the canonical eulogistic vehicle for the political and historical celebration. In previously quoted preface to the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, the author explicitly justified this intentional choice for his work:

> Moreover, none of the Indian vernaculars is expected to be understood – far less appreciated – outside India, while Sanskrit on its philological value has secured scholars throughout the civilized worlds.
>
> (Subramanian 2008: 122)

Nevertheless, the retelling of the British presence in the subcontinent passed in silence; in fact, there is no available evidence suggesting that foreign circles ever paid attention to the poem or that it reached England anyway. On the other hand, Rājarājavarma's aim provoked the disappointment of Indian cultural elites, who showed resentment for the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*'s one-sided version of historical facts and its employment of Sanskrit to narrate the British domination over the country (Cielas 2020: 184). In fact, despite having modelled his work on the pre-existing *mahākāvya* tradition, the poet based his poem exclusively on foreign accounts for the factual history, such as the *History of British India*

[6] The *Āṅgalasāmrājya* was not the first Sanskrit work dealing with the British domination over India; in fact, the first poetical composition on the subject seems to be the anonymous *Itihāsatamomaṇi*, dated to 1813. This work was followed by several texts dealing with the same topic, as the *Vijayinīkāvya* by Śrīśvara Vidyālaṃkāra Bhaṭṭācarya (on the theme of Queen Victoria's life and the British rule in India), the *Victoriacaritrasaṃgraha* by Kēraḷavarma, and the *Gārgidevacaritra* of Padmanābha on the life of King George V (1865–1936), to quote only a few (Subramanian 2008: 119–121).

by William Wilson Hunter, *Essays on Lord Clive and Warren Hastings* by Lord Macaulay, *A Bird's-Eye View of Picturesque India* by Richard Temple, and, lastly, the *History of the Nineteenth Century* by Mackenzie (Subramanian 2008: 124).

Style and audience of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*: divergence from the *mahākāvya* model

Despite having structured his *Āṅgalasāmrājya* on the *mahākāvya* model, the work does not perfectly mirror the *dictamina* of the genre. The thematic content of the poem, purely historical and celebrative, did not allow Rājarājavarma to strictly adhere to the necessary requirements for a *sargabandha*/*mahākāvya*, as those theorised, for instance, by Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* (I, 14–19), or remembered in modern times by Siegfried Lienhard (1984: 162). In this sense, included subjects such as *ṛtu* ("season description"), *ratotsava* and *vipralamba* ("love elements"), *vivāha* ("marriage") or *kumārodaya* ("birth of a son") are absent in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*. In other respects, the poem measures up to the standards of the *mahākāvya*; it is enough to take into account the considerable metrical variability (nearly 30 metres) and the abundant presence of different figures of speech (*artha-*/*śabdālaṃkāra*s).[7]

In a way, the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* represents then a "new" kind of *mahākāvya*, both in terms of its structure and its divergence from the traditional motifs, as recalled above. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of the poem that illuminated its novelty and the gap from the previous tradition is related to the notion of patronage. As the *mahākāvya* genre has exemplified since the first attestations, the composition of such literary texts was intrinsically bound to the idea and institution of patronage, where often a royal figure (or a notable individual still related to the court) sponsored a poet, who, in exchange for maintenance and support, composed an eulogistic work extolling the glories of the patron and his lineage. As the ancient Indian literary tradition showed, the dynamic of patronage also involved a different scenario than the one mentioned above. The poets, wandering from court to court, often composed works for possible patrons in order to gain protection and economic stability, or, in some cases, offered also pre-existing compositions. As stated above, Rājarājavarma's work met its genesis during the celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, following the specific advice of Kēraḷavarma. It appears that the *mahākāvya* narrating the establishment of the British dominion over India was completely detached from the ancient notion of patronage. It would be tempting to assume that Rājarājavarma composed the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* in order to gain a favourable position and ingratiate the British circles; unfortunately, there is no available

[7] Subramanian (2008: 148–152).

data nor direct testimony to fully support such a conclusion at the present state of research. Nevertheless, such a supposition could be still advanced here.

As a relevant last point, the composition of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* was much more motivated and dictated by the poet's strong educational background in English[8] and, as a member of a Keralan royal family, presumably by close contacts with foreign administrative elites and circles, rather than by a courtly or external commission.

Lord Dalhousie and the first passenger train in India

One of the most interesting sections of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* is the twentieth canto, entitled *Dalahausivilāsa*, "The Sports of Dalhousie".[9] This specific *sarga* is centred on the administrative regency of the Scottish statesman and colonial administrator Lord Dalhousie, James Broun-Ramsay, 1st Marquess of Dalhousie (1812–1860), who served as Governor-General of India between 1848 and 1856. Dalhousie was acknowledged to be one of the most efficient rulers of British India, a moderniser who carried out several social and political reforms to improve the conditions of the occupied territories.[10] Despite bringing development and progress to India, the Governor-General ruled with authoritarianism; such harsh policies as the "doctrine of lapse"[11] partly contributed to the growing sense of

[8] During his formative years at Harippāṭ, Rājarājavarma was tutored by his versatile and learned uncle Kēraḷavarma, who instructed his nephew in Mathematics, History, and also English, the hegemonic linguistic vehicle imposed during the 19th century by the new elites, somehow in opposition to Sanskrit, the cultural carrier of Indian national identity (Cielas 2020: 179). Together with Malayalam and the traditional course in Sanskrit, English, as an embodiment of Western literature, occupied a relevant place in Rājarājavarma's artistic career and personal life. For instance, in 1898, the poet translated Shakespeare's *Othello* into Sanskrit under the title of *Uddālacarita* (included in the anthology *Sāhityakutūhala*). Such literary experiment was justified by the poet "as an exercise for the English reading student to whom Sanskrit is fast growing to be more alien than a foreign tongue, and partly as a means of a tongue conveying to the mind of the orthodox Pandit some idea of the marvellous creative imagination of the Western Poet" (Sastral 1925: 1). The influence of English literature over Rājarājavarma is clearly exemplified by this statement of Subramanian: "Shakespeare was a passion, Fraued was a love, Lord Macaulay was an appetite, Walter Scott and Thackeray were enchantments to him" (Subramanian 2008: 27).

[9] For a detailed outline on the contents of each canto of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, refer to Subramanian (2008: 126–137).

[10] Concerning the social policy carried on by Dalhousie refer to Ghosh (1975).

[11] The "doctrine of lapse" constituted a policy of annexation initiated by Dalhousie for the Indian princely states and applied until 1858. According to the doctrine, any state under the suzerainty of the East India Company would have its royal status abolished and annexed into British India, if the ruler was either considered incompetent or died without a male heir. By applying such a policy, the Company took over the princely states of Satara (1848), Jaitpur, Sambalpur (1849), Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852), Jhansi (1854), Nagpur (1854), Tanjore and Arcot (1855). Consult Arnold (1865: 106–203) for an approximate coeval historical account

discontent in the Indian society, which, as is known, burst during the so-called "Sepoy Mutiny" of 1857.

Dalhousie also increased the frontiers of the British domains through military conquests, such as those conducted against the Sikh kingdom, concluded with the subjugation of Punjab at the closing of the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848–1849),[12] and against Burma during the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852–1853). This last campaign reached its climax with the conquest of the Pegu region, pushing the boundaries of the Dalhousie's conquest outside the proper Indian territories. After the escalation of tension between the government of Rangoon and the British shipping interests (officially since the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826), Dalhousie sought any excuse to extend its influence over Burma and invade the country, with the involuntary aid of parliament, which, supporting this cause, was purposely misinformed by the Governor-General. Starting from April 1852, Burma offered very weak resistance, first renouncing to Martaban (5th April), then losing Pegu (officially annexed in December) and Prome during the second campaign in October of the same year.

Aside from the military expansion and the aggressive policy of annexation, Lord Dalhousie is especially remembered for his educational and social reforms, aimed at improving Indian infrastructure. For instance, the Governor-General developed the status of roads and bridges and improved water reserves with the creation of the "Ganges Canal".[13] Further important achievements are represented by the revolutionary introduction of the telegraph and postal systems[14]

of Dalhousie's policy of annexation and Lee-Warner (1904: vol. II, 145–181) on the same issue. Some of the above-mentioned historical annexations find mention in *Āṅgalasāmrājya* XX, 48–50.

[12] Buist (1849; consult sections IV–VII); Lee-Warner (1904: vol. I, 233–269). The Second Anglo-Sikh War is narrated in *sarga* XIX of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, and in the first stanzas of the following one (XX, 1–6). Rājarājavarma mentioned in verse 2 the *mahārāja* Duleep Singh (1838–1893), the last ruler of the Sikh Empire, son of Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), and Jind Kaur, the *rāṇi* who held the kingdom from 1843 to 1847. After their defeat at the closing of the war, Duleep Singh was deposed and exiled to England at the age of 15; here, he was nicknamed "the Black Prince of Perthshire" and became an intimate friend of Queen Victoria.

[13] The "Ganges Canal" was created under Dalhousie's instruction in order to irrigate the Doab region between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, after the Agra famine in 1837–1838. This substantial project not only favoured the agricultural assets of India, but increased the population percentage around the irrigated areas. Reforms were planned to protect the lower strata of local society, but they were never executed; this lack of implementation resulted in the fact that the population was kept poor and tied to agricultural activities promoting bonded labour. Constructed between the 1842–1854, this system consists of a main canal of 272 miles and about 4,000 miles of distribution channels. The canal system irrigated nearly 9,000 km² of agricultural land in ten districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Rājarājavarma alluded to the creation of this irrigation plan in *Āṅgalasāmrājya* XX, 29–30.

[14] The introduction of the mail service and the telegraph is narrated in *Āṅgalasāmrājya* XX, 22–27. For a detailed analysis of the latter's impact in India please refer to Gorman (1971). For

and the completion of the first link of railway communication in India in 1855.

Particularly relevant for our purposes is the poetic description of the passenger train drawn by Rājarājavarma in *Āṅgalasāmrājya* XX, 12–20. A depiction of such technological advancement in a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* may sound surprising, but by the latter half of the 19th century and the following decades, a steam locomotive running on tracks in India did not constitute a novelty. As observed by Hurd and Kerr, a discussion on the desirability of railed steamed locomotion in the subcontinent began to circle around 1830, while a systematic construction of the railway system in India began only around 1850.[15] Such a necessity of a network of railway connection for the East India Company was initially dictated by administrative, colonial, and economic interests, such as the transportation of military regiments,[16] as clearly justified in a monumental memorandum (more than 200 pages-long) composed by Lord Dalhousie himself, an excerpt of which was reported by Hurd and Kerr as follows:

> "Immeasurable" advantages, wrote Dalhousie, would accrue to a colonial administration composed of a "comparative handful" of British administrators and soldiers scattered over the subcontinent. Railways would enable Britain "to bring the main bulk of its military strength to bear upon any given point in as many days as it would now require months, and to an extent which at present is physically impossible".
>
> (Hurd and Kerr 2012: 9)

instance, Rājarājavarma refers to the telegraph as *ninadavāhakatantri* ("the wire that carries [news] with humming") in XX, 25; see for instance, the general description of the telegraph system in the same *sarga* of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*:

> *api ca tāḥ kila tantrya ihāstṛtāḥ prabalavaidyutaśaktijuṣo hi yāḥ |*
> *kṣaṇalavena nayanti vidūrataś caritam īritam īṣad ṛte śramāt* || 24 ||
>
> And even that wire-post which conveys in an instant and without the least effort despatched news from distant places by means of the powerful electric power (*prabalavaidyutaśakti*) was indeed spread here.

As the excerpt may show, such Sanskrit neologisms as *ninadavāhakatantri* embody a considerable degree of artificiality, as a mirror at literary and conceptual levels the issues encountered by modern authors in conveying new ideas which were obviously absent in the Sanskrit literary and linguistic background.

15 Hurd and Kerr (2012: 1). Such a discussion in the British administration began not long after the pioneering construction by the mechanical engineer George Stephenson (1781–1848) of the first steam locomotive carrying passengers, *Locomotion no.1*, in 1825, or the launch of a more developed vehicle, the renowned *Rocket*, inaugurated in 1829.

16 References to the transport of military units by train are also scattered in Lord Dalhousie's private correspondence. To quote an excerpt of a missive: "Therefore what was before us was this. Between 29th April and 10th June to collect carriage for the siege-train, to march it 250 miles with an army to take Mooltan, to put down a rebellion, and to get across the rivers on our way back again" (Government House, May 10th, 1848; Baird 1910: 26).

The object of poetic description in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* concerns in fact the official opening of the first railway in India, on 16 April 1853. On the newly constructed line connecting Bombay and Thane, the first passenger train, hauled by three locomotives[17] baptised Sahib, Sultan and Sindh, and composed of thirteen carriages, ran from Victoria Terminus (now Shivaji Terminus) for an approximate distance of 21 miles, carrying 400 passengers.

The inauguration ceremony was welcomed by general applause and admiration for the steam train, and the inaugural report dated 18 April 1853 and published in *The Times of India* spoke in such celebrative terms:

> The 16th of April 1853 was, and would long continue to be one of the most memorable days, if not the most memorable day, in the annals of British India. This was not the triumph of nation over nation, of race over race, of man over his fellow human. It was the triumph of mind of matter, of patience and perseverance.
>
> (Times of India 2013)

The description of the locomotive in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*

To this epochal event, Rājarājavarma devoted eight stanzas of his *mahākāvya* (XX, 12–20), which contain his poetic description of the steam locomotive in the general frame of Dalhousie's achievements. The impact of such depiction is revolutionary, given that, to the best of my knowledge, the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* seems to be one of the first – if not the first – Sanskrit texts containing a reference and description of the train, an emblem of the technological advancement of the Industrial Revolution.[18] Given also the thematic content of the poem – and especially of *sarga* XX – the elements of modernity, as emblems of the progress brought to the subcontinent, constitute an unavoidable presence in the retelling of the British dominion in India. Furthermore, the presence of such elements of technology in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* contribute to enlighten the characters of

[17] It seems plausible that the first steam locomotives were employed during the construction of the "Ganges Canal" to transport materials and workers (Hurd and Kerr 2012: 2, note 2).

[18] Given the approximate chronological vicinity between the introduction of the first system of steam locomotion in India (1853) and the date of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* (1901), the above statement seems plausible, even though other sources may contain a reference to the train. Later on, the locomotive often became an object of description, especially in the *muktaka* ("independent stanzas") anthologies. For instance, a description of a railway carriage (*relaśakaṭī*) is found in a stanza (no. 5) from the section *navayugavīthī* ("picture-gallery from the modern era") of the *Sāhityavaibhava* (1930) by Mañjukavi, also known as Bhaṭṭa Mathurānātha Śāstrī (Bhatt Mathuranath Shastri; 1889–1964), the renowned scholar, poet, grammarian and Tantra expert from Jaipur. See Śāstrī (1930). Lastly, scattered references to the locomotive are found in Kṣamā Rava's (Kshama Rao) *Śaṅkarajīvanākhyāna* (Rava 1939), as, for example, in XIII, 14, where the authoress mentioned the *dhūmayāna* ("steam vehicle"), the general term used through the work.

novelty of the *mahākāvya* itself, and its rupture with the previous tradition, where the notion of modernity was totally absent. As stated by Saurabh Dube in a handbook entry,

> [A] crucial characteristic of dominant descriptions of the modern and modernity has hinged on their positing of the phenomena as marked by a break with the past, a rupture with tradition, and a surpassing of the medieval.
>
> (Dube 2016)

In nuce, aside from the matter of the patronage, the poem by Rājarājavarma distanced itself from the traditional notion of Sanskrit *mahākāvya* also due to the appearance of such motifs as the extended descriptions of the locomotive, telegraph and postal system. These contents, a surpassing addition to the thematic repertoire of the *mahākāvya* genre, underline the novelty of the asset of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* as a "modern poem", enriched with descriptions of actual glimpses from the modern world, rather with just stereotypical and compulsory elements theorised by the native Indian literary criticism.

On a second note, Rājarājavarma's description appears to be particularly relevant on account of being interspersed with natural imagery that interacts at different levels and ways with the depiction of modernity and technology.[19] The poet began this specific passage with a general stanza intended to introduce the argument; below is the first verse depicting the steam locomotive:[20]

> *sa kila vāhanatallaja ujjvalajvalananunna ihāsya niyogataḥ |*
> *prathamataḥ pracacāra sarasvatā samaruto maruto 'py adhiko jave* || 12 ||
>
> According to his [Lord Dalhousie's] order, that excellent means of transportation, pushed by a blazing fire, faster even than the wind and resounding as the sea, came here [to India] for the first time.

As a preliminary observation, the first of the eight stanzas does not directly employ a specific term for the passenger train, such as *agniśakaṭa* (literally "fire-waggon", the Sanskrit compound coined by Rājarājavarma and found elsewhere in the poem), but instead refers to it through periphrasis in general terms.[21] The poet introduces in fact the locomotive as *vāhanatallaja*, "excellent

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[19] On account of his thematic content, the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* offers little scope for description of nature; nevertheless Rājarājavarma has occasionally inserted such depictions in different *sarga*s, such as the description of dawn in canto XIV, 34–39 (Subramanian 2008: 144).

[20] Here and later on, I refer to the Sanskrit text of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* according to the edition with the Malayalam commentary of Īśvaran Nanpūtiri (Rājarājavarma 1997); if not otherwise stated, all the translations are mine.

[21] Another term referring to the train is *agniyāna*, "the one that moves [thanks to] the fire", or "fire-carriage/waggon", as in *Āṅgalasāmrājya* I, 8.

vehicle", which is further coordinated with the compound *ujjvalajvalananunna*, "pushed/moved by a blazing fire", obviously conveying the specification for the general *vāhana*. Moreover, in stanza 12, we notice the first juxtaposition between the mechanical and the natural elements: the train is said to be "faster than the wind" (*maruto 'py adhiko jave*) and "resounding as the sea" (*sarasvatā samaruto*). The verse presents somehow both the equalisation and the superiority of the technological domain over the natural world, represented respectively by the train itself and the sea and wind.

In the following stanza, Rājarājavarma presents the benefits deriving from travelling on the train, stating that a passenger does not have to worry about the number (and weight) of the luggage, nor about the length of the way, as those would be a real concern while travelling by normal means, as on a cart, for instance. This observation is linked to the second juxtaposition between the train and the natural imagery: this stanza from the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* explicitly states that travelling by train spares the animals the fatigue and pain of pulling a cart loaded with passengers:

> *hayamukhasya paśor na kadarthanā na vahanīyapadārtthavicāraṇā |*
> *na ca punar gaṇanā patha āyater jagati yo gatiyogyatamo mataḥ* || 13 ||
>
> There is no torment for the animal as the horse, no discussion about the weight of the things to be carried and, again, no counting of the length of the road; this is considered the most suitable [vehicle] in the world for travelling.

As an introductory point, the notion of the train facilitating the journeys and shortening the distances is present also in a later *mahākāvya* published in 1930, the *Śrīrāmavarmavijaya* by the Keralan poet Kuññan Vāriyar (1872–1942), which narrates the biography of the *rāja* of Cochin Rāmavarma XV (1895–1914). *Sarga* VI is focussed on the sovereign's journey to Delhi to attend the imperial Durbar of 1903, organised by the Viceroy Lord Curzon (1859–1925) to celebrate the crowning of the King of England Edward VII (1841–1910) as Emperor of India (1901–1910). Kuññan Vāriyar, before narrating this historical event, briefly presented a description of the locomotive; one of the train's advantages is thus introduced:[22]

> *etāvadaṃbugahanāhitadīrghayātrāgamyā diśas tricaturais sugamā muhūrtaiḥ |*
> *āsann ihoti sakalair anubhūtapurvān kleśān vicintya sutarāṃ sukham anvabhāvi* || VI, 15 ||
>
> [Although] the journey is perceived as long and dangerous, because of water depths and such, the distances are easily reachable in few moments

[22] I refer to the text of the *Śrīrāmavarmavijaya* according to Kuññan Vāriyar (1930: 101).

(lit. "three or four"); reaching the destination, and having reflected upon the afflictions previously experienced by all people (because of the old ways of travelling), happiness was felt more deeply.[23]

Commenting upon the content of the stanza from the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, in the words of Rājarājavarma, taking the train as a means of transportation spares the animals yoked to a vehicle the *kadarthanā*, "torture, trouble, distress". The statement emphasizes, in fact, the profitability of such technological advancement, and the substitution with the animals (horses, and so on) that would otherwise be employed and subservient to the human needs and experience great pain. The stanza hints at the considerable advantages of technology represented by the train in the modern world, which can substitute traditional and sometimes nefarious ways of travelling, subtly alluding to the notion of *ahiṃsā*, "non-violence", and respect for all living beings.

In the next verse, the poet further elaborates on the reference to creatures yoked to a vehicle, but with a completely different tone; if in the previous passage the train could spare suffering to the working animals, in stanza 14 the locomotive ridicules the chariot of the god Indra:

pathiṣu yaḥ khalu yantraniyantritaḥ kuśalayantṛniyantryagatiṃ hareḥ |
ratham anekakayugyam ayugyabhāg vihasatīha satīrtthya iṣor jave || 14 ||
In this world, [the train], a companion[24] of the arrow for velocity, possessing no yoked animals and restricted indeed on the paths by an engine, laughs at the chariot of Indra, which is yoked to one thousand [horses] and the movement of which is governed by a dexterous charioteer.

The stanza is structured on the paradoxical contraposition between the train and *hareḥ ratham*, "Indra's chariot". Rājarājavarma conceived such an association skilfully employing contrastive imagery that plays on the recurrence of terms deriving from the same semantic area placed in an openly opposite association. More specifically, the train is characterised in the verse as *ayugyabhāg* ("endowed with no yokes"), a compound that relates in a divergent dynamic to the specification of Indra's chariot, *anekakayugyam* ("yoked to one thousand [horses]"),[25] and,

[23] On this point (and others, as we shall see), the *Śrīrāmavarmavijaya* shows close similarity to Rājarājavarma's description of the passenger train. Taking into account the same provenance of the two authors, it is not implausible to suppose a direct influence of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*'s description of the steam train on Kuññan Vāriyar's own account.

[24] The term *satīrtthya* (equal to *satīrtha*) is registered in Monier-Williams (2005: 1138) as "'having the same teacher', a fellow-(religious) student". I have opted for the more general rendering "companion" to convey the idea of the similarity in speed between the train and the arrow in this passage of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*.

[25] The reference on Indra's chariot being harnessed to one thousand horses is perhaps reminiscent of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* XII, 103d: *ūrdhvaṃ ratham harisahasrayujaṃ ninīya* ("[the charioteer] led up [to heaven] the high chariot to which were harnessed one thousand

further, as *yantraniyantritaḥ* ("restricted / controlled by an engine"), which is opposed to the attribution for the divine cart, *kuśalayantṛniyantryagatiṃ* ("movement [of which] is controlled by a dexterous charioteer"). Such a literary and descriptive opposition was indeed achieved by Rājarājavarma through the refined play between derivatives from the *dhatu*s *yuj-* and *yantr-* (some in negative forms) placed in a manifestly contrastive position. Being endowed with an engine (*yantra*), the train's movements are simply regulated by this, while Indra's vehicle needs the ability of a *sūta*. In similar way, the poet instituted a further contrast between the two objects of description, the train, which is free from yokes, and the chariot, to which numberless horses are yoked. In stanza 14, due to the characteristics applied to the locomotive as opposed to those for the chariot of Indra, the train, the *satīrtthya iṣor jave*, "a companion of the arrow for velocity", mocks (*vihasati*) the divine chariot itself.

Stanza 15 does not contain any direct comparison or juxtaposition between the train and the natural world. Nevertheless, in this verse Rājarājavarma introduced further considerations concerning the merit and advantages of the locomotive, similarly to what was stated in stanza 13. In this passage, the author compared the train to the cart of the gods (*devaratha*): if only those engaged in ascetic and meritorious practices can ascend to the latter, the former is accessible to everyone, emphasising in this way the universal reach of technology:

> *sukṛtipūruṣamātraniṣevyatāṃ prathayatā sulabhasya samaṃ nṛṇāṃ |*
> *jagati yasya saheta janaḥ kathaṃ sumanasām anasā saha tolanāṃ* || 15 ||
>
> How would people tolerate a similarity between the cart of the gods, which allows only those of virtuous conduct engaged in *mantra*s, and this [the train], which is equally accessible to all the people in the world?

The notion of the accessibility of the train seems to be a detail that is remembered and further elaborated in modern Sanskrit literature. For instance, a passage from the previously mentioned stanza on the *relaśakaṭī* by Mathurānātha Śāstrī emphasised a similar aspect, even though much more caste-oriented; the railway carriage, in fact, *nānājātilokānekapaṅktau samāveśayantī* (5c), "comprises many groups of people from different castes". Despite the fact that Mañjukavi referred to the accessibility of the train for people from different social strata, the notion seems to be anyway in line with the concept expressed previously in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, where the technology had universal access. Similarly, the *Śrīrāmavarmavijaya* reiterates the very concept of the universal accessibility of technology as follows:

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horses"; text according to Nandargikar 1971: 394). As specified in Monier-Williams (2005: 1289), the term *hari* (occurring in this quotation from the *Raghuvaṃśa*) is explicitly used in connection to Indra's horses. In my translation of this passage, taking into account the usual imagery of Indra's chariot harnessed to one thousand horses, I rendered *anekaka* ("numberless"), the first member of the compound *anekaka-yugya*, as "one thousand".

nānāmatān vividhaveṣadharāṃś ca martyo nā bālavṛddham
akhilārthayutān abhedam |
bhūloka eva nu vahann adhunaivam āyāty etāṃ matīṃ ca sudhiyām
adadhād ratho 'yam || VI, 14 ||

(Kuñňan Vāriyar 1930: 101)

This train – and not the Earth – carrying people of diverse attire and various beliefs, connected with all walks of life, without distinction between children and the elderly, arrives thus now in the world and brings forth this belief of the wise.

The following stanza of *sarga* XX of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* introduces a different approach in the description of the relation between the mechanical and natural domains. The content of the verse in question is not structured on the comparison or opposition, but on a proper interaction between the two different contexts. Rājarājavarma sketched in this passage a colourful and dynamic scene; the author depicts the train in full movement, running in proximity of a mountain: as soon as the speed of the locomotive increases – as does the covered distance – the mountain, despite being large, gradually withers in the eyes of the passengers that are looking outside the window. Such a description conveys the sense of a multidimensional scene, endowed with perspective and dynamicity:

yam adhiruhya mudā caratāṃ nṛṇāṃ pathi dṛśoḥ sahasābhipatan puraḥ |
kṣitibhṛd apy alaghur laghu prṣṭhabhāk syadavaśād avaśātanam [em.; *avaśādanam* ed.][26] *aśnute* || 16 ||

The mountain withers[27] due to speed, having a short extension, though big itself, as it disappears from the sight range of people who, having boarded [the train], travel on it with joy.

This very image of the mountain disappearing from the sight range of passengers due to the train's speed is again very similarly reiterated in the *Śrīrāmavarmavijayamahākāvya*. In a passage from the already mentioned canto VI, Kuñňan Vāriyar portrayed Rāmavarma XV travelling to Bombay on his train; as Rāmavarma XV observed the scenery from the waggon, the mountains seemed to recede due to the high speed of the locomotive:

tāvat svavāhanarayātiśayāt sudūradhāvat samastanagaśailakulām ivovartīm |
paśyan nivāsanilayodaradṛśyacitrabhaṃgīś ca so 'yam anayan kṣaṇavad dināni || VI, 34 ||

(Kuñňan Vāriyar 1930: 103)

[26] *Avaśādanam* represents the reading in the edition (ed.), while the acronym "em." marks my correction in the text.

[27] Literally "gains withering".

> Meanwhile, this one [Rāmavarma XV], observing the complete multitude of mountains [as] if receding far into the distance due to the high speed of his own vehicle [i.e., the train], and having beheld the varied scenic sights from the interior of [his] compartment [lit. "abode"], spent the days like in a moment.

Stanza 17 of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, once again devoid of any direct reference to nature, contains an interesting case of wordplay aimed at explaining a name of the locomotive, *śatāṅgatā*, "the one with one hundred limbs/parts":

> *rathaghaṭāghaṭitātmakatāvaśāt prakaṭitāṅgaśatena śatāṅgatā |*
> *jagati yena paraṃ sphuṭam arthavaty adhigatā dhig atādṛśi*
> *tatprathāṃ* || 17 ||
>
> Truly suitable in this world is [the name of] 'the one with one hundred limbs', acquired by this [the train], which has one hundred parts displayed, on account of being connected to an assemblage of waggons. Alas, [but] the extension of that [the chariot] is not like this!

This whole stanza is structured through the contrast between *śatāṅgatā*, applied to the train, and, implicitly, *śatāṅga*, "chariot", a reference perhaps evoked by the presence of the term *ratha* as the first member of the first compound. The locomotive is characterised by Rājarājavarma as "having one hundred parts" due to the long series of waggons connected to each other, while one of the usual names of the chariot, *śatāṅga* (lit. "one hundred limbed"), seems inappropriate, given that the cart does not have one hundred parts as the train, even when it is tied to horses. This contrast, exemplified by the remark that the appellative *śatāṅgatā* could relate only to the train, justifies the concluding exclamatory remark of the poet.

At the end of this "etymological" consideration, Rājarājavarma re-employed once again the natural imagery in his poetic description of the steam locomotive. More than the other verses, in which the technological element of modernity was juxtaposed or placed in contrast to the natural world, in stanza 18 the two contexts are seemingly submerging into each other through an identification. The poet described here the movement of the train and its waggons around a mountain flank; the vehicle is, in fact, conceived in comparison with a flock of cranes (*bisakaṇṭhikā*s) flying in circle and resembling a garland of clouds in the sky (*jaladamālini khe*). As the verse reads, the close juxtaposition resulting almost in an identification between the two polarities of the imaginative description is emphasised by the finite verbal construction and its object, *tulanāṃ vahati*, "[it] conveys equalness with":

jaladamālini khe bisakaṇṭhikāpaṭalaguṃbhitayā tulanāṃ srajā |
pathiṣu parvatapārśvacareṣu yo vahati saṃhatisaṃbhṛta cārimā || 18 ||

This [vehicle], which is gracefully brought together by the junction [of the waggons] through paths running on the mountain flanks, bears equalness with the circle of the flock of small cranes arranged[28] in the sky as a garland of clouds.

A further simile is present in the next verse as well: the locomotive, due to the great number of passengers and luggage in the various waggons, is compared to a moving bazaar filled with people and goods:

vividhabhāṇḍajanākulam ullasadgṛhakulaṃ pracalantam ivāpaṇaṃ |
ka iha vismayate sma na mānavo matirayaṃ tirayantam udīkṣya
taṃ || 19 ||

What man in the world has not marvelled, having looked at this [the train] that obscures the speed of the mind, like a market moving with a multitude of dazzling compartments and filled with people and goods of different kind?

In this stanza, introducing the train as an object of *vismaya*, "wonder, awe", Rājarājavarma described the locomotive as the vehicle that "obscures the swiftness of the [human] mind" (*matirayaṃ tirayantam*), an attribution that paradoxically conveys the speed of the steam train. If in verse 12 it surpassed "even the wind for rapidity" (*maruto 'py adhiko jave*), here the locomotive is hyperbolically conceived as outmatching even the rapidity of thoughts. Additionally, as stated above, the poet compared the *agniśakaṭa* to an *āpaṇa*, "market, shop", populated by people selling and purchasing goods. This conceptual simile aids in conveying a completely natural scene, bringing together the abstract and mechanical with the natural world and the everyday life.

The concluding stanza of the locomotive sequence presents once again a dynamic sketch, in a way similar to the multidimensional verse examined before (16). Here, Rājarājavarma portrayed the passengers standing on the platform waiting for the train, which approaches provoking the jubilee of the people, compared finally to "rain-cuckoos":

niyatakālacareṣu nirīkṣiteṣv api tadīyaratheṣu vidūrataḥ |
pathi janāḥ pratipālya cirāt sthitā mumudire mudireṣv iva cātakāḥ || 20 ||

[28] In this stanza the passive past participle *gumbhita* occurs, but it is not attested; more than probably, it should be read as *gumphita*, "tied, strung together, arranged" (Monier-Williams 2005: 359). Perhaps the "variant" could be simply justified as a case of sonorization of a voiceless consonant, typical of Southern writers.

> As the wagons of the train were observed even from a distance arriving at a certain time, the people on the road, who stood having waited a long time, rejoiced, like rain cuckoos [take pleasure] in the clouds.

The arrival of the locomotive after a long wait arouses the joy of the passengers; the people and their pleasure are compared to *cātaka* birds (presumably *Clamator jacobinus*), which, in the standard *kāvya* imagery, are said to live only on water drops falling from the rainy sky. As a famous stanza from Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* reads:[29]

> *ambhobindugrahaṇacaturāṃś cātakān vīkṣamāṇāḥ*
> *śreṇībhūtāḥ parigaṇanayā nirdiśanto balākāḥ |*
> *tvām āsādya stanitasamaye mānayiṣyanti siddhāḥ*
> *sotkampāni priyasahacarīsaṃbhramāliṅgitāni* || I.22 ||
>
> The Siddhas looking at the *Chātakas* skilled in catching the drops of rain-water, and pointing out the female cranes formed into lines by counting them one by one, will highly respect (welcome) you on getting, at the time of your thunder, the eager and hasty embraces from their beloved consorts.

Concluding remarks

Among the copious Sanskrit production marking the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* is one of the most fascinating examples. The interest for this literary work could be justified by several factors: first and more immediately, the *mahākāvya* offers a detailed panoramic account of the rise of the British dominion over the subcontinent, starting from the establishment of the East India Company in 1600 and concluding with the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India. Furthermore, the accountable and proper historical content of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, even though presented in a poetic way, marks the epic composed by Rājarājavarma as one of the first truly historical works in Sanskrit in the annals of early modern India and modern Sanskrit literature.

As we have seen, the thematic content of the *mahākāvya*, modelled on that previous indigenous tradition, showed a considerable degree of difference compared to its antecedents in the genre, as the poem, due to its poetic content, inevitably introduced elements of modernity and, as in the case of the train description, of technological advancement. As we have stated previously, Rājarājavarma's poem embodies further innovative elements that distance it from the ancient tradition – not only in thematic and structural terms but also by being completely detached from the traditional idea of patronage, which

[29] I quote the text of the *Meghadūta* according to Kale (1947); translation after Kale (1947: 5).

served as the ideological justification for composing such literary works as *mahākāvya*s. These characteristics warrant further inquiry and the development of an avenue of research on this epic poem.

Stanzas 12–20 of the twentieth canto of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* contain what presumably is the first description of a steam locomotive in any Sanskrit text. Moreover, as we have tried to advance in the present paper, such depiction of the passenger train in Rājarājavarma's *mahākāvya*, marking a landmark in the history of the modern Sanskrit literature, presumably became a source of inspiration and a model for several subsequent literary works.

The poetical conceptualisation of such modern novelty was structured by Rājarājavarma through recurring references to the most immediate and important basis for comparison and poetic virtuosity in Sanskrit literature, the natural world and its imagery. In the relevant section of the *mahākāvya*, as we have seen, the interaction between the mechanical and natural worlds in these eight stanzas operates on many different levels. In the description of the *agniśakaṭa* and in the poet's literary plan, such divergent domains interact through dynamics that can be summarised as follows: superiority/convenience of technological development over the natural world, interaction/juxtaposition, and finally almost complete identification, as we have emphasised in the previous section of the article.

The use of standard *kāvya* poetic resources and the basis for comparisons drawn from the natural realm obviously do not constitute novelty; the presence of these comparisons and metaphors built in the natural domain was, after all, an essential and recurring requirement of classical production in Sanskrit, and, moreover, of the *mahākāvya* genre's traditional *dictamina*. However, in the *Āṅgalasāmrājya*, a literary work which, due to its contents, offers little scope for natural descriptions, this poetic domain seems to assume a different role in the general plan of the train depiction. The novelty represented by the first steam locomotive in India was treated in the epic with the usual and well-established poetic elements of the classical *kāvya* production in Sanskrit. We may venture to state that in stanzas 12–20 of *sarga* XX of the *Āṅgalasāmrājya* Rājarājavarma did not coincidentally resort to conventional natural imagery for the depiction of the locomotive in his *mahākāvya*. For this section, the natural world poetically became the most immediate and indispensable guiding tool not only for the description of modernity and its disconcerting technological advancement, but also for its visualisation, comprehension, and poetical fruition. In offering the description of the locomotive, such an epochal novelty that marked the progress and the mechanical development in India, Rājarājavarma, in his imaginative account based on an interface between modernity and nature, could not but resort to known poetical images to guide his readers in this poetic journey across

the bewildering changes of the modern world: *vayu*, *sarasvat*, *bisakaṇṭhikā*s, and *cātaka*s.

Funding

This paper is a result of the project "How hard can a dead heart beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature" (OPUS 22; registration number 2021/43/B/HS2/02046), financed by the National Science Centre, Poland.

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 171–220
https://doi.org/10.60018/AcAsVa.xbmi1252

The Buddha and the Sun Disk: Some Reflections on the Dialectics of Light in a Relief from Matkanai, Pakistan

Jessie Pons

Abstract: This paper examines a fragmentary relief from Matkanai (Malakand, Pakistan), housed in the Dir Museum, Chakdara. The relief depicts a solar disk set within a cave, partially obscuring a seated Buddha in *padmāsana*, whose right knee emerges from behind the disk. While Gandharan art is renowned for its use of "luminous" iconographies, such as nimbuses, full-body halos, and flaming shoulders, this example introduces a new visual grammar. The aim of this paper is to offer an interpretation for this relief and to clarify how light and solar metaphors are encoded in this unusual representation of the Buddha.

Keywords: Buddha, Gandharan art, light metaphors, solar imagery, Indra's Visit to the Buddha, *Indraśailaguhā*, Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma, Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics

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A fragmentary relief with unusual iconography, which has so far eluded scholarly attention, was uncovered during a digitisation campaign in 2021, at the Dir Museum in Chakdara (inv. no. DMC 2036), in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (**Fig. 1**).[1] It was originally unearthed in 1980 at the Buddhist site of Matkanai, on the left bank of the Swat River in the Ranizai plain, approximately 7 km southwest of Chakdara, during excavations conducted by the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, which confirms its authenticity. To my knowledge, the relief was only published in the delayed excavation report of 2022 (reproduced under fig. 27), where Aisha Bibi, the main author, assigns it to the Kushan period and describes it as a "solar disk in front of the Buddha inside a cave".[2]

The relief is carved in a grey schist and measures 20.3 x 21 x 5.8 cm. It is broken on all sides, chipped and displays important concretions. The base consists of a plain band, and the main surface of the relief shows a disk carved inside a cave. The disk features a plain field and a wide border divided by a plain fillet. The border is decorated with radiating drop-shaped sunbeams. Traces of red-brown pigment remain on the lower left part of the disk. Behind it, the right knee of the Buddha sitting in *padmāsana* emerges. The cave was surrounded by flames, the remains of which are still visible on both sides. A globular flask with a central band is depicted on the ground. On the right, the right hand and foot of a figure are preserved.[3]

Unfortunately, the relief could not be reassembled with any other known fragment preserved in the Dir Museum. Upon discovery, the finds from Matkanai were divided between the Dir Museum and the Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at the University of Peshawar (hereafter referred to as the Peshawar University Museum). It remains possible that additional fragments survive in the storage collection. Despite its fragmentary condition, the extant portion alone warrants examination. It incorporates familiar iconographic elements – the non-(fully)figural representation, the solar disk, the cave setting – however the configuration is highly unusual and ambiguous. The solar disk may be interpreted as forming the Buddha's upper body or, instead, as obscuring it.

1 The relief was spotted by Cristiano Moscatelli during the first campaign of the DiGA project. DiGA, short for "Digitization of Gandharan Artefacts Project: A Project for the Preservation and the Study of Gandharan Art from Pakistan" was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research under the funding code 01UG2048X, funding line eHeritage (2021–2024). It was carried out by Serena Autiero, Cristiano Moscatelli, Frederik Elwert and me at the Centre of Religious Studies at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

2 Bibi et al. (2022: 135–165). The relief is also examined in Ms. Bibi's unpublished MPhil thesis: Bibi (2020). As in many other Gandharan sites, the chronological sequence of Matkanai is unfortunately disturbed. The author's attribution of the architectural and sculptural remains to the Kushan period relies on structural and stylistic comparisons with other sites is Swat and I see no reason to question it (Bibi et al. 2022: 142–143).

3 https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/1719570 (accessed 27 June 2025).

Fig. 1. The Visit of Indra or the Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, schist, 20.3 x 21 x 5.8 cm, Matkanai, Dir Museum Chakdara (DMC 2036), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

To scholars familiar with early Buddhist art, the motif may initially evoke "aniconic" or symbolic representations,[4] such as those found at Bhārhut, Sāñcī,

[4] Coined by Alfred Foucher, the term aniconic ("aniconique"; Foucher 1911: 55–80), has become one of the most heavily charged concepts in the study of South Asian art, particularly through the opposing views of Susan Huntington (1990: 401–408; 1992: 111–156) and Vidya Dehejia (1991: 45–66). A useful review of the various understandings of the term is provided by DeCaroli (2015: 24–28). In the present article, I use the term to refer to the practice of avoiding figurative representations of the Buddha in favor of symbols. Siding with Seckel (2004: 3–107), Schlingloff (1987), Dehejia (1991: 45–66), Zin (1998: 50–74) and DeCaroli (2015: 28), to mention but a few proponents of this widely accepted theory, I understand these not as substitutes or stand-ins for the Buddha, but rather as visual cues that gesture toward the Buddha, his life, and his teachings. By virtue of their allusive power and polyvalence, such signs do more than merely evoke the Buddha and have a dimension beyond the biographical and historical illustration: they encapsulate his achievements, his path, and the enduring presence of his doctrine.

Kanaganahalli, or Amarāvatī, where the Buddha is not depicted in human form but referenced through signs like the empty throne, the *bodhi* tree, footprints, the *stūpa*, the royal umbrella, the flaming pillar, the *dharmacakra*, and the *triratna*. The solar disk, however, is not typically part of this early symbolic repertoire.[5] Examples of symbolic or non-figural imagery do exist in Gandharan art, though save for rare examples,[6] they need not be indicative of an early developmental phase. These include reliefs from Butkara I, Butkara III, and Shnaisha, which show symbols like the stupa, the Buddha's footprints or the *dharmacakra* being worshipped, the latter sometimes read as early sermon scenes.[7] Within this Gandharan visual lexicon, the solar disk is a well-attested motif, appearing in both narrative and non-narrative contexts, and can be regarded as part of its established non-figural vocabulary. In the Matkanai relief, however, the depiction of the Buddha's knees emerging from behind the solar disk within a cave – rendering him at once visible and invisible – challenges our established taxonomies of non-corporeal representation.[8]

[5] With some interpretative leeway, one might invoke the traditional reading that views the solar disk, governing the celestial order, as a conceptual antecedent of the *dharmacakra*, the emblem of the *cakravartin*, the universal monarch and, by extension, of the Buddha as spiritual sovereign. Yet this connection, discussed by Przyluski (1932: 481–498), Coomaraswamy (1935a: 24–33), Rowland (1938: 72) or Seckel (2004: 13, 41) remains theoretical. In practice, the solar disk is absent from the iconographic lexicon from these early sites.

[6] The most famous example is a relief from Butkara I which illustrates the Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven through a representation of his footprints carved on the lowest step (Faccenna 1962–1964: pl. CCXXXIII). On this particular image and its implication for an early aniconic phase in Gandharan art see van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1981: 389).

[7] Butkara I: Faccenna (1962–1964: pls. CCXXIX a, CCXXIX b, CCXXX a, CCXXX b); Callieri and Filigenzi (2002: nos. 88 and 89); Butkara III: Rahman (1990: figs. 10 and 11); Shnaisha: Faccenna (1962–1964: pl. CCXXX).

[8] In various discussions of the relief, it was suggested to me that the hybrid form could reflect a transitional phase in Gandharan art. I hope that the forthcoming discussion about the technical contrivance of the relief and its narrative content will suffice to refute this hypothesis. Besides, one should bear in mind that an "aniconic" representation is not automatically indicative of antiquity or an earlier stage in the visual representation of the Buddha. As Dieter Seckel aptly observed (here quoted in the English translation by Andreas Leisinger): "Aniconic symbolism spans a historic phase in early Buddhist fairly precisely delimited. To assume, however, that it was abandoned with the advent and the subsequent permanent Buddha image would be quite wrong. To a certain extent, aniconic symbols remain valid as a principle beyond history. The symbols are not simply replaced by figural images. True, images take the place of most aniconic symbols, but the old motifs nonetheless retain a part of their function and even gain new meanings: not instead of or beside iconic images, but rather on a level of meaning higher than that of representational art. Thus, the symbol occupies a place in Buddhist art not only *before* (historically) but also *beyond* (transhistorically) the image" (Seckel 2004: 55). Therefore, even if the motif on the Matkanai relief were to be interpreted as a "semi-aniconic" representation of the Buddha (which I consider unlikely), there is no reason to treat its hybridity as a chronological indicator. The symbolic mode does not necessarily signal an earlier developmental phase. Rather, it may reflect persistent, transhistorical principles within Buddhist visual culture.

What can also be said at the outset is that, with the solar disk thus *mis en exergue*, the depiction unequivocally foregrounds solar imagery and may be counted among the many "luminous" representations of the Buddha, in keeping with the familiar panoply of the nimbus, full-body halo, and flaming shoulders that permeate Gandharan art. The rich symbolic meanings attached to these motifs have been explored by Rowland, Soper, and Verardi, to mention but the most seminal scholars. Their studies have variously emphasised the conceptual affinities between the Buddha and his Vedic or Zoroastrian precursors such as Indra, Sūrya, and Mithra,[9] identified parallels with the Iranian concept of *xᵛarənah* to support a dynastic reading of the Dharma's transmission,[10] and demonstrated how certain motifs signify the Buddha's emission of light during contemplative practices and articulate his mystical anatomy.[11] Together, the visual evidence attests to a powerful visual economy in which light imagery is deployed to exalt both the physical and spiritual qualities of the Buddha. This metaphorical construction of the Buddha's extraordinary nature, particularly through light metaphors and solar symbolism, is paralleled in literary sources where the Buddha is consistently described as the "Light of the World" (*lokapradyota*), the "Man of Light" (*puruṣāditya*), or the "Kinsman of the sun" (*ādityabandhu*), to cite the most emblematic tropes.[12] Another reoccurring trope is the great, infinite radiance that floods the world at transformative events in Siddhārtha's life. In sum, that the relief from Matkanai should display some kind of light is not particularly disconcerting. The challenge lies in discerning *what kind* of light this is and what its purpose is in this specific visual context. While Gandharan art is known for its engagement with luminous iconographies, this particular relief introduces a distinct visual grammar.

The aim of this article is to offer an interpretation for this relief and to clarify how light and solar metaphors are encoded in this unusual representation of the Buddha. Accordingly, this article is divided into three sections. The first identifies iconographic parallels for the motif of the solar disk with emerging knees. The second reconstructs the likely narrative context of the Matkanai fragment, proposing its association with the following episodes from the Buddha's life: the Visit of Indra which serves as a prelude to the Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma and the Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics. Both are associated with cave settings and the theme of radiance, offering plausible

[9] Rowland (1938: 69–84); Soper (1949a: 252–283; 1949b: 314–330; 1950: 63–85); Verardi (1988: 1534–1549); Quagliotti (1991–1992: 73–91).

[10] Taddei (1974: 435–449; 1992: 103–107).

[11] Taddei and Klimburg-Salter (1991: 73–103). For an alternative interpretation see Rhi (2005: 169–211).

[12] These illustrative examples taken from the *Mahāvastu* are quoted from Nicolas Revire's study on solar symbolism in early Buddhist literature (Revire 2017: 146–147), examined in more detail below. *Mahāvastu* I 175, ed. Senart (1882: 175); trans. Jones (1949: 139); *Mahāvastu* II 302, ed. Senart (1890: 302); trans. Jones (1952: 284).

literary and visual frameworks for interpretation. The third section examines relevant textual counterparts. Drawing on Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Gāndhārī sources, the analysis explores how well-known literary tropes – metaphors, analogies, simile – which imbue the Buddha with a blazing radiance or compare the Buddha to the sun both as a natural phenomenon and a personified god, are materially expressed through sculptural form. In doing so, the article contributes to broader discussions in early Buddhist art and Gandharan visual culture on the aesthetic strategies used to represent the Buddha's supra-human nature and the critical role of light in that construction.

The solar disk: Iconographic parallels and layered meanings

The solar disk motif is well attested in Gandharan art. Scholars such as Rowland and Verardi have highlighted its Indic and Iranian resonances with Sūrya and Mithra,[13] while Taddei (1990: 43–50) pointed to its broader symbolic role within the Buddhist visual lexicon of luminosity, connecting it to the imagery of the flaming shoulders. Verardi, who examined the motif's context of appearance and its varying interpretative dimensions, offers a twofold reading: first, as a connotation of the Buddha's radiant body liberated from the fetters at the moment of awakening, and, by extension, of *bodhi*; and second, as a denotation of the light emitted by the Buddha at the *bodhimaṇḍa* and in the context of the First Sermon. The most systematic analysis, however, comes from Quagliotti (1991–1992: 73–105), whose typological framework and contextual insights remain especially valuable. She examines the motif's compositional, iconographic, and narrative functions, identifying around twenty reliefs in which the solar disk appears.[14] These are grouped into two main categories: those in which the motif features in a narrative context (Type I), and those in non-narrative contexts (Type II). In what follows, I expand upon Quagliotti's typology by proposing a slightly different set of subtypes that better accommodate the diversity of visual strategies at play.[15]

[13] Rowland (1938: 69–84); Verardi (1985: 67–101; 1988: 1534–1549, particularly 1542–1544).

[14] In a subsequent study, Quagliotti undertakes an examination of a broader corpus of reliefs that feature the motif she designates as the "*cakra*/*padma*/solar disk" treating these variants as functionally interchangeable (Quagliotti 1995–1996: 200–216). While acknowledging a certain degree of semantic and iconographic overlap, the present inquiry will limit its focus to the solar disk.

[15] In addition to these two main categories, Quagliotti identifies, within each group, two further subcategories depending on whether the solar disk is in the foreground ("A") or partially covered by an atlas, a pillar / column or a tree ("B") (Quagliotti 1991–1992: 73–74).

Fig. 2. Brahma and Indra framing the solar disk. Relief usually interpreted as the Gods Entreaty to Preach the Dharma, schist, 5.10 x 26.70 x 23.50 cm, Swat Valley, British Museum (1966,1017.2), © The Trustees of the British Museum. / CC BY-SA 4.0.

I.1. Illustrations of Indra and Brahma framing the solar disk, a representation usually interpreted as the Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma (**Fig. 2**).[16]

[16] As put by Callieri and Filigenzi "The lack of specific details leaves room for doubt about the scene depicted: the Enlightenment, which took place under the *bodhi* tree, or the First Sermon" ("La mancanza di dettagli specifici lascia un margine di dubbio sulla scena rappresentata: l'Illuminazione, avveneuta sotto l'albero della bodhi, o la Prima Predicazione") (Callieri and Filigenzi 2002: 175).

Fig. 3. The First Sermon, schist, 18.1 cm × 25.4 cm × 5.1 cm, Nīmogrām, Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (NG. 380), © Joan Anastasia Raducha. The CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

I.2. Illustrations of the episode of the First Sermon, showing the solar disk on a pedestal and surrounded by the five monks or framed by antelopes (Quagliotti 1998: figs 5 and 6).

I.3 Reliefs illustrating the First Sermon where the solar disk appears behind the triple wheel supported by an atlas, a pillar/column (**Fig. 3**).

I.4 One relief depicts the solar disk behind the *bodhi* tree at whose foot the Buddha sits (**Fig. 4**) – a scene that Quagliotti incorrectly interprets as the Buddha's victory over Māra, but which represents the Buddha paying homage to the *bodhi* tree by gazing at it after his enlightenment (Bopearachchi 2016: 19–22 and 31–34).

The second category includes:

II.1 Reliefs showing the solar disk among worshippers either framed by arches or not (**Fig. 5**).

Fig. 4. The Buddha paying homage to the *bodhi* tree, schist, 18 x 32 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum (I. M. 31-1935), © Victoria and Albert Museum, London / CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fig. 5. The solar disk among worshippers framed by arches, 14 x 32 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (I 526), © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst / CC BY-SA 4.0.

II.2 Reliefs where the solar disk appears among different kinds of relics, each separated by arches. This is an arrangement typically found on cornices or on the upper register of reliefs with two superposed registers (**Fig. 6**).

Fig. 6. The solar disk among different relics separated by arches, 6.20 x 22 x 53.40 cm, Takht-i-Bāhī, British Museum (1899,0715.11), © The Trustees of the British Museum / CC BY-SA 4.0.

What this typology immediately reveals is that, when the motif is situated within a narrative context, it is, more often than not, in connection with the First Sermon, or episodes directly preceding it, such as the Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma or the Meeting with the Five Ascetics. Given this evidence, one need not take a large interpretative leap to discern the motif's relation to the Buddha's teaching activity, a line of reasoning indeed pursued by Quagliotti.[17] According to her, the solar disk represents the phenomenon of light emitted by the Buddha at the moment of teaching, as reported in the *Lalitavistara* (Foucaux 1884: 341). Yet, for Quagliotti, what is at the heart of the matter is not the light that *shines* but the light that *irradiates*. In this interpretation, she draws heavily on Verardi, who gives a mahāyānic orientation to the iconography and the phenomenon it refers to. He argues that "while a Buddha confines himself to leaving the cosmos realising only the ascending phase, and thus 'shining' without irradiating, the Bodhisattva realises also the descending phase, and his function can be expressed by the symbolism of solar irradiation, through which all things are illuminated" (Verardi 1985: 83). In other words, the process of Śākyamuni's diffusion of the law is likened to the phenomenon

[17] In full disclosure, it should be noted that this interpretation of the motif is not the only one Quagliotti proposes in her article, which aims to interpret the Victoria and Albert Museum relief which she misreads as depicting the Buddha's victory over Māra. According to the author, in this narrative context, the solar disk symbolises the victory of the Buddha – *bodhi* itself – which is essentially a victory of light over darkness, and hence a solar victory. The fact that the disk appears behind the tree on the relief would likely indicate that the victory is imminent but not complete. Quagliotti (1991–1992: 87). Examined in the context of the Buddha paying homage to the *bodhi* tree after his awakening, the solar disk may be interpreted as a symbolic device that glorifies the *bodhimaṇḍa*, the locus of awakening.

of solar irradiation, a metaphor that emphasises not only the enduring impact of his teaching, but also the sustained nature of the act of teaching itself. To Quagliotti (and Verardi), "it is precisely this irradiation of the Buddha as the Bodhisattva that Gandharan artists have tried to render in representing the Buddha in the 'First Sermon' and related episodes in the form of a solar disk: the Buddha of the bodhi in a profoundly Mahayanic sense" (Quagliotti 1991–1992: 86). While I am not persuaded by the māhāyanic undertones,[18] I do find the layered readings of the motif alluring. An important implication and a lesson for the present analysis, is the recognition (although the author does not make this explicit) of the layered meanings with which the motif is potentially imbued: *bodhi* itself; the splendour of the body of the being who has attained it; the miracle of light production that accompanies the Buddha's teaching feat; the far-reaching, enduring propagation of the Dharma. The Matkanai relief broadly aligns with this iconographic tradition and, potentially, its metaphorical implications, but also exhibits notable variations: rather than resting on a podium, the solar disk is placed directly on the ground of a cave and, quite crucially, the right knee of the Buddha, seated in *padmāsana* and shown in three-quarter view, emerges from behind it. Although this feature has been noted in passing in relation to a few other reliefs,[19] it has never been systematically explained. Below, we propose a rationale for its appearance in the Matkanai relief, without assuming its applicability to other instances.

The next variation is stylistic in nature and pertains to the motif of the sun disk itself. In other depictions, the solar disk is either plain, incised with a simple fillet, or carved with a saw-tooth motif that, in one case (**Fig. 2**), projects beyond the border. As noted above, at Matkanai, the disk field is plain, bordered by a simple fillet that creates a broad edge adorned with radiating, drop-shaped

[18] The mahāyānic reading proposed by Quagliotti is set against the background of the Tibetan translation of the *Lalitavistara* as well as Verardi's reading of the iconography. However, this text is much later than the period of Gandharan art. What is more, since the publication of her article, it has become clear that the *Puyao jing,* translated by *Dharmarakṣa in 308 and generally "considered to represent an early version of what later developed into the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara*" (Tournier and Strong 2019: 23–24), is more relevant to the northwest Indian context. While I do not reject the possibility of a mahāyānic reading, I also see no necessity for it. The fact that Buddha Śākyamuni goes on to teach the Dharma after his awakening is not specific to a mahāyānic framework and common to mainstream Buddhist traditions.

[19] These are fig. 5 and fig. 6 (both seen in the antiquarian market at Karachi), fig. 8 and fig. 9 (both in private collections in Japan and published by Kurita (1988: 254, fig. 768 and p. 240, fig. P 4–IX). Two of these were published by Verardi (1988: pl. IVb and V). To these examples, one may add a relief from a private collection, published by Kurita (2003: vol. 2, no. 770), which illustrates the First Sermon as indicated by the two deer in front of the pedestal and the meditating monks. Instead of the solar disk or the more typical depiction of the Buddha in *abhāya-mudrā* or *dharmacakra-mudrā*, the relief features a variation of the *dharmacakra* motif: a *triśūla* surmounted by a triple wheel. The knees of the Buddha, seated in *padmāsana*, emerge from behind this intricate emblem.

Fig. 7. Fragment of a bodhisattva statue, 15.5 x 14.5 x 8.4 cm, Matkanai, Dir Museum Chakdara (DMC 1998), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

sunbeams. Except for one relief published by Quagliotti (1991–1992: 94, fig. 6) – of unknown location and provenance, but likely from Swat – the closest parallels are found in statuary. More precisely, they appear on the nimbus of a couple of Buddha statues, precisely the head of a bodhisattva from Matkanai (**Fig. 7**) and a Buddha statue from Andan Ḍheri, a site located about 13 km to the north (**Fig. 8**), both preserved in the Dir Museum in Chakdara (DMC 1998 and DMC 001).[20] This specific treatment of the motif, with drop-shaped sunbeams, is not commonly found elsewhere in Gandhara, where nimbus designs are generally rather diverse.[21] Outside Gandhara, the motif recalls the depiction of Sūrya on a railing from Bodhgayā dated to the 1st century BCE. There, the sun god is shown riding a chariot pulled by a quadriga, silhouetted against a large nimbus carved with radiating drop-shaped sunbeams, akin to the Gandharan examples (**Fig. 9**).[22] I will return to the significance of the connection with the

[20] For DMC 1998 and DMC 001 see https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/23824197 and https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/23787835 respectively (accessed 27 June 2025). Dani (1968–1969a: 53, pl. 12).

[21] See Faccenna and Filigenzi (2007: pl. 101 and pl. 108) for a typology and Bautze-Picron (1990: 81–97) for an assessment of the Gandharan treatment of the nimbus and halo in the larger context of early South Asian representations of the Buddha.

[22] One may also mention in this context, a statue of the Buddha possibly from Mathura in the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin (I 22) published in Revire (2016–2017: 4, fig. 1). It displays a similar sunbeam motif in the main field of the halo (instead of on the border).

Fig. 8. Buddha statue, 45 x 58 x 15.5 cm, Andan Ḍherī, Dir Museum Chakdara (DMC 001), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

sun god and this particular relief below; for now, the stylistic parallel is too distant to project onto our relief. Thus, given the seemingly localized points of comparison, we may cautiously suggest a localised iconographic convention in Swat.

We may add, in this context, that the sun disk from Matkanai was likely painted, as suggested by the traces of reddish pigment. These could be remnants of surface polychromy or the bole-like ochre sometimes applied before the gold

Fig. 9. Sūrya on a railing from Bodhgayā, Bodhgayā site museum, Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

Fig. 10. 3D model of the sculpture from Matkanai Dir Museum Chakdara (DMC 2036), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

leaves, as documented elsewhere in Gandhara.[23] Unfortunately, until chemical analysis is undertaken, we cannot determine the disk's original appearance or its intended effect, whether that of a red, fiery sun or a golden finish enhancing its brilliance.

The next feature that sets this relief from Matkanai aside is the technical contrivance with which the motif is treated. In other examples, the solar disk, with or without emerging knees, is carved in relatively low relief, generally seen in frontal view and sometimes in oblique. Quagliotti (1995–1996: 208) interprets this as "an optical adjustment […] serving the purposes of perspective, and rendering the solar disk and its features easier to identify during the *prakaṣina*". On the Matkanai piece, this "optical adjustment" takes on a new dimension. The solar disk looks like a wheel or a plate, placed in front of the Buddha. The relief is deeply carved, causing the edge of the disk to protrude slightly, enough to align with the cave's entrance without fully obstructing it. The partial obstruction of the cave's opening draws the viewer in, inviting them to peer not only into the cave but also behind the solar disk itself, where the fully sculpted thigh complete with detailed folds of the *saṃghāti* emerges from the stone. To fully appreciate the technical *tour de force*, one may attempt to reconstruct the visual experience of the viewer. Assuming the relief was mounted on one of the stupa storeys, a devotee performing the *pradakṣiṇa* would initially see the solar disk obstructing the cave (**Fig. 10**). As they continued their circumambulation from right to left, they would progressively discern the Buddha's figure. The composition, together with its sophisticated technical execution, produces a dynamic effect: the Buddha is at first concealed and subsequently revealed. To put things differently, the visual strategy conveys the impression of a Buddha who is *hidden* rather than deliberately *withheld*.

The last feature distinguishing this relief from other treatments of the solar disk is the narrative context. Admittedly, the fragmentary condition of the piece complicates interpretation. Be that as it may, certain discernible details allow us to propose tentative hypotheses. The setting – a cave – evokes two narratives well attested in Gandharan art: the Visit of Indra to the Buddha and the Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics. Each of these possibilities is examined on their own merits in the following section. And although, to anticipate any conclusion, we may not be able to determine the story with certainty, it can nonetheless be agreed that the Matkanai relief clearly expands the typological range outlined above. It may thus be identified as a new subcategory within Type I (i.e. solar disk in a narrative context): Type I.5, "Solar disk in visits scenes from the life of the Buddha."

[23] See for instance the various studies on chemical analysis performed on samples of stone, stucco and clay sculptures published in Pannuzi et al. (2019: 40–81); Bonaduce et al. (2019: 82–89); Zaminga et al. (2019: 90–99); Ramasso (2019: 164–173).

The relief's narrative context: Three possible visits in the life of the Buddha

Several episodes in the life of the Buddha depict encounters with figures bearing a water pot in an attitude of devotion. Such figures may include Brahma or ascetics, whether in contexts of the divine entreaty to preach the Dharma or in conversion narratives, such as episodes involving the Uruvilvā Kāśyapas. As for the cave setting, two episodes offer a reasonable basis for comparison with the Matkanai relief: Indra's Visit to the Buddha, usually known as the visit in the *Indraśailaguhā* and the episode of the Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics. Beyond these, interpretation becomes speculative. In what follows, each hypothesis is considered on its own merits. I will suggest that the Matkanai relief may not represent the conventional *Indraśailaguhā* episode, but could instead correspond to a different episode in which Indra and Pañcaśikha visit the Buddha. This section thus situates the relief within the broader literary and visual traditions of each episode, not only to ascertain its iconography and stylistic affiliations, but also to establish a framework for understanding the potential function of the solar motif in each narrative tradition, as discussed in the final section.

The Visit of Indra to the Buddha

The Visit of Indra to the Buddha is popular in both literary and visual accounts. It is also referred to as the *Indraśailaguhā* episode, after its locus, varyingly named *Indasālaguhā*/*Indrasālaguhā* ("cave of the *ind[r]asāla* tree") or *Indraśailaguhā* ("Indra's rock cave").[24] The story, in its main lines, unfolds as follows: some time after the Buddha's awakening, Indra accompanied by the *gandharva* Pañcaśikha approaches the Buddha while he is absorbed in deep meditation in a cave. To draw the Buddha's attention, Pañcaśikha plays his harp. The Buddha eventually emerges from his meditative state and responds to Indra's inquiries. Despite its absence from major Sanskrit narratives texts such as the *Buddhacarita*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Lalitavistara*, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, and the *Nidāna-kathā*, the episode survives in various Pāli,[25] Sanskrit,[26]

[24] The etymology of the toponym found in Pāli and Sanskrit sources is discussed by Lüders and Waldschmidt in connection with the inscription *Idasalaguha* accompanying the illustration of Indra's Visit at Bharhut as well as Sanskrit manuscript fragments from Central Asia. Waldschmidt analyses the Pāli form *Indasālaguhā* and the Sanskrit variant *Indraśailaguhā*, suggesting that the former is an older form and posits that the Sanskrit form may be a later adaptation or misinterpretation. Lüders (1963: 109–110) and Waldschmidt (1932: 61). For an overview of the etymology in Chinese sources see Rhi (2024: 442, footnote 2).

[25] *Sakka-pañha Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya* no. 21, ed. Rhys Davids and Carpenter (1903: 253–289); trans. Walshe (1987: 221–234).

[26] *Śakraprasnasūtra*, Sanskrit manuscript fragments discovered in Turfan and Shorchuk; (Waldschmidt et al. 1965: no. 581). These closely parallel the Chinese translation of the *Chang*

Tibetan,[27] and Chinese sources,[28] either recounted in full or alluded to.[29] It has been the subject of many scholarly studies, most recently by Anālayo (2015) and Rhi (2024).

The story of Indra's visit is one of the most frequently depicted episodes in Gandharan art, a popularity which is echoed in India, Central Asia and China.[30] In Gandhara, it is attested on at least fifty reliefs, although only about half of these are securely provenanced. The most famous examples and object of much scholarly attention are the large stele from Mamāne Ḍherī, Jauliāñ and Loriyān Tāṅgai (**Fig. 11**). Other specimen come from Chatpat (**Fig. 12**), Nīmogrām and Butkara I in Swat, Jamālgaṛhī, Thareli, Sikrī (**Fig. 13**), Takht-i-Bāhī in the Peshawar-Mardan Bassin, Jauliāñ and Dhārmarajikā around Taxila, as well as

ahan jing 長阿含經 (*Dīrghāgama*) and the *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (*Madhyamāgama*), *infra*. To this, one may add the Mahāyāna *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka sūtra* (Yamada 1968).

27 While absent from the Tibetan translation of the *Lalitavistara*, an account of the episode is preserved in the Tibetan version of the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka sūtra* mentioned above. *'phags pa snying rje pad ma dkar po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, trans. Jinamitra (from Kashmir), Surendrabodhi, Prajñāvarman, and six others (9th century), To. 112.

28 *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (*Dīrghāgama*), *Shidi huanyin wen jing* 釋提桓因問經, trans. by Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 in the early 5th century (T. I no. 1(14) 62b28–66a3); *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (*Madhyamāgama*), *Shiwen jing* 釋問經 (*Indraśakraparipṛcchāsūtra*), trans. by Gautama Saṃghadeva in the late 4th century (T. 1 no. 26(134) 632c27–638c4); *Dishi suowen jing* 帝釋所問經, trans. by Faxian 法賢 (11th century) (T. I no. 15 246b3–250c6); *Za baozang jing* 雜寶藏經, "Dishi wenshi yuan 帝釋問事緣" (*Samyuktaratnapiṭakasūtra*), trans. by Kiṃkārya and Tanyao in the middle of the 5th century (T. IV no. 203 476a17–478b8), trans. by Willemen (1994: 144–154) and Chavannes (1934: 53–69); Faxian, *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* (T. LI no. 2085), trans. Deeg (2005: 401–404); Xuanzang, *Datang xiyu ji* (T. LI 925a23–28), trans. Beal (1884: vol. 2, 180). In addition to this group of texts which Rhi labels the *Sakka-pañha/Śakrapraśna* group because of their close affinity with the Pāli *Sakka-pañha Sutta*, the author discusses three more texts which, as we will see, are determining for the interpretation of the Matkanai relief: the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經, trans. by Zhi Qian in the early 3rd century (T. III no. 185 479c17–480b1), the *Puyao jing* 普曜經, trans. by Dharmarakṣa in the early 4th century (T. III no. 186 527a25–528b10), and the *Beihuajing Beihua jing* 悲華經 (*Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka sūtra*), trans. by Dharmakṣema in the first half of the 5th century (T. XX no. 157).

29 *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 (*Samyukta-āgama*), T. II no. 99 133b24–134a6, 144c20–145a7, 257a28–b14.

30 Overviews of the various studies on visual representations are provided by Zin (2023: 350–355) and Rhi (2024: 444–446, 460–646). More specifically, for analyses of visual representations of the episode from ancient India, Gandhara and Afghanistan see: Bhārhut: Lüders (1963: pl. 40); Bodhgayā: Coomaraswamy (1935b: pl. 48.1); Sāñcī: Marshall and Foucher (1940: vol. 2, 35b); Kanaganahalli: Zin (2018: no. 13, 57–60, pl. 8); Mathura: Sharma (1995: figs 61–64, 106, 169); Nāgārjunakoṇḍa: Longhurst (1938: 48–49); Gandhara and Afghanistan: Soper (1949a: 252–283; 1950: 63–85); Tsuchiya (1986); Akiyama (1988); Li (2000); Quagliotti (2005: 271–291); Filigenzi (2005: 93–111); Nakanishi (2006). For studies dedicated to Kizil see: Yao (1997); Li (2000); Zhu (2009: 491–509); Rhie (2002); Zin (2023: 344–384).

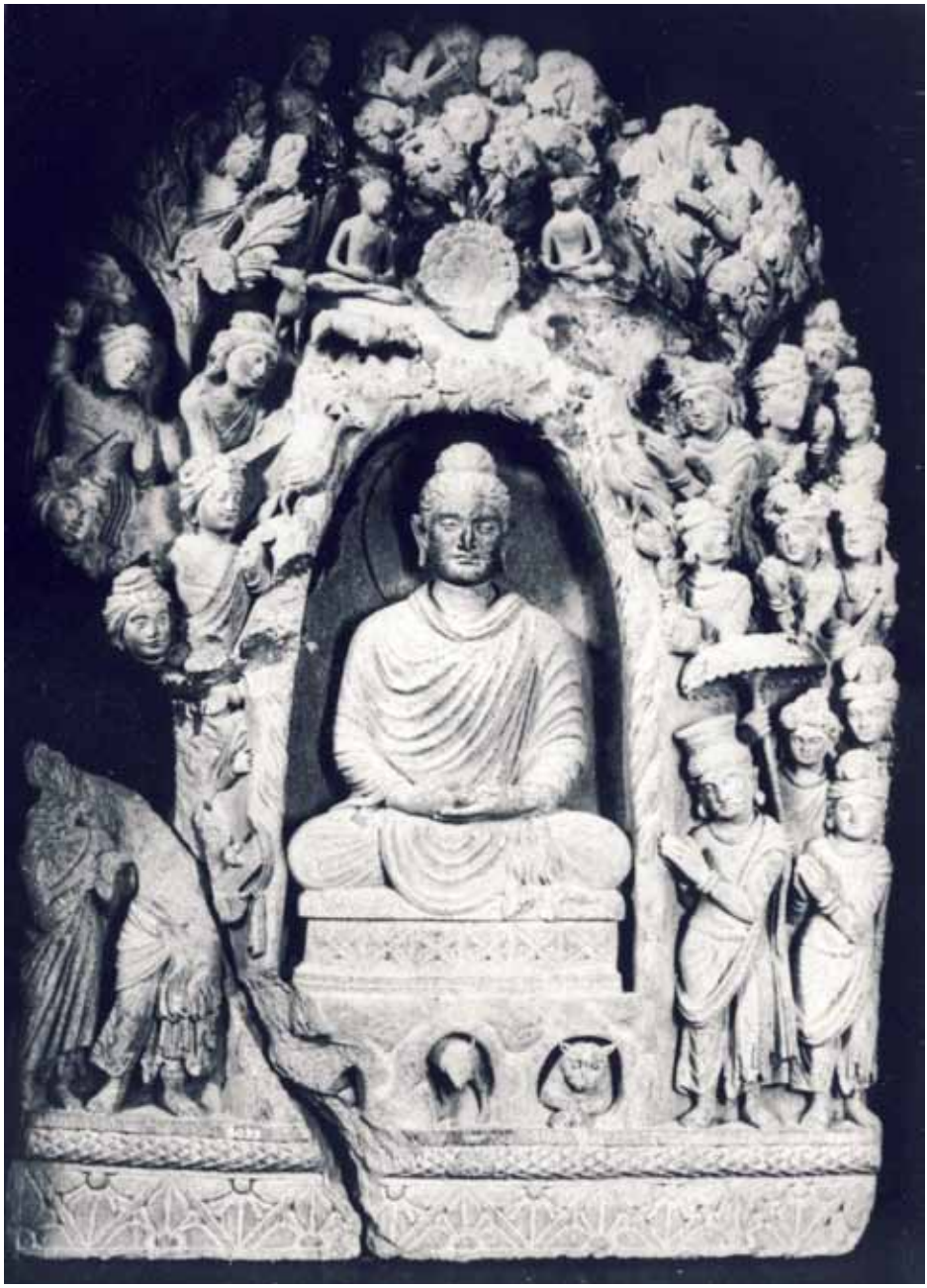

Fig. 11. The Visit of Indra, Loriyān Tāṅgai, H. 120 cm, Indian Museum, Kolkata (5099/12263/36), © Archives Francine Tissot, courtesy of Osmund Bopearachchi. The CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 12. The Visit of Indra and the Mahāparinirvāṇa, Chatpat, 47.5 x 16.5 x 6.2 cm, Dir Museum, Chakdara (DMC 756), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

Shotorak and Guldara in Kāpisā.[31] Altogether, this corpus provides a valuable sample of the various modes of representation of the episode from different regions of Gandhara and can serve as a basis to reconstruct the fragmented relief from Matkanai.

Unsurprisingly, the cave, the locus of the encounter, is a consistent feature across all representations. On the Matkanai relief, however, its treatment with stacked boulders, more closely resembles the depictions from Sikrī (**Fig. 13**) or Chatpat (**Fig. 12**),[32] rather than those from Loriyān Tāṅgai (**Fig. 11**) or Mamāne Ḍherī. In these examples, emphasis is placed on the lush natural environment of the Buddha's cave retreat, with the exterior populated with flora and fauna arranged in superposed registers, or, as in the fragment from Shotorak, signalled by the prominent presence of lions in the foreground. The flaming motif incised on the surface of the cave also finds parallels. It appears on the relief from Sikrī (**Fig. 13**), as well as on steles from Loriyān Tāṅgai (**Fig. 11**) and Jauliāñ, though in these two cases, with notable variations in treatment: as flames bordering the rim of the cave. As Rhi remarks, this flaming element only occurs in a limited number of examples and likely symbolises the fiery radiance that the Buddha

[31] Mamāne Ḍherī: von Drachenfels and Luczanits (2008: 232, no. 177); Jauliāñ: Marshall (1951: vol. 1, 384, vol. 2, 718–719, pl. 221); Loriyān Tāṅgai: Foucher (1905–1951: vol. 1, 493, fig. 246); Chatpat: Dani (1968–1969b: 84, pl. 44b and p. 98, no. 117, pl. 60a); for an illustration see https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/23789169 (accessed 15 July 2025); Nīmogrām: https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/N7I4QDPXQS7NT8B (accessed 18 July 2025); Butkara I: Faccenna (1962–1964: vol. II–2, 79, pl. 310a–310b); Jamāgaṛhī: Zwalf (1996: vol. 1, no. 220); Thareli: Mizuno and Higuchi (1978: pl. 106, no. 1); Sikrī: von Drachenfels and Luczanits (2008: 223, no. 158), Ingholt (1957: no. 129); Takht-i-Bāhī: Ingholt (1957: no. 134); Dharmarājikā: Marshall (1951: vol. 1, no. 136); Shotorak: Meunié (1942: 63, no. 28, pl. 96); Guldara: Fussman and Le Berre (1976: p. 20, pl. 21, no. 23 and pl. 22, no. 24).

[32] For other examples see Zwalf (1996: vol. 1, no. 219); Sengupta and Das (1991: 27, no. 260); von Drachenfels and Luczanits (2008: 231, no. 175).

Fig. 13. The Visit of Indra, Sikrī, H. 33 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore (5099/12263/36), © Archives Francine Tissot, courtesy of Osmund Bopearachchi. The CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

emitted during meditation. We should emphasise here, that the literary accounts diverge on this point. This is a nuance that Rhi seems to have overlooked, but one worth bearing in mind and we will return to its implications for the Matkanai motif below.

The pot discernible at the bottom right of the fragment is specific in form, featuring a protruding spout and grooves around its shoulder.[33] This is a *kuṇḍikā* (or *kuṇḍaka*), a water vessel. Though its presence might seem incidental at first glance, it is in fact crucial for the identification of the episode and for potentially linking it to a specific literary tradition. The *kuṇḍikā* is a cultic vessel commonly carried by ascetics, but it is also an attribute of Brahma. As generally understood, Brahma is not associated with Indra's visit; this is true, at least, of the *Indraśailaguhā* episode as recounted in the literary traditions referenced above, which Rhi classifies as the *Sakka-pañha/Śakrapraśna* group, so named for their alignment with the *Sakka-pañha Sutta*. These texts identify Indra and Pañcaśikha as the Buddha's sole interlocutors. On this basis, there would be no apparent reason to attribute the water pot to Brahma, nor to assume that the now-lost right fragment once bore his image. Some literary accounts, however,

[33] Interestingly, a comparable type of vessel has been found in the archaeological assemblage of the nearby site of Barikot. For a discussion of its form and an overview of its typological precedents, see Callieri and Olivieri (2020: vol. 1, 175–176, vol. 2, pl. 2).

introduce a different scenario, or rather include an entirely different narrative, in which Brahma appears alongside Indra and Pañcaśikha in the context of a cave. These include the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, a text supposedly translated by Zhi Qian in the early 3rd century,[34] and the *Puyao jing*,[35] generally regarded as the Chinese translation of a textual precursor to the *Lalitavistara*, attributed to the early 4th century monk Dharmarakṣa (see fn. 18).

Rhi, who has carefully analysed these texts, has shown that their accounts of the encounter diverge significantly from the *Sakka-pañha/Śakrapraśna* group, with Brahma's participation representing only one among several discrepancies that together constitute a distinct narrative.[36] Both texts situate Indra's visit shortly after the Buddha's awakening, in a cave to which he has withdrawn after spending seven days by the pond of the *nāga* Mucalinda. The story is therefore set in the vicinity of Bodhgayā rather than in the *Indraśaila* cave near Rājagṛha. There, in deep *samādhi*, he contemplates the roots of transmigration and hesitates to preach the Dharma, uncertain to find an audience capable of grasping its depth. Each text introduces its own nuances in recounting the subsequent events. The *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* reports that it is Brahma who first perceives the Buddha's hesitation, and dispatches Indra, accompanied by Pañcaśikha, to persuade the Buddha otherwise. The *Puyao jing*, by contrast, has Indra himself discern the Buddha's reluctance and approach him on his own initiative. In both accounts, however, it is ultimately Brahma who succeeds in convincing the Buddha to teach.

As Rhi highlights, the dialogue between the Buddha and his interlocutors does not resemble the doctrinal inquiry found the *Sakka-pañha/Śakrapraśna* group, but instead takes the form of an urgent plea for him to preach. In this respect, Pañcaśikha does not sing a song of love but performs song of supplication.[37]

34 T. III no. 185 479c17–480b1.

35 T. III no. 186 527a25–528b10.

36 The Mahāyāna *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka sūtra*, likely known in Gandhara, also seems to place the episode directly after the Buddha's enlightenment (Rhi 2024: 457–458). Before Rhi, Huo had already drawn attention to these texts and emphasised their connection with the murals of Kucha depicting events shortly after the Buddha's enlightenment (Huo 1990; reprinted in 1994 and 2006). Unfortunately, these articles – written in Chinese – have remained largely unnoticed in Western scholarship. As Zin notes, although Huo does not explicitly mention the episode of Indra's visit, his analysis points in the right direction for identifying literary parallels with the Kucha paintings (Zin 2023: 347).

37 This alternative reading of the story, which centres on the "critical juncture in the emergence of a real Buddha" (Rhi 2024: 445), offers a persuasive argument for understanding the popularity of the episode in Gandhara. Previously, the popularity of the episode was largely accounted by the inclusivist undertones of Indra's conversion (who becomes a stream-enterer in the Pāli version) and his humbling (see for instance Anālayo 2015: 9–10). This idea was already supported by Soper, among others, although he emphasised that the episode's popularity also stemmed from the significance of the light symbolism it embodies, an imagery transmitted

As becomes clear, these variations establish a different narrative climax, one centered not on the articulation of doctrinal content, but on the dramatic tension over whether the Dharma will be communicated at all. The author rightly underscores that "the visit of Indra and Pañcaśikha is told here as part of another famous episode from the Buddha's life, the Entreaty to Preach prior to the Buddha's First Sermon".[38] In this light, the attribution of the *kuṇḍika* to Brahma becomes more plausible. We may thus identify the Matkanai relief as a depiction of Indra's Visit, understood as a prelude to the Gods Entreaty to Preach the Dharma and disambiguated from the *Indraśailaguhā* episode. This identification and the connection with the narrative tradition reflected by the two texts is supported by other evidence.

The history of the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* and the *Puyao jing* and their interrelationships, as analysed by Rhi (2024: 451–453), is too complex to explore fully here. Nevertheless, the relevance of the *Puyao jing* to the Gandharan context has been demonstrated by several scholars. Salomon, Ducoeur and Rhi himself have drawn connections between the narrative tradition represented by this early Chinese translation of a precursor to the *Lalitavistara* and illustrations of the episodes of the Bodhisattva riding to school and the Buddha's austerities.[39] The relief from Matkanai may thus bear witness to the circulation, in the south of the Swat valley, of a narrative tradition whose Indic original is now lost but preserved in the Chinese translation of the *Puyao jing*.

The existence of several Gandharan reliefs portraying Brahma in a cave setting may confirm the relevance of this narrative tradition. Rhi mentions a relief in the Chandigarh Museum and, tentatively, a relief from Giri which does not show Pañcaśikha, but the Buddha in a cave, flanked by Indra and Brahma.[40] To these examples, one may add a relief from the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin, which depicts Brahma – identifiable by his water pot, his ascetic hairstyle and his nimbus – kneeling to the left of the cave entrance.[41] Unfortunately, the exact

from the West and reinforced by indigenous figure cults in ancient India (Soper 1949a: 252–283). For an overview of different theses put forward to explain the popularity of the story in Kucha, see Zin (2023: 347–353).

38 Zin, who accepts Rhi's interpretation for certain depictions of the encounter that include Brahma, draws attention to the reference to "an earlier meeting" in the *Indraśailaguhā* episode as preserved in the *Dīghanikāya*, Sanskrit fragments, and the Chinese *Dīrghāgama* and *Madhyāgama*. This would suggest that the narrative of Indra's visit shortly after the enlightenment was already part of the canonical tradition (Zin 2023: 347–353). For alternative explanations for the presence of Brahma in the paintings of Kucha see Zhu (2009: 491–509).

39 Salomon (1990: 255–273; 1993: 275–276); Ducœur (2014: 385–424); Rhi (2006–2008: 156–183). For the general relevance of the *Puyao jing* to Gandhara see Tournier and Strong (2019: 24–25).

40 Bhattacharyya (2002: no. 96) and von Drachenfels and Luczanits (2008: no. 176).

41 The relief (I 5813) is accessible online: https://id.smb.museum/object/1713943/erz%C3%A4hlende-szene-fragment-der-g%C3%B6tterk%C3%B6nig-indra-besucht-den

provenance of this piece remains unknown, but the greenish tint of the stone and the treatment of Brahma's drapery with uninterrupted lines suggest it was also produced in the Swat valley.

The literary tradition reflected by the *Puyao jing* and the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* may also help explain the Buddha's three-quarter view in the Matkanai relief (and possibly also in the Berlin piece), partially obscured by the cave. As noted above, in other depictions of the episode, the Buddha is typically shown frontally, seated in meditation. The posture in the Matkanai relief finds visual parallels in reliefs from Sikrī (**Fig. 13**), Chatpat (**Fig. 11**) and the relief in the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin,[42] where the Buddha is oriented toward the cave's interior, seemingly turning his back on his interlocutor, Pañcaśikha. According to Rhi, this position may signal the Buddha's initial reluctance to teach, as recounted in both texts.

The connection between the Matkanai relief and the account preserved in these texts is significant not only for reconstructing the relief's narrative context, but also for informing our interpretation of the solar motif. These sources include a Visit of Indra and Pañcaśikha as a prelude to the Gods' Entreaty to Preach. If the *kundikā* depicted at the lower right of the Matkanai relief does indeed belong to Brahma, then the presence of the solar disk aligns with the typological scheme detailed in the first section and can be related to the Buddha's teaching feat.

The Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics

While the interpretation proposed above appears plausible and could well suffice, there is good reason not to dismiss the alternative identification with the Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics. This episode also known as the Bāvari legend, relates how sixteen ascetics are sent by their brahman teacher, Bāvari, to seek out the Buddha during his residence in Śrāvastī, to inquire into the goal of his teaching and the path to its realisation. Each ascetic approaches the Buddha individually and, deeply impressed by his responses, converts to Buddhism and enters the monastic fold. Most famously, the story is preserved in Pāli, as part of the *Suttanipāta*, forming the content of the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta* ("*The Chapter on the Way to the Far Shore*").[43] The textual history of this *sūtra* is

-meditierenden-buddha-in-einer-h%C3%B6hle-indrashailaguha%3B-rankendekor-rechts (accessed 18 July 2025).

42 See also a relief in the Lahore Museum (GR-386/1401) (von Drachenfels and Luczanits 2008: no. 175), and a relief from Nīmogrām in the Swat Museum Saidu Sharif (NG313): https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AN7I4QDPXQS7NT8B (accessed 15 July 2025); Rhi (2024: 456, note 26).

43 *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* no. 5, 976–1149, ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 190–223); trans. Norman (1992: 127–145). For a generally assessment of this *sūtra* see Lamotte (1958: 380–381, 775–782).

notably complex, not least due to the fragmentary nature of the manuscripts preserved.[44] Although the Pāli version is the only complete recension, individual verses, blocks of the text, approximate parallels, or synthesised versions are also preserved in Sanskrit,[45] as well as in Chinese[46] and Uyghur translations.[47] In what follows, we draw on these texts not in an attempt to identify the direct source of our illustration – the historical and geographic contexts of their production would preclude such a claim – but rather to sketch the literary backdrop of a story that was evidently popular. Evidence of its resonance in the Gandharan context is in fact provided by a Gāndhārī commentary on selected verses from the *Kṣudraka* section of an early Buddhist canon. As examined by Baums, this commentary discusses several verses from the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta* alongside verses drawn from at least two other source collections: an *Arthapada* and a *Dharmapada* or an *Udāna*.[48]

That the story was known in Gandhara is confirmed by the extant representations, suggesting it enjoyed a certain degree of popularity. However, it appears to have had little iconographic resonance beyond Gandhara,[49] and its visual depictions have received comparatively less scholarly attention than those of Indra's

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44 Ines Konczak-Nagel offers an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the legend in this volume, examining its etymology, the complex literary history of the narrative, and its connections to Maitreya as well as its reception in Kucha; readers should turn to her study for further details on the points addressed in my own article. See Konczak-Nagel (2025).

45 These are Sanskrit manuscripts from Turfan (SHT IV, no. 50; SHT VI, no. 1581 and no. 1582). Sander and Waldschmidt (1980: 236–238); Wille and Bechert (1989: 198–200). The questions of Ajita are also found quoted in works such as the *Yogācārabhūmi* (Enomoto 1989: 34).

46 The *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (*Scripture of the Wise and the Foolish*), T. IV no. 202, 330a–491c, is the only known Chinese text to include any portion of the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*. However, there is no evidence that the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga* was ever fully translated into Chinese (Zieme 2003: 45), the *Xianyu jing* embeds the story of Bāvari within a broader narrative concerning Maitreya. Lévi (1925: 318–329) observed that this integration, linking the Bāvari legend to the future Buddha Maitreya, finds its most developed expression in the *Maitreyasamitināṭaka*, a dramatic text structured into twenty-seven sections and devoted to the complete career of Maitreya. Fragments of this work, preserved in Tocharian, were edited by Sieg and Siegling (1921: nos. 212–216).

47 These include Old Turkish fragments from the Turfan Collection, such as Mainz 700 (T III M 194), Mainz 699, U 1945 (T III M 184) + U 2028 + U 1188 (T III M 184), Mainz 707 (T III M 194), Mainz 757 (T III M 194), and U 1946a, b (T III M 184). For editions and translations of these fragments, as well as an overview of their textual parallels with Pāli, Sanskrit, and Chinese sources, see Ehlers (1982: 175–185); Zieme (1997: 743–759; 2003: 31–47); Wilkens (2010: 40–41); and Cengiz (2024: 2–16). Some of these materials are also likely part of the broader Maitreya legend.

48 Baums (2009: 44, 302–306). More specifically, these are: the *Ajitamāṇavapucchā*, the *Mettagūmāṇavapucchā*, the *Jatukaṇṇimāṇavapucchā* and the *Posālamāṇavapucchā*.

49 The story is depicted in Kucha, Kizil Cave 114 where it is likely connected with the broader narrative concerning Maitreya (Zin 2023: 449, see also footnote 38).

visit, with Raducha's, Quagliotti's and Filigenzi's studies remaining, as far as I am aware, the most comprehensive to date.[50] In Gandhara, the episode is possibly attested on some thirty reliefs, roughly half of which stem from an archaeological context. This figure, however, must be treated with caution, as many of the documented specimens are fragmentary and depict only groups of ascetics, sometimes shown in interaction with the Buddha, at other times lacking the key narrative elements of the cave.[51] Such fragments may illustrate a different episode altogether, such as the conversion of the Kāśyapas. The number of reliefs that can be securely identified as representations of the Bāvari legend and that originate from a documented archaeological context is limited to six. These include the stele from Takht-i-Bāhī (**Fig. 14**), one relief from Chatpat (**Fig. 15**), two from Butkara I, and two from Nīmogrām (**Fig. 16**).[52]

In these reliefs, the Buddha is typically depicted seated cross-legged in *padmāsana*, performing the *abhaya-mudrā*, a gesture commonly associated with teaching or dialogical encounters. He is flanked by two groups of ascetics, which, based on the surviving compositions, we can reasonably assume were originally arranged symmetrically around the cave. This cave retreat setting finds justification in literary sources, which mention that the ascetic brahmins had travelled long distances to meet the Buddha who was residing in the *pāsāṇaka cetiya* at the top of a mountain.[53]

[50] Gandharan illustrations of the episode have been briefly addressed by Soper (1949a: 258ff), Foucher (1905–1951: vol. 2, 255–257), Zwalf (1996: 222); Raducha (1985: 89–102); Quagliotti (2005: 271–291) and Filigenzi (2005: 93–111).

[51] This is for instance the case with the panel from Shotorak preserved in the British Museum (OA 1968.8): Zwalf (1996: no. 263); one in the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul (64.7.1): Meunié (1942: 26, 47–48, no. 155, pl. 8, 24 and pl. 19, 62); one from Tapa-i-Kafariha or Bagh-gai in the Guimet Museum (MG 3466): Dagens (1964: 18, pl. IV–14); three from Saidu Sharif in the Swat Museum (S301, S326, S620): Faccenna (2001: pl. 118, pl. 119, pl. 123); one from Chatpat (Dir Museum, Chakdara, DMC 507), see https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/1748555 (accessed 14 July 2025); one from Matkanai (Dir Museum, Chakdara, DMC 2033): https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de#/detail/1719569 (accessed 14 July 2025).

[52] Takht-i-Bāhī (Peshawar Museum, no. 1151a–c): Ingholt (1957: no. 106); Butkara I (3444 and 4015, 1748): Faccenna (1962–1964: vol. II–2, 29–30, pl. 92, pl. 93a, pl. 93b, pl. 94, pl. 95, pl. 96). Numbers 3444 and 4015 belong to the same relief; Chatpat (Dir Museum, Chakdara, DMC 558): Dani (1968–1969b: 98, pl. 60a); Nīmogrām (Swat Museum. Saidu Sharif, NG136): Faccenna (2001: pl. 139b), see also NG448: https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/QYUOAVQBULNGQ85 (accessed 14 July 2025). Other examples from an unknown provenance include a relief in the British Museum (1917, 0501.2): Zwalf (1996: no. 222); a relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.81–1949): Ackerman (1975: 126–127, pl. LVa); one in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri (no. 20 81.13, no. 8): Sarla D. Nagar (1981: no. 8); two reliefs in the Museo delle Civiltà, Rome (no. 4772, Varia 668 and no. 4795 varia 720): Quagliotti (2005: II.6 and II.7).

[53] *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, 1013–1014; ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 194–195), trans. Norman (1992: 130). A similar passage is attested in the Old Uyghur version: *pašanak t[agk]a* (Mainz 699, line 003) in Cengiz (2024: 4–5).

Fig. 14. The Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, Takht-i-Bāhī, H. 73 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar (1151), after Kurita (2003: vol. 1, no. 440). The CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 15. The Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, Chatpat, 41.7 x 15.2 x 5.1 cm, Dir Museum, Chakdara (DMC 558), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

Fig. 16. The Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, Nīmogrām, 16.1 × 67.9 × 5 cm, Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (NG136) © Raducha, Joan Anastasia, University of Wisconsin, https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A4EGEL2EGHRSEW8M. The CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Several visual parallels to the depiction of the Buddha's cave retreat on the Matkanai relief can be found in examples from Chatpat, Nīmogrām, and the piece housed in the British Museum, all of which feature similarly stylised boulder formations. These form a coherent iconographic group that is distinct from the stele at Takht-i-Bāhī, whose composition is identical to its counterpart depicting Indra's Visit. The flame-like motif incised on the cave surface in the Matkanai relief may also find a visual analogue in a relief from the British Museum (**Fig. 17**), where "radiating patches", interpreted by Zwalf as possible representations of vegetation, might alternatively be read as a fiery motif. Unfortunately, the state of preservation of the other examples does not permit a definitive assessment of whether similar motifs were originally present.

The ascetics approaching the Buddha are depicted at various ages, as suggested by their bodily features and hairstyles, and appear in diverse postures. Some join their hands in devotion, others lean on walking sticks or raise a hand to their forehead or head. All carry water pots similar to the one seen in the Matkanai relief. Notably, the positioning of the ascetics flanking the cave entrance in the reliefs from Nīmogrām, Chatpat, and the British Museum may clarify the presence of the water pot and shed light on the identity of the devotee in the Matkanai panel. These figures are shown kneeling in *añjali-mudrā* which may account for the presence of the water pot on the ground in our piece. In short, the central motif of the Matkanai relief could be transposed into any of these related compositions without disrupting the narrative coherence of the Bāvari legend.

As for the luminous element so prominently featured in the Matkanai relief, possible resonances may be found in two other examples: another relief from Matkanai (**Fig. 18)** and a fragment from a private collection (Hiruma 1986: no. 83). Although these omit the cave motif, they depict ascetics in attitudes of devotion before the Buddha. They show the Buddha performing the *abhaya-mudrā*, seated in *padmāsana* and standing respectively. In both instances, the Buddha is silhouetted against a full-body halo.

Fig. 17. The Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, 4.7 x 20.7 x 27.6 cm, British Museum, London (1917,0501.2) © The Trustees of the British Museum / CC BY-SA 4.0. Public Domain.

Fig. 18. The Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics, Matkanai, 28.5 x 12.2 x 5.5 cm, Dir Museum, Chakdara (DMC 2033), © KPDOAM/DiGA. Public Domain.

At this point, the narrative identity of the Matkanai relief remains open to interpretation. On the one hand, there is enough contextual evidence to support either reading; on the other hand, the relief is too fragmentary to allow for the exclusion of one interpretation over the other. The hesitation, however, is not merely the result of its poor state of preservation. Indeed, the striking compositional affinities between the two episodes have been repeatedly noted and interpreted as symptomatic not only of a shared narrative scheme – a (group of) reverent(s) seeking council from the Buddha meditating in a cave – but also of a shared symbolism, related to light. This luminous dimension can be traced back to Soper, who links the motif of the Buddha in the cave to solar mythology, more specifically to the Mithraic tradition and its iconography.[54] In its essence, the solar analogy and the cultural permeation between the Buddhist and Iranian mythological and iconographic repertoires hinge on basic idea of "the enormous importance to mankind of the sun and of fire as powers of good" (Soper 1950: 71). The composition therefore stages a conceptual metaphor in which light signifies knowledge and darkness stands for ignorance. Building on this interpretation, Quagliotti and Filigenzi have infused the compositions of the Visit of Indra (in their discussion, interpreted in the sense of the *Indraśailaguhā* episode) and the Visit of the Sixteen Ascetics with additional flavour.[55] The authors draw attention to iconographic details, especially armed figures flanking the cave, identified variously as Vajrapāṇi or Skanda/Kumāra/Kārttikeya, to support readings that remain complementary despite variation. They commonly interpret these deities either as protectors of the Buddha and the Dharma, concealed within the darkness of the cave and awaiting revelation, or as embodiments of lay virtues aligned with the pursuit of enlightenment. The presence of Skanda, traditionally considered to be an attendant of Sūrya, has further been taken to reinforce the solar resonance of the scene. To these authors, the basic solar metaphor of the Buddha as a radiant source of knowledge is thus extended to encompass notions of protection, revelation, and religious aspiration.

The polyvalence of the solar disk

While the preceding discussion has helped situate the motif within plausible narrative frameworks and hinted at its symbolic and metaphorical solar resonance, I believe there is still more to be extracted from the relief. In this section, I turn to literary traditions that resonate with the Matkanai scene, not to propose direct sources for its imagery, but to suggest that certain narrative turns and literary tropes reveal further dimensions embedded in the motif. This approach does not diverge radically from earlier interpretations, but rather offers a more nuanced, fine-grained reading of the solar disk and its layered

[54] Soper (1949a: 252–283; 1950: 63–85).

[55] Quagliotti (2005: 271–291); Filigenzi (2005: 93–111).

significance. In what follows, I examine each scenario, building on the visual and symbolic cues gathered thus far in our interpretive toolbox.

The light of samādhi

If the relief does depict the Visit of Indra and Pañcaśikha as a prelude to the Gods' Entreaty to Preach, it follows that the motif of the solar disk resonates with the interpretive framework proposed by Verardi and Quagliotti and may be understood as symbolising the irradiation of the soon-to-be-teaching Buddha. Yet the motif's full significance may extend beyond this initial reading, for the theme of light plays a significant role in the various literary versions of the episode. This aspect has been dealt with by Rhi but more systematically by Anālayo (2015) as part of a broader effort to identify stages in the textual development of the Buddha's miraculous displays involving fire. All the versions consistently describe the emission of a great light. Whereas Rhi (2024: 448) indiscriminately ascribes this to "the fiery light emanating from the Buddha in mediation […] consistently present in the textual tradition", the sources diverge in the circumstances and origin of the miraculous phenomenon. A brief excursion into accounts from the *Sakka-pañha/Śakrapraśna* group is therefore appropriate, as it provides a contextual backdrop against which the specific account in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* and the *Puyao jing* can be appreciated.

As Anālayo underlines, the radiance evoked in literary accounts is explicitly attributed to the *devas* themselves (namely Śakra, Pañcaśikha, and the Trayastriṃśa gods) in the *Sakka-pañha Sutta*, where it is said to arise "through the divine power of the gods" (*devānaṃ devānubhāvena*),[56] illuminating Mount Vediya upon their arrival. So intense is their radiance that local villagers believe it was on fire. This attribution is ambiguous or at best implicit in the Sanskrit version (Waldschmidt 1932: 65–67), the *Zhong ahan jing* (T. 1 no. 26(134) 633a8–633a13), the *Dishi suowen jing* (T. I no. 15 246b21) and the *Za baozang jing* (T. IV no. 203 476a28, tale 407). The *Chang ahan jing*, the Chinese version of the *Dīrghāgama*, gives a different explanation. Here, the radiance of the mountain is also traced to the presence of the Buddha who was meditating:

> At that time the Blessed One had entered concentration on fire and Mount Vediya completely appeared to be on fire. Then the country people, on seeing this, said to each other: "Due to the power of the Tathāgata and the devas, the Mount Vediya appears to be on fire".[57]
>
> (Anālayo 2015: 13)

[56] *Sakka-pañha Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya* no. 21, ed. Rhys Davids and Carpenter (1903: 253–289); trans. Walshe (1987: 321–334).

[57] T. I no. 1(14) 62c10–62c14. The special place of this text has already been noted by Chavannes (1934: 55).

This, of course, resonates with reliefs such as the stele from Mamāne Ḍherī and Loriyān Tāṅgai mentioned above, which depict flames emerging from the Buddha's shoulders and/or carved on the rim of the cave. It is worth mentioning in this context, that in art historical terms the motif of fire constitutes an iconographic convention for representing meditation and the figure's absorbed state.[58] Applied to the relief from Matkanai, however, this interpretation would compel us to the uncomfortable conceptual leap of equating the light of the sun with that of fire.

The *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* and the *Puyao jing* offer a slightly different explanation for the emission of light, potentially more fruitful for interpreting the Matkanai motif. Both accounts report that, having pondered the possibility of preaching the Dharma and initially refraining from doing so, the Buddha entered deep meditation. At that moment, a radiance is said to have shone from his *ūrṇā*, illuminating the seven heavens or reaching "the Lord of the Gods", as recounted in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* and the *Puyao jing* respectively. Immediately thereafter, either Brahma (in the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*) or Śakra (in the *Puyao jing*) perceives the Buddha's resolve to leave the world to its grim fate.[59] It is unclear whether a causal relationship should be inferred here, and whether it is this light that heralds the Buddha's regrettable intention. We can only speculate. The rest of the story is already familiar, but one final point may be worth mentioning: the motif of the illuminated seven heavens is echoed in Pañcaśikha's song, or, more accurately, his plea. In the *Puyao jing* the *gandharva* begs the Buddha to illuminate the seven heavens with radiance and fragrant virtues.

With this in mind, the solar disk may be interpreted as the radiance emanating from the Buddha as he sits in meditation, illuminating the seven heavens. In this instance, the solar disk may not primarily symbolise a quality of the Buddha or serve as a representation of *bodhi*, as suggested by Verardi, but may rather convey the visual manifestation of the light that radiates from him and, by metonymy, function as an alternative visual convention for depicting *samādhi,* that is, a metaphorical use of solar light to evoke the trance of meditative absorption.[60]

[58] It must be said here, that Anālayo suggests that such imagery may have influenced the literary tradition of the *Dīrghāgama*, where "the metaphorical motif of the 'fire of *samādhi*' used in art would have supported the idea of a *samādhi,* which results in the visible appearance of fire as a phenomenon observable by those nearby, even if they themselves are not engaged in or proficient at meditative practice" (Anālayo 2015: 19).

[59] T. 185.480a.3 and T. 186.527b.14.

[60] Of particular relevance here is the painting on the rear wall of the niche in Cave 63 at Kizil, which contains a depiction of the Visit of Indra. The composition features an elaborate nimbus and mandorla for the now lost statue of the Buddha, with two ornamented beams extending to the right and left from where the Buddha's *uṣṇiṣa* would have been. See Zin (2023: 381). This raises the question of whether Kucha artists also attempted to render a similar event in the account of Indra's Visit.

This reading also helps explain the presence of emerging knees, as the light appears to emanate from the Buddha rather than merely standing in for him.

The light of the kinsman of the Sun

Should the Matkanai relief instead depict the legend of Bāvari, the solar disk may assume a different, though still related, function. The emphasis on radiance finds an echo in passages from the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, where the Buddha is likened to the sun. When they reach the Buddha's retreat, the ascetics Ajita and Jatukaṇṇi gaze upon the Buddha who is described in the following terms:

> *1016. Ajito addasa Sambuddhaṃ vītaraṃsi va bhāṇumaṃ*
> *Candaṃ yathā pannarase pāripūriṃ upāgataṃ.*
>
> 1016. Ajita saw the fully-awakened one, like the sun with straight rays,[61] like the moon come to fullness on the fifteenth day.
>
> (trans. Norman 1992: 130)
>
> *1097. Bhagavā hi kāme abhibhuyya iriyati*
> *ādicco va paṭhaviṃ teji tejasā:*
> *parittapaññassa me bhūripaññā*
> *ācikkha dhammaṃ, yam ahaṃ vijaññam*
> *jātijarāya idha vippahānaṃ.*
>
> 1097. The Blessed One indeed dwells having overcome sensual pleasures, as the brilliant sun [overcomes] the earth by its brilliance. One of great wisdom, preach the doctrine to me who am of little wisdom, so that I may know the abandonment of birth and old age here.[62]
>
> (trans. Norman 1992: 139)

In the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, Ajita and Jatukaṇṇi compare the Buddha to the sun through two terms: *bhānu* and *ādicca* (Skt. *āditya*). Each potentially carries a distinct mythological and symbolic weight. The first may stress the radiant force of the natural phenomenon, which shines with "straight rays" (*vītaraṃsi*), while the second more directly evokes the personified god.[63] In these verses, solar imagery serves both to underscore the Buddha's radiant presence and to affirm his role as a dispeller of darkness and defilements. Although the Pāli account cannot be directed mapped onto the Gandharan relief, evidence preserved in the Sanskrit, Chinese, and Old Uyghur versions suggests that this literary trope, or at least the broader theme of blazing light, circulated beyond the Pāli tradition.[64]

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[61] Bhikkhu Bodhi has a different reading here – with "Ce *sataraṃsiva* (Be *sataraṃsiṃ va*)" – and translates "like the sun with hundred rays" (Bodhi 2017: 326 and note 227, 1358).

[62] *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* no. 5, 1016 and 1097, ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 195, 212).

[63] Monier-Williams (1899: 137 and 751).

[64] In the Old Uyghur version, the brahmins, portrayed as an undifferentiated collective, gaze

This literary trope is well-established and permeates Buddhist literature. Throughout the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, as in many other Buddhist texts, the Buddha is time and again likened to the sun, variously named Sūrya, Āditya, or Virocana, through similes, metaphors, and epithets.[65] The broad semantic range and mythological connotations of these terms suggest that this association extends beyond the sun as an astral body to encompass its role as a divine embodiment of cosmic light and sovereignty, as celebrated in both Vedic and Purāṇic traditions. The entities and functions from which the Buddha derives his solar qualities, and the metaphorical logic underlying them, have been widely examined; it will suffice here to recall only the principal lines of reasoning.[66]

At its most fundamental level, the sun casts light and dispels darkness. This natural function is conceptually mapped onto the Buddha, who illuminates the world with knowledge and dispels the darkness of ignorance. Thus, the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta* refers to him as "[t]he darkness-thruster [who] is seated alone, brilliant, that light-maker Gotama".[67] Likewise, Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* celebrates the Bodhisattva as "this sun of knowledge [who] will blaze forth in this world to dispel the darkness of delusion".[68] In the *Divyāvadāna*, he outshines his enemies

upon "the perfectly wise divine Buddha, like the sun" (*kaltı kün*, Mainz 699, T II, line 15) […] (Cengiz 2024: 4–5). The surviving Sanskrit fragments contain traces of words such as *jvalita* and *jvalatī* (blazing, shining) or *tejasānvitā* (endowed with fiery energy), though they appear in contexts too fragmentary to allow detailed interpretation. The *Xianyu jing* takes a different turn and reports that the Buddha emits light when Maitreya and his companions approach and then wraps his tongue around his head or face and displays his penis. T. IV no. 202, 432b.13–436c.6.

65 These entities, the multi-facetted concepts they encompass, and their associated cultic practices, have generated an extensive scholarship. For foundational studies see Srivastava (1972), Stietencron (1966), Lalta Prasad Pandey (1971), Durgha Prasad Pandey (1989) and Gail (2001). For overviews, see Witzel (2018) and Gansten (2018). For more recent reassessments in light of new documentation, see Frenger (2001; 2005; 2020).

66 The Buddha's association with Sūrya and with solar deities more broadly, has been examined in both textual and material contexts, notably by Senart (1875: 504–507), Coomaraswamy (1935a, 1935b), Rowland (1938), Rosenfield (1967), Bopearachchi (2021; 2022: 941–954). Particularly valuable for the present discussion are the contributions by Nicolas Revire and Marion Frenger. Revire, surveying a remarkably diverse range of sources, including the Pāli Nikāyas, hagiographic accounts of the Buddha's life, Chinese and Tibetan translations and commentaries, as well as later Mahāyāna and Tantric materials, aims "to define precisely how the Buddha is said to relate to the sun, in one aspect or another" (Revire 2017: 143–156). By casting such a wide net, he compiles an illustrative catalogue of examples from which this study draws. Frenger (2020), who approaches the question through early North Indian imagery of Sūrya and its integration within wider Buddhist visual programmes (rather than from the perspective of Buddhist imagery), provides an incisive synthesis of the conceptual logics underpinning these associations.

67 *eko tamanud' āsino jātimā so prabhaṃkaro, Gotamo bhūripaññāṇo, Gotamo bhūrimedhaso. Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* no. 5, 1136, ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 220); trans. Norman (1992: 144).

68 *vihāya rājyaṃ vīṣayeṣv anāsthastīvraiḥ prayatnair adhigamya tattvam | jagaty ayaṃ*

through the radiance of his wisdom.[69] The sun is also endowed with a cosmic function: it imposes order upon the world, like a sovereign ruler, an authority derived from its role in generating the inexorable alternation of day and night. Within this symbolic framework, Siddhārtha Gautama also assumes sovereignty. Regardless of the destiny foreseen by the sages, whether as a spiritual guide or as a *cakravartin*, a universal monarch, his role is to ensure world order. By choosing to become a Buddha, he thereby affirms the universal scope of his message. In this respect, the *Mahāvastu* calls him "this Light of the world, the world's Guide, he who is the foremost seer of the Śākyans, kinsmen of the sun."[70] This latter epithet adds yet another layer of the Buddha-sun connection, this time mythological. The phrase "kinsmen of the sun" (*ādityabandhu*), also found in *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*,[71] refers to the Śākya lineage, which Buddhist sources explicitly link to the legendary Ikṣvāku dynasty, itself said to originate from the solar deity.[72]

This "Buddha-sun connection" manifests through multiple modes of expression, and it would be impossible to detail all the numerous instances of this equation. We may, however, focus on two particularly telling examples, beginning with early images of Sūrya and the Buddha from the Kushan and early Gupta periods from the region of Mathura. These depict both figures seated in *bhadrasāna*, wearing

mohatamo nihantuṃ jvaliṣyati jñānamayo hi sūryaḥ || (*Buddhacarita* 1.69). "For quitting his realm, detached from pleasures, realizing the truth through arduous efforts, this sun of knowledge will blaze forth in this world to dispel the darkness of delusion" (ed. and trans. Olivelle 2008: 24–25). See also: *adbhutānāṃ ca dharmāṇāṃ viśuddhiḥ upalabhyate | tvāṃ prāpya puruṣāditya tamontakaram acyutaṃ* || *Mahāvastu* I 175, ed. Senart (1882: 175); "O Man of Light, thanks to thee, the steadfast dispeller of darkness, the pure radiance of wondrous states is won" (trans. Jones 1949: 139).

69 *tāvad avabhasate kṛmir yāvan nodayate divākaraḥ | virocana udgate tu vairavyārto bhavati na cāvabhāsate || tāvad avabhāṣitam āsa tārkikair yāvan noditavāṃs tathāgataḥ | saṃbuddhāvabhāsite tu loke na tārkiko bhāsate na cāsya śrāvakaḥ* || (*Divyāvadāna*, ed. Cowell and Neil 1886: 352.2–353.2, 163). "The insects shine so long as the sun does not rise. Once the sun rises, the insects become confused and cease to shine. Similarly, these dialecticians (*tārkika*) shone while the Tathāgata remained silent. However, once the perfect Buddha has shone in the world, the dialecticians and their *śrāvakas* keep silent" (trans. Skorupski 2001: 44).

70 *yatra te lokapradyotā āgatā bodhi prāpuṇe | krakucchando konākamuni kāśyapo ca mahāmuni || taṃ deśaṃ lokapradyoto upāgame lokanāyako | yo so vādityabandhūnāṃ śākyānāṃ paramo muniḥ* || (*Mahāvastu* II 302–303), ed. Senart (1890: 302–303). "Where those Lights of the world, Krakucchanda, Konākamuni, and the great seer Kaśyapa, came and achieved enlightenment. To that place has come this Light of the world, the world's Guide, he who is the foremost seer of the śākyans, kinsmen of the sun" (trans. Jones 1952: 284).

71 *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* no. 5, 1128, ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 219); trans. Norman (1992: 143).

72 In the *Pabbajjā Sutta* for instance, Siddhārtha Gautama tells king Bimbisāra that his family belongs to the "Ādicca" lineage. *Pabbajjā Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* no. 3.1.423, ed. Andersen and Smith (1913: 74); trans. Norman (1992: 51).

regal tunics with central decorative bands, and bearing a club or sword. Together, these are features modelled on Kushan royal portraiture. These iconographic parallels have been interpreted either as reflections of the genealogical connection between the Buddha and the sun, or as a token of their shared royal or cosmic authority, a theme for which Kushan portraiture is particularly apt.[73] The second example is the relief from Bodhgayā previously mentioned. The solar deity who is depicted riding his quadriga is carved onto a *vedikā* pillar near a scene of Siddhārtha's birth. This juxtaposition is one of several examples in which Sūrya is embedded within the broader visual programme of Buddhist sacred spaces.[74] Such representations may simultaneously honour the Buddha's solar descent and metaphorically evoke *bodhi*, conveyed through the symbolism of light. Such iconographic and compositional strategies, playing on visual analogy and visual proximity, reaffirm the solar dimension of the Buddha and the fundamentality of the connection. From this perspective, the solar motif from Matkanai may constitute another means of articulating the intimate connection between the Buddha and the sun. In this case, the Buddha, compared by his beholder to the radiant sun, literally assumes the form of the sun. The visual motif thereby transforms the metaphor into a tangible, perceptible reality. The Buddha's knees remain visible behind the disk, perhaps to preserve the human scale and posture of his seated body, maintaining the recognition of his corporeal form even as he is iconographically and metaphorically linked with the sun.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of visual and textual parallels, the fragmentary relief from Matkanai can most plausibly be interpreted as depicting one of two visits to the Buddha, either by Indra, Pañcaśikha and Brahma as a prelude to the Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma, or by the Pārāyaṇa ascetics. Should one of these interpretations be preferred? Admittedly, given the popularity of the narrative cycle revolving around the First Sermon in Gandharan art, it is statistically more likely that the relief illustrates the former episode. The presence of a solar disk in this context would be consistent with the broader Gandharan visual tradition, which frequently associates this motif with scenes related to the Gods' Entreaty to Preach the Dharma and the Buddha's First Sermon. That said, the alternative interpretation cannot be entirely dismissed. Although the Visit of the Sixteen Pārāyaṇa Ascetics is less represented in the wider Gandharan corpus, it remains a coherent reading. Moreover, the collection of the Dir Museum has yielded

[73] Revire (2016–2017: 3–14); Frenger (2020: 400–402). This system of iconographic and symbolic correspondence fostered by the Kushan's proclivity for solar imagery which fitted well into their concept of divine kingship (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1989: 78).

[74] Coomaraswamy (1935b); Leoshko (1991: 230–234); Frenger (2020: 402–404). For similar examples from Bhāja, Bhārhut, Mathura, Gandhara or Bāmiyān see Srinivasan (1992: 41); Shanti Lal Nagar (1995: 151); Bopearachchi (2021; 2022: 941–954); Bausch (2025: 311–323).

a high number of reliefs from Chatpat and Andan Ḍheri[75] featuring rows of ascetics, suggesting that this episode may have enjoyed greater regional popularity on the right bank of the Swat River. In the absence of the missing fragments, however, a definitive identification remains elusive.

Though fragmentary, the Matkanai relief offers a window into the conceptual and artistic strategies through which early Gandharan sculptors articulated the Buddha's supra-human nature. As this study has demonstrated, the motif of the solar disk cannot be reduced to a single function. Rather, it operates within overlapping value systems, narrative, symbolic, and metaphorical. It may be interpreted as a manifestation of the radiance of the liberated Buddha's body, as a symbol of *bodhi*, or as the light of Dharma radiating at the moment of teaching. When considered in the context of the two narrative episodes, the solar disk also signifies the luminosity emitted by the Buddha in *samādhi*, heralding his imminent teaching act. At the same time, it may be read as the materialisation of a literary trope that recurs in the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta* and permeates Buddhist texts that explicitly liken the Buddha to the sun, a connection that the stylistic treatment of the disk in the Matkanai relief, with its straight, radiant rays, reifies. Ultimately, these various interpretations may be understood as different facets of the same prism, each building upon a fundamental conceptual mapping between the Buddha, the Dharma, knowledge, liberation and light. While solar imagery carries an undeniably powerful semantic charge in this regard, the Buddha's mythological association with solar deities further strengthens the foundational logic of this Buddha-sun connection.

Needless to say, the meanings ascribed to the solar disk are shaped, to some extent, by the narrative tradition in which the motif is embedded. The range of these associations may thus be narrowed or redirected depending on the narrative context. Still, the interpretive conundrum that the Matkanai relief constitutes, an equation with multiple unknowns so to say, also serve as a productive heuristic device in this respect. It reveals the interpretive processes that can potentially unfold as the viewer encounters the Buddha behind the solar disk. The motif condenses layered meanings which can trigger a network of metaphorical and symbolic associations. These are channelled and shaped by the viewer's familiarity with literary sources, narrative conventions, theological discourses and mythological frameworks. While not all viewers may have grasped every layer of meaning, it is likely that some did. In this sense, the motif's very ambiguity, its resistance to fixed iconographic categorisation and its detachment from full bodily representation, grants it a polyvalence that is particularly effective for staging the Buddha's presence. Through its tactile immediacy and spatial emplacement within the darkness

[75] A number of relevant examples are catalogued in the DiGA database. These can be retrieved through a "ascetics" keyword search. https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/pool/diga.

of the cave, this visual strategy renders the Buddha's luminous nature both perceptible and tangible.

Funding

The article was conducted under the auspices of: SFB 1475 "Metaphern der Religion. Religiöse Sinnbildung in sprachlichen Prozessen"; supported by the DFG. Funding period: 01/2022 – 12/2025. It also builds on "Digitization of Gandharan Artefacts. A Project for the Preservation and the Study of Gandharan Art from Pakistan" (01UG2048X); supported by the BMBF, funding line eHeritage. Funding period 02/2021–01/2024.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the partner institutions whose support was essential to the successful realisation of the digitization campaigns of the DiGA project, during which the Matakanai relief was documented: KPDOAM, custodian of the collection in Chakdara; the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan of the ISMEO, which provided on-site logistical and scientific guidance; and the Heidelberg University Library, which hosts the digital collection now accessible on the multimedia platform heidICON. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the individuals who made this possible: Abdul Samad (KPDOAM), Luca Maria Olivieri (Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan), Marco Baldi (ISMEO), and Nicole Merkel (Heidelberg University Library). I am grateful to Cristiano Moscatelli for his helpful comments on this article and his thorough photographic documentation of the relief (and many more!). I am also thankful to Călin Şuteu, expert in 3D documentation, for providing the 3D model of this relief and others in the Dir Museum collection. My sincere thanks also go to Max Deeg, Tillo Detige and Yukiyo Kasai, for their invaluable guidance in navigating the Sanskrit, Chinese and Old Uyghur sources and for assisting in the identification of the relevant passages discussed below. I am also grateful to Monika Zin and Luca Maria Olivieri for casually placing new documents before me that have prompted me to reconsider and refine my argument and to Stefan Baums for drawing my attention to Gāndhārī connections to the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga Sutta* discussed below. Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, which have significantly improved this article. Any shortcoming remains my own.

Abbreviations

DiGA	Digitization of Gandharan Artefacts Project: A Project for the Preservation and the Study of Gandharan Art from Pakistan, see https://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/pool/diga (accessed 18 July 2025).
DMC	Dir Museum in Chakdara.
IsMEO	Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
ISMEO	Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente.
KPDOAM	Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
SHT	*Sanskrit-Handschriften aus den Turfanfunden.*
Skt.	Sanskrit.
T.	*Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō.* Ed.: Takakusu and Watanabe (1924–1934).

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 221–235
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The Obligation to Worship God and Theistic Vedānta Philosophy

Gyan Prakash

Abstract: Worship is one of the paths used to accomplish the highest levels of knowledge in Vedānta theism. These levels refer to knowledge of ultimate reality, where the worshipper realises oneness with God. In worship, we regard Him with admiration and as a maximally excellent being. However, in contemporary debate many philosophers examined the grounds for worshiping the God and argued that none of them are compelling enough to be accepted. This paper explores the philosophy of the Indian theist Rāmānuja with respect to the contemporary debate on what justifies the obligation to worship God. This paper contends that the arguments against worshipping God used by contemporary thinkers do not undermine Rāmānuja's arguments for worshipping God.

Keywords: Rāmānuja, worship, obligation, God

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1. Introduction

Tim Bayne and Yujin Nagasawa initiated a debate on the grounds for worshipping God (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 2007). They examined a number of accounts of theists, who believed there were grounds for worshipping God, and asserted that there is no theory successfully proving the obligation for such worship. It is my intention to explore the theory of obligation in order to clarify what grounds, if any, exist for worshipping God. The obligation to worship has already received significant attention, and I believe that a cross-cultural examination can contribute greatly to this debate. This article will discuss the arguments put forward in contemporary debate from the perspective of the Indian theist Rāmānuja. It is my hypothesis that these arguments do not challenge his position on worship.

Rāmānuja was a prominent figure of the 11th century and a key proponent of the Vaiṣṇava tradition. He produced many original works, including the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*; the *Śrībhāṣya*, a commentary on the Vedānta *Brahmasūtra*; and the *Gītābhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* (Ram-Prasad 2023: 238). Swāmī Ādidevānanda writes about his works: "While the Bhāṣya on the Sūtras, known as Śrī-Bhāṣya is highly technical and polemical, and therefore too difficult to enter into except by those who have mastered the Vedāntic way of exegesis, the Gītā-Bhāṣya is much simpler" (Ādidevānanda 2009: 9). Rāmānuja holds that the supreme reality (Brahman) is the personal God (Īśvara) Viṣṇu, who possesses all unsurpassably excellent qualities, and that the *jīva*s (individual selves or souls) and the *jagat* (the material world or matter) constitute God's body. Though the *jīva*s and the *jagat* exist in an inseparable relationship with God – the all-encompassing unity and the source of everything – they remain distinct from Him. Rāmānuja was a Vedāntin, and his philosophy is known as qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita).

Before starting this discussion on the theory of obligation, let us first examine the terms frequently used by Rāmānuja. In his *Gītābhāṣya*, Rāmānuja characterises *bhakti* (devotion) as "single-minded and abiding, which is expressed by the terms knowledge (*vedana*), worship (*upāsana*), meditation (*dhyāna*), etc., which constitutes the means of realising the Supreme Person, who is the Supreme Brahman"[1] (RGBh 3, the chapter's introduction).[2] Through such *bhakti*-oriented actions, an agent worships God. For Rāmānuja, *bhakti* contains a deep feeling of attachment to God (RŚBh 1.1.1). Rāmānuja argues that the steady remembrance of God is called devotion (*bhakti*) (RŚBh 1.1.1). The continuous remembrance of God, such as the ceaseless flow of oil, is meditation (RŚBh 1.1.1). In the

[1] *parabrahmapuruṣottamaprāptyupāyabhūtavedanopāsanadhyānādiśabdavācyatadaikāntikāt yantika-*. The *Gītabhāṣya* is cited in Ādidevānanda's translation.

[2] See Lipner (1984: 112–115); Akepiyapornchai (2022: 91).

Vedārthasaṃgraha, Rāmānuja says that he who meditates on Brahman attains the Supreme Being (Ayyangar 1956: 145).[3] My main concern in this paper is to understand the notion of worship and the obligation to worship God from Rāmānuja's point of view. The paper is an attempt to address the contemporary debate on what justifies the obligation to worship God, from the perspective of the Indian theist Rāmānuja.

2. The delineation of worship

The *Bhagavadgītā*, upon which Rāmānuja comments, runs as follows:

> *śrībhagavān uvāca*
> *mayy āveśya mano ye māṃ nityayuktā upāsate* |
> *śraddhayā parayopetās te me yuktatamā matāḥ* ||
>
> The Lord said:
> Those who, ever integrated with Me and possessed of supreme faith, worship Me, focusing their minds on Me – these are considered by Me the highest among the Yogins
>
> (RGBh 12:2)

Worship, or worshipful meditation (*upāsana*), is one of the paths used to accomplish the highest levels of knowledge in Rāmānuja's philosophy. These levels refer to the knowledge of ultimate reality where a worshipper realises oneness with God. In worship, we regard Him with admiration and as a maximally excellent being. Nevertheless, the admiration of God is not the same as the admiration of another person. When we admire someone, it means we believe that someone is worthy of respect or praise. In the act of worship, different kinds of emotions come into play, which is natural for a worshipper. As Aaron Smuts writes, "the act of expressing this emotion is an act of worship" (Smuts 2012: 222). However, he argues that there is a difference between an act of worship and feelings of worship because an act of worship is merely a set of rituals which cannot be termed as genuine without feelings of worship for the object also being present (Smuts 2012: 222). Campbell Brown and Yujin Nagasawa argue that "one might pretend to worship God by following certain religious rituals, but that does not mean that one actually worships God" (Brown and Nagasawa 2005: 142). Many thinkers argue that worship involves gratitude, praise, reverence, or deep respect (Choo 2022: 81). Such attitudes contribute to a meaningful relationship between the worshipper and God. A meaningful relationship involves sensing intimacy with God, where worshippers are able to express anything they wish before God. According to Rāmānuja, it is believed that this God-centered activity is a quest for ultimate good.

[3] The *Vedārthasaṃgraha* is cited in Ayyangar's translation.

However, Bayne and Nagasawa state that "it seems to be extremely difficult to distinguish veneration from worship" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 302). They observe: "The younger sibling's attitude towards his or her older sibling may have much in common with the devotee's attitude to God […]" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 302). Let us explore the attitude of the younger sibling in the above example. A younger sibling's tendency to admire and seek to emulate is not the same as worship. From Rāmānuja's perspective, worshippers always meditate on the attributes of God. They aspire to these attributes in the same way the younger brother wants to be like his older sibling. At this point, the younger sibling's attitude and the worshipper's attitude ostensibly appear the same, but in the former case it only signifies that the older sibling is being respected. A younger sibling should follow the path of the older in order to achieve or hold the same attributes. But a worshipper wishes to attain knowledge whereby he can realise the ultimate reality. The main goal of worship is to be as one with God. Rāmānuja argues that worship (*upāsana*) is the means for attaining God Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa). He also says: "The vision of the nature of the individual self of the aspirant constitutes an element of that worship" (RGBh 7, the chapter's introduction).[4] But in the sibling analogy, the younger brother does not have this desire. Therefore, worshipping God is not the same as praising the older brother's attributes. An explicit line can be drawn between veneration and worship. In the latter, we are trying to achieve the highest or ultimate knowledge of truth, while in the former, we admire a person for his achievements or his superiority.

Bayne and Nagasawa assert that theists primarily hold two views: firstly, "it is reasonable for us to worship God", and secondly, "it is obligatory for us to worship God" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 303). The latter view is an appropriate way to see God within the Indian theist framework. Worshipfulness is the state of being worshipful, and being worshipful is to feel or express worship. In this paper, however, I am using the word "worshipfulness" as used by Bayne and Nagasawa in their paper, to describe the property that the obligation viewpoint ascribes to God (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 303).

Bayne and Nagasawa argue that most theists accept the obligation thesis. They quote two theistic philosophers, Thomas V. Morris and Richard Swinburne, who assert that it is our duty to worship God and be thankful for his beneficial acts towards creation (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 303). D. Benjamin Crowe raises an essential issue of the obligation thesis by stating that it depends on the individual's various capacities (Crowe 2007: 467). Bayne and Nagasawa assert that "the 'us' in 'necessarily, it is obligatory for us to worship God' was meant to refer to those human beings who have the cognitive and emotional capacities to worship God" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2007: 477). This is significant because

[4] *tadaṅgabhūtam […] prāptuḥ pratyagātmano yāthātmyadarśanam uktam* |

a person who does not have a healthy mental state cannot talk about his religious duty or obligations.

Bayne and Nagasawa adduce correctly that it is important for theists to justify our obligations for worshipping God. I will examine three arguments, namely, the creation-based account, the account of maximal excellence, and the prudential-reasons account, according to Rāmānuja's philosophy of worship. My main contention is that the arguments against the obligation to worship God used by contemporary thinkers do not pose any challenge to Rāmānuja's arguments for worshipping God.

3. The creation-based account

The first account considered by Bayne and Nagasawa is a creation-based obligation theory. This argues that we are obliged to worship God because He created us and we should be grateful for this. However, Bayne and Nagasawa raise four main objections, arguing that this theory does not oblige us to worship God. To rebut this creation-based account, they discuss the possibility of beings who have not been created by God and who, thus, do not have an obligation to worship Him (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 304). In order to respond to this objection raised by Bayne and Nagasawa, it is important to understand the creation theory from the point of view of Rāmānuja's system of philosophy. He makes it clear that God is the primary reason for the existence of this world. In the unmanifest state, God is one and undivided; but God is also manifold because He has countless attributes in the manifest state (Sinha 2015: 677).

God is manifold and creates innumerable objects and souls in this world. According to Rāmānuja, God created this world for His own entertainment (Chakravarti 1974: 189; Sinha 2015: 680). In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, Rāmānuja maintains that the creation and reabsorption of this world are simply God's sport (RSBh 1.4.27). Now let us look at Bayne and Nagasawa's first argument against the creation-based account:

> Even if the theist rules out the possibility of uncreated beings (capable of worshipping God), the objection from uncreated beings has some force as long as the theist allows that such entities are conceivable. The mere fact that we can conceive of beings uncreated by God allows us to ask whether such beings would have obligations to worship God. If the theist answers this question in the affirmative, then they cannot hold that worshipfulness has its *sole* ground in the obligations we owe our creator *qua* creator.
>
> (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 304)

They argue that beings not created by God have no obligation to worship God (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 304). However, they mention that in cases where the theist denies this possibility, one has to conceive of uncreated beings. Rāmānuja's argument for uncreated beings is similar to Bayne and Nagasawa's: "The theist might suggest that God's role as the ultimate cause of all should be understood not just in terms of everything that happens to exist, but in terms of everything that *could* exist. On this view of things, God is the ground of all *possible* being" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 304). Rāmānuja argues that only God is uncreated, and that everything else is created by God. However, the concept of "creation" in Rāmānuja is thoroughly different than the one Nagasawa refers to, since Nagasawa's creation is a unique event, whereas Rāmānuja's creation is repeated in a never-ending cycle. He adduces that whatsoever is seen or heard in this world, both inside and outside, God abides everywhere (RŚBh 1.1.12).

Bayne and Nagasawa further contend that in the creation-based account, we are grateful to God because he created us; but what if the act of creation does not benefit a person? They argue that "an act can benefit someone only if it leaves them better off than they were, or at least, better off than they would have been had one not acted. Since we would not have been had God not created us, our creation cannot benefit us" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 305). Here, they make a comparison between a world in which we exist and a world in which we were never created and argue that the act of creation cannot benefit us. Indian theists have a different way of comprehending this issue. In response to Bayne and Nagasawa's argument, I can say with some certainty that Rāmānuja, and all Indian theists for that matter, do not talk about a world in which we have never been created. There is also a logical constraint here for Rāmānuja, because after accepting a world in which we do not exist, it will be challenging to argue coherently for the chain of birth and rebirth. For Rāmānuja, life is part of an endless cycle of birth and rebirth because of nescience. He then goes on to say that "the beings found in *saṃsāra* are in the same condition – for they are essentially devoid of purity since they reach their true nature only later on, when through Yoga knowledge has arisen in them" (RŚBh 1.1.1; Thibaut 1904: 90).[5] Here, it is clear that in the world in which we have been created (*saṃsāra*), we are considered as impure. Now let us imagine a world where we exist in a pure state. The question arises that if we are impure, then how did we become so? A pure soul cannot be transformed in to an impure soul. Indian theists do not talk about a world in which we have never been created. They give importance to the present world, its problems and their solutions. For Rāmānuja, therefore, the question of benefiting from creation does not arise. Bayne and Nagasawa's argument is based on procreation:

[5] Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* is cited in Thibaut's translation.

> Suppose that someone really believed that bringing a person into existence is – or at least can be – of benefit to the person created. Such a person would have reason to attempt to bring into existence as many people as possible, either through their own procreative powers or by encouraging others to procreate. Most of us would regard such a strategy of procreative maximization as odd if not downright perverse
>
> (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 305)

Bayne and Nagasawa clearly consider this strategy to be anomalous; therefore, the creation-based theory does not validate worshipping God. This argument is based on the premise that we benefit from being created in the world. In Rāmānuja philosophy, since the question of benefiting from the act of creation does not arise, an argument based on the procreative theory does not reject the obligation to worship God.

Bayne and Nagasawa assert that not everyone benefits from being brought into existence. For instance, many people have cursed the day of their birth, coming into this world with much pain and anguish. Bayne and Nagasawa argue that as God is responsible for an individual being born into an utterly miserable life, that person has no obligation to worship God (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 305). Indian theists debate the theory of action where they argue that individuals must face the consequences of their last actions. In a later section I will go into more detail on the theory of action. Here, it is significant to note that the inequality of creation[6] is based on the last actions of the individual. Those who have performed good deeds reap their just rewards or, put another way, will always remain in a position of benefit, while those who have performed bad deeds will not be reborn into auspicious circumstances. Therefore, an individual's present life is dependent on his last actions performed during his previous life. However, if we accept that an individual life is part of the cyclical chain of birth and rebirth, how can one account for the starting point of this chain, where good or bad actions cannot be held responsible for the creation of inequality. In response to this objection, Rāmānuja argues that there is no starting point in creation. In other words, the cycle of creation is beginningless.[7] Rāmānuja insists that it is necessary to accept that the creation of inequality is due to the actions performed by the being in a previous lifetime. It is significant to mention here that Rāmānuja argued that the soul has the independence and freedom to choose between good and evil actions. Otherwise, souls would be rewarded for what they have earned from their deeds rather than for what they have not earned (RŚBh 2.1.35). In this case, one can argue, as Bayne and Nagasawa do, that not

[6] This means that we are not created equally, or that we have not received the same life circumstances.

[7] Indian theists argue that "beginningless" means that there is no starting point to the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

everyone benefits from being brought into existence. In Rāmānuja's elucidation on creation, all beings are held to be responsible for their existence, and this is why Bayne and Nagasawa's argument presents no threat to Rāmānuja's argument concerning the obligation to worship God.

Lastly, they maintain that the creation-based account runs the risk of domesticating worship: "If our dependence on God gives us an obligation to worship God, it ought to follow that our dependence on our parents, our friends, and family, and even our society will generate obligations to worship these individuals" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 306). According to Rāmānuja, our dependence on God is not the same as being dependent on our parents, friends, and family. Bayne and Nagasawa correctly observe that theists can emphasise "the uniqueness thesis", which maintains that worship has "no real parallel in our relations with created things" (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 306). In the same vein, Rāmānuja also asserts that God is the ultimate ground of our existence (RŚBh 1.1.1). Therefore, dependence on God is significantly different from dependence on other beings. Further, Bayne and Nagasawa declare that highlighting the distinction between different forms of dependence does not justify an obligation to worship God. They argue that in this case worship has been reduced to thankfulness or gratitude. Rāmānuja would have responded to this objection by saying that this sense of gratitude or thankfulness occurs when an individual has received support on a few occasions. But what if an individual is totally dependent on someone else, even for the duration of his lifetime?[8] As such, the creation-based theory provides strong grounds for worshipping God.

4. The maximal-excellence account

The account of maximal excellence proposes that worship is the acknowledgment of the supreme degree of intrinsic excellence of God (Adams 1999: 14; Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 307). In their paper, Bayne and Nagasawa argue that properties, such as perfect goodness, knowledge, power, and presence, which constitute the maximal excellence of God, are not sufficient grounds to worship God (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 307). If we do accept these properties are a sufficient basis for worship, then we should also worship a person who is more knowledgeable, more powerful, and more aware than us. "The idea that moral perfection obligates worship is less objectionable, but not unproblematic. Most of us recognise various other persons as our moral superiors, yet few of us suppose that we have *obligations* to worship such persons" (Bayne and

[8] RŚBh 2.1.33: "The motive which prompts Brahman – all whose wishes are fulfilled and who is perfect in himself – to the creation of a world comprising all kinds of sentient and non-sentient beings dependent on his volition, is nothing else but sport, play" (Thibaut 1904: 477). *avāptasamastakāmasya paripūrṇasya svasaṅkalpavikāryavividhavicitracidacinmiśraja gatsarge līlaiva kevalā prayojanam* | (*Śrībhāṣya* 1990: 100).

Nagasawa 2006: 307). Responding to this objection, Jeremy Gwiazda argues in favour of the threshold obligation, which is "an obligation that arises only when a property is possessed beyond a certain degree" (Gwiazda 2011: 522). But God is beyond the threshold obligation. Gwiazda does not reject Bayne and Nagasawa's account, but instead discusses the existence of the threshold obligation where one is obliged to perform an action in one situation, but not in other contexts. For instance, take the example of a child who refuses to eat peas at lunchtime but later demands food. The parent is not obliged to feed the child until he has passed a certain degree of hunger. Here, Gwiazda argues that there is no obligation to feed someone if that person is not hungry (Gwiazda 2011: 522). John Danaher, who opposes Gwiazda's idea that there is a threshold obligation to worship God, suggests that parents are obliged to feed their child once he has passed the hunger threshold because they already have pre-existing general obligations to look after the child (Danaher 2012: 474). Danaher argues that a general obligation can crystallise into a concrete obligation after one crosses a certain threshold (Danaher 2012: 475). He uses the instance of assisting a wounded child in support of the idea of a general obligation. A person passing by who sees a child whose leg is bleeding profusely is obliged to help the child. The person has an obligation to assist the child because there is a standing general obligation to help others, which is morally praiseworthy and can be transformed into a perfect obligation within a particular context (Danaher 2012: 474). In the case of the debate on worship, he argues that Gwiazda's threshold obligation argument only works if there is a general or imperfect obligation[9] involved, since there is no pre-existing agreement in the case of worship. Therefore, Gwiazda's argument fails to justify the account of maximal excellence.

Hugh Burling advances the respect theory that resolves Danaher's objection to Gwiazda's threshold argument. He argues that we have a general or imperfect obligation that is then transformed into a perfect obligation to worship God (Burling 2019: 498). In the context of worship, an imperfect obligation does not mean that one needs to worship normal creatures rather than respect them. Therefore, a person possessing more knowledge and excellence than another should not be worshipped but, rather, respected. But when we encounter God, this imperfect obligation generates a perfect obligation to worship (Burling 2019: 498).

The argument for respect as an imperfect obligation is plausible from Rāmānuja's perspective. From his point of view, a general or imperfect obligation can

[9] Danaher argues that the distinction between imperfect and perfect obligation captures the idea that some obligations allow for latitude with respect to the actions that fulfil them whereas other do not. The former would be imperfect obligations and the latter would be perfect obligations (Danaher 2012: 475).

be transformed into a perfect obligation. For instance, suppose there are two individuals, x and y, who are roommates in a university hostel. One night x is studying and y is sleeping. Unexpectedly, y starts crying and pleading for help in his sleep. He is dreaming about a person who is trying to kill him and repeatedly cries out for mercy. Since x is awake, he knows that y's pain is due to the fact that y does not have the capacity to understand his dream is not reality, due to an absence of knowledge. In this example, x has more knowledge and more awareness than y; therefore, there is an obligation for y to respect x because of this. Respecting others is called a general or imperfect obligation, as Burling has argued. But when we find someone more knowledgeable and more aware than us, we should show respect for the person. For Indian theists who believe, as I have discussed above, that our lives are full of pain that is not going to end during this lifetime, but will continue into the afterlife, the main cause of this pain is our ignorance. God is a perfect being and the source of all knowledge.[10] Rāmānuja argues that here knowledge refers to everything through which an individual can know, comprehend, or perceive the perfect, pure, highest reality God (RŚBh 1.1.1).

One might wonder why God is the only object of worship. Rāmānuja argues that all beings in the world are in the same condition: "They are all implicated in Nescience, and stand within the sphere of the *saṃsāra*; knowledge arises in them only later on, and they are thus of no use in meditation" (RŚBh 1.1.1; Thibaut 1904: 90). Everything in the world is a part of God but this does not mean that any being is worthy of becoming an object of worship. God is the only one who can be worshipped. As Crowe argues, "a good person and God are both 'good', but God's goodness is incommensurably greater to such an extent that we are no longer talking about the same property" (Crowe 2007: 473). Gwiazda correctly asserts that this incommensurable superiority does not mean that God's properties differ from the properties of lesser beings; rather, it shows that God is beyond such things (Gwiazda 2011: 523). As Thibaut explains

[10] Concerning God as an excellent being, Rāmānuja refers to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*: "The whole creation of beings is taken out of a small part of his power. Assuming at will whatever form he desires, he bestows benefits on the whole world affected by him. Glory, strength, dominion, wisdom, energy, power, and other attributes are collected in him, Supreme of the supreme in whom no troubles abide, ruler over high and low, lord in collective and distributive form, non-manifest and manifest, universal Lord, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful, highest Lord" (RŚBh 1.1.1; Thibaut 1904: 86).

[...] svaśaktileśād dhṛtabhūtasargaḥ |
icchāgṛhītābhimatorudehaḥ saṃsādhitāśeṣajagaddhito 'sau || *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 6.5.84 ||
tejobalaiśvaryamahāvabodhasuvīryaśaktyādiguṇaikarāśiḥ |
paraḥ parāṇāṃ sakalā na yatra kleśādayaḥ santi parāvareśe || *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 6.5.85 ||
sa īśvaro vyaṣṭisamaṣṭirūpo 'vyaktasvarūpaḥ prakaṭasvarūpaḥ |
sarveśvaraḥ sarvadṛk sarvavettā samastaśaktiḥ parameśvarākhyaḥ || *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 6.5.86 ||
(*Śrībhāṣya* 1985: 139)

Rāmānuja's view, "in meditations on Brahman, His qualities are the chief matter of meditation, just as these qualities are the principal point in Brahman reached by the devotee" (Thibaut 1904: 82; see RŚBh 1.1.1). Therefore, we worship God because he manifests intrinsic excellence to the supreme degree. As such, God is the only one who qualifies as the object of meditation because he is perfect and the source of all knowledge. The soul in all its states is imperfect and to comprehend ultimate reality, one has to free oneself from imperfections (Varadachari 1956: 65). This is not possible without worshipping a perfect being (RŚBh 3.2.38). Rāmānuja writes: "The objects of meditation in all the *vidyā*s which refer to the highest Brahman, are Brahman viewed as having qualities, and the fruit of all those meditations" (RŚBh 1.1.1; Thibaut 1904: 99).[11] Rāmānuja argues for the incommensurable superiority of God.

Bayne and Nagasawa next debate on the existence of multiple maximally excellent beings (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 308). They contend that if worshipfulness changes one's possession of "M-properties", where M-properties are those that contribute to God's maximal excellence, then we would have an obligation to worship multiple beings. Again, suppose there were two perfect beings, namely God and God*, then surely both would have obligations to worship each other (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 308). Regarding this argument, Rāmānuja insists that achieving God's M-properties is possible. As I have discussed earlier, for Rāmānuja, all beings have the potential to achieve the God-like state, but the question that remains is what happens after acquiring M-properties. As far as Rāmānuja is concerned, after achieving them a person becomes the body of God. Rāmānuja argues that all souls and matter are the body of God, but due to false knowledge, we perceive the world differently (Bharadwaj 1958: 109). After achieving the ultimate state of reality, we will be able to realise the true nature of everything and will become the body of God. Therefore, in Bayne and Nagasawa's example, God and God* cannot be called two separate beings, but rather, there is only a single being called God. What Bayne and Nagasawa view as a problem does not pose any challenge to Rāmānuja's idea of worship.

5. The prudential-reasons account

A third approach to worshipfulness examines prudential reasons to justify our obligation to worship God. Bayne and Nagasawa point out that some theists uphold the view that not worshipping God is a sin and that sin is punishable by death. However, they also note that this has little philosophical appeal because it leaves unanswered the connection between worship and our wellbeing. They argue that this account does not justify God punishing us for failing to worship Him. To understand the problem from an Indian perspective, it is important

[11] *paravidyāsu sarvāsu saguṇam eva brahma upāsyam | phalaṃ ca ekarūpam eva |* (*Śrībhāṣya* 1985: 161).

to shed light on the theory of *karma*, or action, which argues that one has to face the consequences of one's last actions. These consequences will have to be faced both during present and future lifetimes (Adams 1999: 225). It is God who maintains the rules of *karma*, or action, awarding or punishing the sentient being based on his past actions. As God is necessarily antagonistic to all types of evil, one might well wonder how our world began to experience suffering during the first cycle of creation. However, as there is no starting point for the cycle of creation, one cannot debate such an issue (Gupta 1967: 72). So, God created the world, as well as its progress, based on the merits and demerits of individual souls. If any individual wishes to remove himself from this endless cycle of birth and rebirth, then he is obliged to worship God. Refusing to worship God cannot be considered as a bad deed; therefore, not worshipping God is not a sin or punishable act. Indian theists argue that worshipping God is essential because He is the only maximally excellent being and source of true knowledge (Kumarappa 1934: 184).

For Rāmānuja, not worshipping God is not a punishable act but it may perpetuate the endless cycle of pain and pleasure. Rāmānuja holds that the cessation of the bondage "which consists in the experience of pleasure and pain caused by the connection of souls with bodies of various kind" "is to be obtained only through the grace of the highest Self pleased by the devout meditation of the worshipper" (*bhaktirūpāpannopāsanaprītaparamapuruṣaprasādalabhyā*) (RŚBh 1.1.1 in *Śrībhāṣya* 1985: 249; Thibaut 1904: 145). However, the main cause of this pain and pleasure is our past actions and inclinations. We all desire happiness, but happiness is only possible if there is an absence of pain, and the state of happiness without pain is achievable only through worshipping God.

Our pain is caused by our past actions and cannot be considered as punishment for not worshipping God; worshipping God should not be driven by the fear of punishment or by the prospect of rewards. Let us take a look at Bayne and Nagasawa's analogy of Sarah in order to understand the prudential-reasons account. Suppose I have offended Sarah and I feel guilty about it. I know that I will feel better if I apologise to her. However, "my apology should be motivated by my desire to repair my relationship with Sarah, not by my desire to feel better about myself". In a similar way, Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that worshipping God should not be driven by the prospect of prudential rewards (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006: 309).

Rāmānuja would have seen the example of Sarah in a different way. The relationship between God and self cannot be compared with the relationship between me and my friend Sarah. For Rāmānuja, humans are an accessory – or modes – of God. Souls and matter constitute the body of God (Sinha 2015: 664). Due to ignorance, we falsely identify the self with the body (Sinha 2015:

665). Similarly, if we apply the Sarah analogy to God and the worshipper, it will appear absurd from Rāmānuja's point of view since he argues that the worshipper is not different from God. It seems absurd that I can offend myself. This analogy appears in Rāmānuja's view of philosophy along the lines that even though I have offended myself, the cause of this feeling is my ignorance and it can be resolved only by banishing this ignorance. Therefore, the act of worship is not motivated by the fact that not worshipping God is a punishable act.

For Rāmānuja, an absence of worship is the same as living one's life in ignorance. The classic illustration is the snake and rope analogy. Here, I falsely identify a piece of rope as a snake in the darkness. I realise my foolishness when I bring more light and thus clearly see I have made a mistake. Bringing more light, more clarity, to illuminate reality can be seen as the process of worship, and identifying the rope as a rope removes all false information.

6. Conclusion

Rāmānuja argues that the essential nature of God is knowledge. The existence of an individual self is based on nescience, and when a person destroys ignorance, he ceases to see existence in terms of plurality. One might wonder how it is possible that we can know the nature of God. One cannot understand or know the nature of God through the perception *pramāṇa*. Since He is not an object of perception, but can only be known through scripture. Indian theists always argue that one should worship God's essential nature because this is the only way to achieve the final goal in life. Therefore, our obligation to worship God is not groundless, and based on such grounds, we are obliged to worship God. In this paper, I have argued that Bayne and Nagasawa's arguments against the obligation to worship God do not undermine Rāmānuja's ideas concerning our obligation to worship Him. This article adduces that there is nothing incoherent in arguing for the obligation to worship God from Rāmānuja's point of view.

Abbreviations

RŚBh Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya*, ed.: *Śrībhāṣya* (1985–1991); trans.: Thibaut (1904).

RGBh Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*, ed. and trans.: Ādidevānanda (2009).

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 237–272
https://doi.org/10.60018/AcAsVa.ptir8584

The Use of Blue in the Ajanta Paintings

Mercedes Tortorici

Abstract: Blue pigments, scarcer and more expensive than many other colours in antiquity, have played an important role in global art history. In this research, I examine how the colour blue, confirmed to be lapis lazuli, was used in the wall paintings of the Buddhist caves at Ajanta. Blue is completely absent in the paintings of the 1st century BCE. Among the paintings of the 5th century CE, it was sparingly used for small details in the centrally located caves (Caves XVI and XVII), while applied in larger amounts in the peripheral caves of Ajanta (Caves I, II and XXVI). In order to explain the sudden appearance of lapis lazuli in the Ajanta paintings, historical aspects, such as trade routes and political change, are also considered in this paper.

Keywords: Ajanta paintings, Lapis lazuli, Lazurite, Natural ultramarine, Indigo, Indian art, Trade

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Introduction

Blue pigments, historically rare and more expensive than other colours, have played an important role in global art history. In this paper, I examine how the colour blue – specifically derived from lapis lazuli – was used in paintings of the Ajanta cave complex, located in today's Maharashtra, India. The site consists of 30 Buddhist caves cut into a sheer, horseshoe-shaped cliff (**Fig. 1**). The caves fall into two distinct phases: the earliest caves, numbered IX–XIII, date to the 1st century BCE; while the remainder belongs to the second phase, dated to the latter half of the 5th century,[1] the relative chronology of which will be discussed below. The ornamentation of all the caves, including both sculptures and paintings, was undertaken contemporaneously with their construction (e.g. Schlingloff 2000: 15, 74).

Fig. 1. Panoramic view of Ajanta. Photograph © Mercedes Tortorici.

Interestingly, the paintings in the earliest caves reveal no evidence of blue pigment use. Even later additions to Caves IX and X, primarily depictions of Buddha figures dated to the 5th century, show no trace of any intensive blue. In contrast, among the other caves from the 5th century that do employ blue pigment, distinct differences in its application can be observed. While some caves use blue sparingly for small details, others incorporate it more extensively, applying it to larger surfaces, such as whole backgrounds or to adorn textiles and ornamental motifs.

The blue from lapis lazuli

The pigment used for blue in the Ajanta murals has been confirmed to be lapis lazuli, according to modern tests carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India and experts from Italy and Japan.[2] Singh is certain that every instance

[1] All dates are CE unless otherwise mentioned.

[2] Conservators from the *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* (Rome, Italy), in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India, conducted tests for lapis lazuli in Cave XVII and published their findings in 2008 (Artioli et al. 2008: 4–5, 8, fig. 6). Subsequently, the Indo-Japanese

of blue at Ajanta is lapis lazuli, regardless of its intensity, including the light and the greyish hues (Manager Rajdeo Singh, personal communication, 8 February 2023). He also confirmed that samples from several caves were collected and analysed using Raman spectroscopy, as well as examined under a stereomicroscope (Manager Rajdeo Singh, personal communication, 21 May 2025).

The terminology used to describe the blue from lapis lazuli in paintings presents a challenge. The blue pigment extracted from the lapis lazuli stone is usually termed ultramarine. But since this term is often confused with the synthetic ultramarine pigment developed in the 19th century, many scholars have chosen to refer to the natural pigment extracted from the stone not as "ultramarine" but simply as lapis lazuli. I consider it important to distinguish between ground lapis lazuli and natural ultramarine, i.e. extracted lazurite (see below). I will use the term "natural ultramarine" when referring to extracted lazurite, and "lapis lazuli pigment" or simply "lapis lazuli" in cases where the distinction is uncertain.

Lapis lazuli as a precious stone was highly valued in many ancient cultures, the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations being the earliest prolific consumers. In ancient times, the Sar-e-Sang mines in Badakhshan (modern-day Afghanistan) were the sole known source of this stone,[3] which was exported to distant parts of Eurasia from prehistoric times onwards. The trade of lapis lazuli in the Mediterranean is mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, dated to the 1st century (Schoff 1912: 38, sec. 39). Lapis lazuli beads have also been discovered in various regions of South Asia, dating to periods far earlier than Ajanta's earliest phase (Lahiri 1992: 274, 335, 355). The term *rājāvarta*, derived from the Persian *lājvard*, is used to refer to lapis lazuli in many Sanskrit scientific texts and *kāvya* literature (Buddruss 1980). Given the prominence of lapis lazuli in many ancient cultures, it raises the question of why it was rarely used as a pigment in paintings. The reason for this may be that the natural ultramarine pigment had not yet been employed: the simple grinding of the lapis lazuli stone, unless it is of very high quality, produces a grey-blue colour rather than the intense sought-after blue (Plesters 1966: 63).

Lapis lazuli rock is composed of various minerals, such as calcite, iron pyrite, lazurite, mica and pyroxene, with lazurite being the single component responsible for its distinctive blue colour. To achieve the characteristic deep, vibrant blue, lazurite must be meticulously extracted from the rock. This extraction process is both time-consuming and intricate, which accounts for the pigment's high value

Project for the Conservation and Scientific Investigation of the Paintings of Ajanta focused on Caves II and IX, identifying the presence of lapis lazuli in Cave II (Rana and Yamauchi 2015). I am not aware of tests carried out for other caves.

[3] Today, there are other lapis lazuli mines that were not known in ancient times, such as those in Chile.

and expense in ancient times. The precise time and place where this technique was developed remain uncertain. There are no literary sources providing clear instructions for the extraction of lazurite prior to the 14th century (Plesters 1966: 63). In the Mediterranean world, extensive records detail the production of other pigments, such as Egyptian blue, a cuprorivaite derivative. This suggests that ultramarine may have been primarily imported. Indeed, the term "ultramarine", derived from the Latin *ultramarinus* (meaning "beyond the sea" or "overseas") originally referred to imported commodities (Plesters 1966: 62). Moti Chandra supports a similar view for the Indian subcontinent, noting that Sanskrit literature contains no references to the manufacture of natural ultramarine pigment (Chandra 1919: 82). Lapis lazuli is mentioned as a pigment for painting in several sources, including the Buddhist Sanskrit Gilgit Manuscript from the 5th to the 6th centuries (Buddruss 1980: 9–10), the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* from the 6th to 7th centuries,[4] and the Buddhist Sanskrit-Tibetan *Mahāvyutpatti* from the 8th century (Buddruss 1980: 11). In the context of pigments and paintings, the same term used for lapis lazuli – *rājāvarta* – was employed.

It is also important to address the methods employed to identify the lapis lazuli or the natural ultramarine pigment. Prior to the 1970s, the identification of lapis lazuli as a pigment relied on detecting certain metals (copper, cobalt, iron, aluminium) or elements (silicon or sulphur). However, as these are also commonly found in materials such as clay, this approach often led to false conclusions regarding the presence of lapis lazuli. Modern technologies, such as Raman spectroscopy, allow for the precise identification of the pigment (Delamare 2013: 104). In the tests conducted on the paintings and sculptures considered for this article, it is not explicitly stated whether the material used is simply ground lapis lazuli or pure lazurite, except for the tests carried out in the Kizil caves in Central Asian Kucha (see below).

A history of lapis lazuli in paintings

The earliest known use of lapis lazuli in painting is found in Mycenaean frescoes from Gla, Greece (ca. 13th century BCE), where the pigment was discovered in a purple hue (Brysbaert 2006). Although less common than other blue pigments, lapis lazuli also appears in other Greek cultural artifacts, such as a 5th-century BCE marble vase from Athens depicting a charioteer wearing a dark blue garment (Brecoulaki 2014: 20). In Roman wall paintings from Pompeii, destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79, modern testing has revealed the presence of lapis lazuli in white samples from the frame of a fresco depicting a hen, currently housed at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (Aliatis et al. 2011: 1541). A greyish-blue pigment from a relief in Hadda

[4] *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa III,* Adhyāya 40, 25 (Mukherji 2001: 137).

(Tapa-i-Kafariha Monastery, Afghanistan), dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries, also indicates the presence of lapis lazuli. The pigment here was mixed with a white material, likely to produce a pale blue colour (Pannuzi et al. 2019: 55). Italian researchers found lapis lazuli on stucco architectural decorations of Gandharan art. They confirmed that lapis lazuli was exclusively used for blue pigments in these objects (Lluveras-Tenorio et al. 2022: 499). These samples, collected from the Swat Valley in present-day Pakistan, date to between the 2nd and 4th centuries. Tests for lapis lazuli were also made on fragments of paintings with a very intense blue found at Kara Tepe, in today's Uzbekistan (Birstein 1982: 107–108). They are dated to the 4th century.

However, in most of these examples, the deep, lustrous blue typically associated with natural ultramarine is not evident, suggesting that the lazurite extraction process may not have been employed. It is plausible that, in the cases of Gla, Pompeii and Hadda, the entire lapis lazuli stone was ground and then mixed with other pigments. There are further examples that cannot be overlooked, as they are frequently cited in literature about lapis lazuli in painting. However, to my knowledge, these lack modern testing to confirm its presence. Such examples include fragments of wall paintings or objects from Mansur Depe[5] (Turkmenistan) and Fayaz Tepe[6] (Uzbekistan), as well as examples from Sri Lanka.[7]

[5] Lapierre (1990) cites Mansur Depe as an example of the earliest use of natural ultramarine in wall paintings. This site has been dated by Koshelenko et al. (1989: 49) to between the 2nd century BCE and the 3rd century. According to descriptions by Russian experts, the paintings include blue pigments (Berlin et al. 1968: 49). However, to my knowledge, no modern testing has been conducted to confirm whether the pigment is natural ultramarine. The first paintings at Mansur Depe were created shortly after the building's construction, while later layers were added following multiple fires (Koshelenko 1989: 47). Consequently, it is important to consider the possibility that the blue layers could be later additions.
Regarding the use of blue pigments at Nisa, located just a few kilometres from Mansur Depe, Lippolis notes that preliminary analyses conducted in the early 2000s on fragments of clay sculptures identified the light blue pigment as Egyptian blue. However, a systematic survey of the blue fragments from clay sculptures or architectural elements has not yet been carried out. Thus, the use of lapis lazuli at Nisa cannot be entirely ruled out (Carlo Lippolis, personal communication, 23 December 2024). Egyptian blue, an artificial pigment made by combining quartz, sand, and copper, was widely known and used not only in ancient Egypt but also extensively throughout the Roman world.

[6] Fragments of wall paintings from Fayaz Tepe also exhibit an intense, shiny blue, suggestive of natural ultramarine. To date and to my knowledge, no tests have been conducted to date to confirm this. Fayaz Tepe was dated to the 1st–2nd centuries CE by Al'baum (for a detailed discussion of the chronology and a comprehensive description of the murals, see Lo Muzio 2008), while Lo Muzio has proposed a later chronology, suggesting the 4th century as a *terminus post quem* (Lo Muzio 2008: 201). It therefore remains possible that the paintings were added at a later stage.

[7] In Sri Lanka, lapis lazuli is believed to have been used in the painted slabs of the Jetavana Stupa, which dates to the early 4th century (Ratnayake 1993: 84). However, to my knowledge, no chemical tests have been conducted to confirm this.

The Bingling Caves, dated based on inscriptions to the Western Qin Period in the early 5th century, also feature lapis lazuli in their paintings (Li 2005: 46). Nevertheless, I cannot exclude the possibility that certain parts of the original mural were repainted at a later time or that the paintings featuring blue correspond to a later period.

The 5th century paintings at Ajanta provide some of the earliest well preserved and unequivocal examples of lapis lazuli used in wall art. Given the intensity of the colour in most cases, I believe the pigment to be natural ultramarine, rather than simply ground lapis lazuli. Contemporary with Ajanta, the paintings in the Bagh Caves, located in Madhya Pradesh, India, also exhibit a similar intense blue, though this has not yet been tested using modern technologies.

Sculptures from Tepe Narenj painted in blue, dated between the 5th and early 7th centuries, were analysed by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan directed by Anna Filigenzi. The results of chemical analyses confirmed the use of lapis lazuli as a pigment (Giulia Forgione, personal communication, 30 December 2024).

Later than the Ajanta paintings are the wall paintings at Bamiyan (Afghanistan) and Kucha (Xinjiang, China), which are also notable examples of the use of lapis lazuli blue. The Kucha paintings, like those at Ajanta, display two distinct phases: an earlier phase without blue pigment and a later phase, beginning in the 6th century, characterised by the extensive use of lapis lazuli blue (Konczak-Nagel forthcoming). Among the sites discussed, the Kizil Caves represent the only confirmed instance where natural ultramarine pigment, rather than merely ground lapis lazuli, was used. This conclusion is supported by the archaeological discovery of a block of ultramarine pigment at the site (Zhou et al. 2019).[8]

Other blue pigments: indigo and azurite

The exclusive use of lapis lazuli for blue in the Ajanta paintings raises another question: why is indigo, the most prominently used blue pigment in India, absent from the aforementioned artworks?

Despite India being a major exporter of indigo, at least as a dye,[9] historical Indian art texts, such as the *Śilparatna*, specifically describe indigo as unsuitable for paintings on a lime plastered wall (Giuliano 2013: 100). As an organic pigment, indigo presents additional challenges for detection compared to mineral-based pigments. While traces of an organic blue, such as indigo, might exist in certain

8 I thank Ines Konczak-Nagel for this reference.

9 A dye is meant to be dissolved in water, in which the textiles or other objects are soaked to gain the colour.

green and black mixtures in the Ajanta paintings (Giovanili et al. 2012: 36), its presence remains uncertain and requires further study.

Indigo can be extracted from several different plant species in the genus *Indigofera* that grow all over the world. After a very complicated extraction process, the dried tincture could either be used as a dye or a pigment. Historically, one of the most famous indigo-bearing plants was the *Indigofera tinctoria* cultivated in India, from which the colour indigo took its name: the Greek *indikon* and the Latin *indicum*, meaning "coming from India". Indian indigo was mainly used as a dye for textiles. Indian blue-dyed textiles where even exported from India to the Roman world (Wild 2006: 183; Sidebotham 2011: 243–244).

The oldest find of indigo as a pigment is from Mycenaean Greek painted plaster from the Late Bronze Age (Brysbaert and Vandenabeele 2004: 691). The ivories of Begram, dated to circa 1st century, were painted with indigo (Passmore 2012: 44). Other early samples of this pigment were found on some antique shields from Dura Europos dated to the 3rd century (Gunnison et al. 2020: 140), in the Mayan frescoes at Bonampak in Mexico also dated to the 3rd century (Eastaugh et al. 2004: 195),[10] and in the mural paintings of the Xinjiang region in the P.R. of China from the 6th century (Riederer 1977: 375ff). Since the different samples of indigo derive from different *indigofera* plants, it is very difficult to trace a linear history of indigo production and use, and make conclusions about possible intercultural relations which may have affected the industry. For example, even though contemporaneous, it is evident that the Mayan indigo found in Mexico had absolutely nothing to do with the pigment used in Dura Europos.

As an organic pigment, indigo has a low resistance to light (Schweppe 1997: 88) and loses its intensity when exposed to UV radiation (see for instance, Ogura et al. 2019: 9). Perhaps for this reason, samples of paintings from the Kizil Caves 198–199 (*Teufelshöhle*) analysed by Riederer (1977: 375) showed that indigo results in a grey-blue colour.[11]

Nevertheless, in India, indigo use as a pigment seems to lack any precedent in wall painting until the 18th century (Sharma and Singh 2021). Azurite, a mineral often found in many areas of the Indian subcontinent, is also absent from the Ajanta paintings (Giuliano 2013: 100). As mentioned earlier, the only blue pigment used at Ajanta is lapis lazuli.

[10] This blue pigment, the so-called "Mayan blue" is not pure indigo, but an artificial combination of indigo (from *Indigofera suffruticosa*) and palygorskite (attapulgite), which makes the pigment very resistant to wear and fading.

[11] Riederer (1977: 388) also notes that indigo samples were always found mixed with ultramarine blue.

Blue in the visual language of Ajanta

From a visual language perspective, it seems that specific conventions governed the use of blue in the Ajanta caves. Sometimes, this colour was used symbolically to emphasise the sacredness of significant figures, such as in nimbi (**Fig. 2**), the backgrounds of certain deities and the Buddha's hair in some sculptures (**Fig. 3**). With the same intention to enhance, blue was applied in ornaments framing important scenes or figures (**Fig. 4**).

Blue is also used in a more a naturalistic way to depict textiles (**Fig. 5**). As mentioned before, India was the major exporter of indigo as a dye, and Indian blue-dyed textiles reproducing ornamental motifs depicted at Ajanta were found at the Roman port of Berenike, on the Red Sea in Egypt (Wild 2006: 183; Sidebotham 2011: 243–244). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that blue textiles, dyed with indigo, were worn by the population in India. In the paintings at Ajanta, however, these indigo-dyed textiles are not depicted using indigo itself – due to its unsuitability as a pigment – but are instead represented with lapis lazuli.

It is noteworthy that the presence of blue attire in Ajanta paintings does not necessarily indicate social distinctions; it can be observed both among royalty and beggars. Ornaments, beads of necklaces, armbands and girdles are very often blue (**Fig. 6**). Blue is also associated with musical instruments, such as cymbals and flutes (**Fig. 7a, b**). In addition, its use to depict metal weapons, like swords (**Fig. 8**), was a convention that was passed on to Central Asian Kucha.

The colour blue is used either in the details, like a single blue bean in the centre of a necklace (**Fig. 6**), or a delicate blue flower in the ornamental composition of a ceiling (**Fig. 9**); or on larger surfaces, like a celestial background (**Fig. 10**) or an architectural element of a depicted scene (**Fig. 11**).

In short, the colour blue was usually used either with a symbolic or a naturalistic intention. In only two rare cases, it was used to achieve a certain effect in the visual composition, like rhythm or balance. That can be seen in the *Mahāprātihārya* (Schlingloff No. 91)[12] mural in Cave XVI, which depicts the arrival and departure of King Prasenajit's entourage, and features blue on swords, musical instruments and the eyelids of some of the figures. The blue details create a visual rhythm that suggests the musical rhythm of a performance (**Fig. 7a**). It is also interesting to note that blue is used in another musical performance depicted on a side wall of Cave I (Tortorici 2022) to enhance the visual rhythm and, at the same time, balance the visual composition (**Fig. 12**).

[12] For the narrative paintings, I am following the identifications in Schlingloff (2000).

Fig. 2. Ajanta Cave XXVI, triforium, left. Buddhas' nimbi. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Ajanta: cave by cave visual analyses[13]

The caves without blue

The paintings from the 1st century BCE in **Caves IX** and **X** exhibit a conspicuous absence of blue pigment. In the later additions to these caves, attributed to the 5th century, the nimbi and Buddha's throne, which in other caves are rendered in blue, appear instead in green. Similarly, the stones in necklaces are red rather than the blue seen elsewhere. While some areas in the background might contain traces of blue, it remains unclear whether these hues are grey-blue, light blue or simply grey. Even if a light blue were present, it would differ significantly from the deep, vibrant blue seen in other locations.

Caves XII, **XIII** and the small **Cave XXX**, also dating to the 1st century BCE, lack paintings and are coated only with red plaster. Similarly, several caves – particularly the unfinished ones – from the 5th century are devoid of any paintings. For instance, **Cave III** is largely incomplete and entirely

[13] The present research was done mainly based on the available visual material of the Ajanta Archives at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road", and photographs available on online public sources.

Fig. 3. Ajanta Cave XX, shrine. Main Buddha sculpture with traces of blue on the hair. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" /Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 4. Ajanta Cave XXVI, triforium, left. Detail of blue on carved reliefs. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

unornamented, while **Cave XVIII** serves as a passageway between **Caves XVII** and **XIX** and features no decoration. Likewise, **Caves XXV** and the entirely inaccessible **Cave XXVIII** remain unfinished and unadorned.

Several unfinished caves also feature reliefs but no paintings. **Cave V**, though unfinished, includes carved depictions of loving couples and goddesses on the doorframe, but the interior remains incomplete and undecorated. **Cave XXIII**, likewise unfinished, lacks both a central Buddha figure and wall paintings. While some pillars in the porch and main hall display carved reliefs, none retain any traces of blue pigment. Similarly, **Cave XXIV**, though partially cut, features intricately ornamented pillars on the veranda and main hall, as well as depictions of loving couples and goddesses on the porch. However, no evidence of painted surfaces is present.

Among the caves that contain painted ornamentation, the richly sculpted antechamber of **Cave IV** features standing Buddhas and other high reliefs, while the shrine contains a seated Buddha flanked by whisk-holding attendants.

Fig. 5. Ajanta Cave II, main hall, right side wall. Blue undergarments and cushion of painted figures. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Despite the presence of painted remnants on these sculptures, no blue pigment can be identified.

In **Lower Cave VI**, no blue is visible in the wall paintings of the antechamber. A very dark blue hue is present only in certain ornamental patterns and carvings (see below). Similarly, the antechamber and shrine of **Cave VII** are adorned with carvings, and the main Buddha figure is flanked by sculptures, but no traces of blue pigment are visible. While remnants of paintings exist in the halo of the main Buddha and on the porch ceiling, these are heavily discoloured, rendering any identification of colours impossible.

Cave XV includes some paintings on the ceilings of the shrine and antechamber, but no blue pigment can be discerned. The Buddha figure in the main shrine and later reliefs similarly lack traces of blue. **Cave XXVII** contains faint remnants of greenish or turquoise pigment in a ceiling painting, with no other visible decoration.

Fig. 6. Ajanta Cave I, main hall, left side wall. Necklace, armlet and girdle with blue details. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Fig. 7a. Ajanta Cave XVI, main hall, left rear wall. Scene from the *Mahāprātihārya.* Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Cave XXIX, which is highly inaccessible and was discovered later, is situated in the elevated area above **Cave XXI**. This cave remains largely unfinished, with only a portion of the vault visible. Based on the sole available photograph (Spink 2009: Fig. 184), no discernible paintings can be identified.

The caves with blue

Ajanta **Cave I** features the most extensive and prolific use of an intense blue pigment. Many murals in this cave include at least some elements – if not large surfaces – painted with a deep, lustrous blue. This vivid hue is also applied to various details such as garments, cushions, jewellery, and architectural features like columns and roofs. The use of this pigment is widespread, appearing on nearly every wall and column with only a few exceptions. No traces of blue are present in the depictions of *Nāgakumāra* (Schlingloff No. 76) and *Prabhāsa* (Schlingloff No. 53), which occupy a significant portion of the right wall in the main hall, or in the mural depicting the *Mahāprātihārya* (Schlingloff No. 88), located on the right wall of the antechamber. In addition, the background colour in the depiction of *Sudhana* (Schlingloff No. 40) on the left front wall of the cave remains uncertain. Depending on the photographic material, it

Fig. 7b. Ajanta Cave XVI, main hall, left rear wall. Scene from the *Mahāprātihārya.* Drawing © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Matthias Helmdach. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

appears as either a grey-blue or green/turquoise (**Fig. 13**). However, the intense blue observed elsewhere in the cave seems absent in the surviving portions of this particular mural.[14] A similar turquoise colour is also present on the ceiling of the main hall, where no traces of intense blue can be found.

[14] The section of Sudhana depicted on the left sidewall features significant use of blue; however, Schlingloff's (2000, 2013) identification of this part as Sudhana narrative should be called into question (Tortorici 2022).

Fig. 8. Ajanta Cave XVII, veranda, left side wall. Blue sword. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

The interior of **Cave II** contains several examples of murals incorporating blue pigment. These include small details on the crown of a *bodhisatva*,[15] various other pieces of jewellery, floral motifs, textiles (**Fig. 5**) and architectural elements (**Fig. 11**).[16] In the main hall, most of the murals feature at least some details in blue, except for a single painting on the right sidewall (depiction of *Ruru*, Schlingloff No. 16) and three on the left sidewall: two murals depicting rows of Buddhas and the unfinished wall-painting depicting the story of the *Bhagavatprasūti* (Schlingloff No. 65). In this particular wall painting, the clothing and ornaments are remarkably pale compared with other paintings in Ajanta. For instance, the central bead of necklaces worn by figures, which is typically blue or red elsewhere, appears plain white or light grey in these cases. The ceiling of the right-side chapel dedicated to Hārītī is adorned with ornamentation in a rich, intense blue. The sculpture of Hārītī herself inside appears to retain traces of dark blue on her hair (see photograph in Takata 1971: 101).

[15] The spelling of Bodhisatva with one *t* is intentional. See Bhattacharya (2010).

[16] For describing non-narrative and ornamental motives, I am following the identifications of Zin (2003).

Fig. 9. Ajanta Cave XXI, main hall, ceiling. Ornamental floral motifs. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

The sidewalls of the antechamber present murals without blue, while the reliefs depicting loving couples at the entrance of the shrine present backgrounds of an intensive blue. Inside the shrine, the Buddha sculpture is flanked by two sculpted whisk-holding attendants, both of whom retain traces of blue pigment in their hair. The backgrounds behind these figures are also painted in blue, and the Buddha's nimbus similarly shows remnants of this vibrant hue. All other paintings in the shrine lack any intense blue.

At front of the cave, the paintings inside the left (depicting the stories of *Kṣāntivādin* and *Maitrībala*, Schlingloff No. 34 and 52) and right chapels (depicting the stories of *Bhūridatta* and *Prabhāsa*, Schlingloff No. 61 and 54), located on either side of the veranda, are not well preserved and seem to lack any blue. However, in the veranda the use of blue is more extensive, appearing in the backgrounds of *bodhisatva* landscapes (**Fig. 10**), depictions of Indra's heaven, and the ceiling's ornamental patterns. In addition, the reliefs on the upper wall of the veranda's right side show faint traces of blue paint.

Fig. 10. Ajanta Cave II, veranda, left rear wall. Celestial background. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Ajanta **Cave VI** is unique in that it comprises two levels, one above the other. As previously mentioned, the wall paintings of the **Lower Cave VI** do not exhibit any intensive blue. However, some of the ornamentation displays a very dark blue colour, which appears almost black depending on the light conditions. For example, in the side ornamentation of the shrine's entrance is a checked pattern that contains traces of this dark hue. Moreover, the carvings on the shrine's entrance retain remnants of dark blue paint.

In contrast, **Upper Cave VI** features a striking use of a vibrant, shiny blue pigment. The main Buddha sculpture exhibits traces of blue in its background, particularly beneath the Buddha's right arm. In the antechamber, a minor standing Buddha on the left wall displays a thin blue line on its nimbus. A lateral chapel located on the right side of the front transept showcases blue pigment in several notable ways. On the doorframe of this chapel, the figures depicted to the right of the entrance have blue-painted backgrounds (**Fig. 14**). Their ornaments and attire also include blue details, such as the belt of the male figure on the left, the central bead of the necklace worn by the female figure on the left,

Fig. 11. Ajanta Cave II, main hall, right side wall. Textiles with blue details and architectural elements. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

and elements of the male figure on the right. The reliefs on the right wall of this lateral shrine further reveal traces of blue on the backgrounds and on the nimbi of the seated Buddha figures. Notably, this lateral chapel currently displays the most extensive use of blue pigment in Upper Cave VI.

In the paintings located on the veranda of **Cave XI**, a grey-blue hue is used as the background for the Bodhisatva landscapes. However, no traces of the intense blue pigment are found here.

In **Cave XVI**, only two mural paintings feature the use of blue pigment. On the left rear wall, in the depiction of the *Mahāprātihārya* (Schlingloff No. 91), blue was applied to the lotus at the Buddha's feet, parts of the ornaments of the *nāga*s, and the dress of King Prasenajit. In the adjacent scene, blue can also be observed on the swords, some musical instruments and the eyelids of several figures (**Fig. 7a, b**). On the right-side wall of the cave, the entire life story of the Buddha is illustrated (Schlingloff No. 64). This large mural, comprising more than thirty scenes – only a few of which are missing due to deterioration –

Fig. 12. Ajanta Cave I, main hall, left side wall. Musical performance. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

contains just one scene where blue pigment is evident. This scene (**Fig. 15**) was identified by Foucher (1921: 222–223) as depicting the Buddha's conception, in which the Bodhisatva enters the womb of his sleeping mother in the form of an elephant. In contrast, Schlingloff (2000, 2013) interpreted it as the renunciation scene, portraying the future Buddha gazing at his wife for the last time before departing the palace. The female figure is shown sleeping, with her feet resting on an oval cushion and her head supported by a blue pillow. At least one of the columns beside her bed is also painted blue.

Ajanta **Cave XVII** contains a greater amount of blue pigment compared to Cave XVI. The hair of the main Buddha sculpture located in the shrine shows traces of blue pigment. At least eight murals feature blue details, including the depiction of the story of *Sutasoma* (Schlingloff No. 57) on the left rear wall; the stories of *Viśvantara* and *Haṃsa* (Schlingloff No. 43 and No. 14) on the left side wall; the story of *Mṛga* (Schlingloff No. 19) on the right front wall, a *yakṣiṇī* on the first pilaster of the right-side wall, and numerous murals on almost every wall of the veranda. The blue-painted elements include various textiles such as

Fig. 13. Ajanta Cave I, main hall, front left wall. Turquoise background behind figures. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

dresses, cushions and pillows, as well as jewellery like necklaces and armbands, animals, swords and depicted architectural elements. Notably, the depiction of the wheel of rebirth (*saṃsāracakra*, Zin 2003, vol 1: 440–456) on the left-side wall of the veranda stands out. Here, blue is employed not only for small details within the representations of each realm but also for entire small figures, such as cows and male deities (**Fig. 16**). The *cakra* itself – the circle encircling all the realms – features blue ornamentation.

The paintings in **Cave XIX**, which depict seated Buddha figures on the side walls, also incorporate blue details, such as throne cushions, nimbi and various ornaments. Similarly, the relief sculptures display blue accents, including decorative elements on figures and framing details around the sculptures. This suggests that decorating sculptures with blue pigment was a common practice.

A similar pattern can be observed in **Cave XX**, where subtle traces of blue are visible in the Buddha's hair (**Fig. 3**) and his background – on the throne, cushion and nimbus. One of the goddesses carved into the shrine's doorframe also exhibits remnants of blue pigment.

Fig. 14. Ajanta Upper Cave VI. Right side chapel, doorframe. *Yakṣinī* with blue background and details. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

In **Cave XXI**, the ceiling displays blue ornamentation in the form of volutes and flowers (**Fig. 9**). A painting on the left side wall also features blue details, such as backgrounds and jewellery worn by some of the depicted figures.

Cave XXII features traces of vibrant blue pigment. Notably, remnants of this intense blue can be observed in a relief depicting a Buddha located on the left rear wall of the main hall, beneath the Buddha's arm. In addition, some of the Buddha figures painted on the right rear wall of the main hall are depicted with a blue cushion on their back.

Cave XXVI's ceiling is richly painted with intensive blue ornamentation. While the rest of the cave is carved, its sculptures also retain traces of blue. For example, on the triforium near the central *stūpa*, remnants of blue paint on the reliefs suggest that not only the Buddhas' nimbi but also the framing and dividing ornamentation were originally entirely covered in blue pigment (**Figs 2** and **4**).

Fig. 15. Ajanta Cave XVI, main hall, right side wall. *Bhagavan*, "renunciation" scene. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

The relative chronology of Ajanta

The cave-by-cave analysis described above reveals that blue was entirely absent in the earliest paintings of the 1st century BCE located in Caves IX and X. Moreover, some caves from the 5th century, such as Cave IV, Lower Cave VI and Cave XV, exhibit a complete absence of blue pigment.

Among the caves boasting blue, some differences can be observed: caves located at the centre of Ajanta display a moderate use of blue, whereas caves on the eastern side, such as Caves I and II, show a significantly higher concentration. A similar pattern is observed at the opposite end of the site in Caves XXI and XXVI, where remnants of blue paint on the sculptural reliefs suggest that these decorations were predominantly covered with blue. The possibility that this blue pigment was applied during later periods over sculptures seems unlikely, since Ajanta was abruptly abandoned. Cave VI exhibits a striking distinction between its two levels: the lower cave entirely lacks blue pigment, while the upper cave shows a profuse application of blue, particularly in a lateral chapel.

Fig. 16. Ajanta Cave XVII, veranda. *Saṃsāracakra*, the divine realm. Photograph © Ajanta Archives of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Research Centre "Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road" / Andreas Stellmacher. The CC BY-ND 4.0 licence does not apply to this picture.

Several scholars have attempted to establish a relative chronology for the Ajanta caves of the 5th century to determine the sequence in which they were created. Based on stylistic analyses of the paintings, Kramrisch (1937), for instance, suggests that Caves XVI and XVII predate Caves I and II. The caves that Spink (2007) considers to be the earliest of this phase – Cave IV, Lower Cave VI, and Cave XV – lack any significant use of intensive blue. In contrast, the caves he identifies as later exhibit a prolific application of blue.[17] While his intricate and arguably unrealistic "short chronology" of 16 years (Spink 1992) is hard to accept, his relative chronology aligns with my observations regarding the use of blue.

[17] Although Cave XXVI is regarded by Spink (2007: 312) as one of the earliest of the second period, its sculptural decoration with intensive blue is described as "clearly late, contributing to the widespread perception that this cave represents one of Ajanta's most recent undertakings" (Spink 2009: 58). A comparable situation is observed in Cave XI, which, despite being an earlier excavation (Spink 2007: 141), features veranda paintings in a grey-blue that belong to a later phase of ornamentation (Spink 2007: 157–159).

From this, it can be concluded that the earliest 5th-century caves show no significant use of blue, whereas the later caves display a gradual increase in its use. Given that all the caves from the second phase of Ajanta date to the latter half of the 5th century, this suggests a sudden rise in the availability of lapis lazuli pigment in the region during this period.

Historical context

The Indian trade routes

It is well established that India maintained from ancient times extensive trade connections with various parts of the world. The northern Indian trade route, known as the Uttarāpatha, connected the Punjab region to the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. Rather than being a single pathway, it comprised a complex network of shifting routes, as is well documented in Sanskrit literature. Another significant trade route was the Dakṣināpatha, which linked the northern region through the Deccan plateau with southern India. Notably, the Ajanta caves were situated along this route, and numerous other important Buddhist sites, such as Bharhut, were either directly located on it, in close proximity to it (e.g. Sanchi), or indirectly connected through other routes (e.g. Nasik, Karli, Junnar).

Indian trade with the Roman Empire also is well-documented (see Evers 2017). The aforementioned *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* provides detailed descriptions of numerous Indian ports where goods were both imported from and exported to the Roman Empire, with specific mention of the various commodities involved (Schoff 1912). Additionally, as mentioned before, Indian textiles were discovered at the Roman port of Berenike (Sidebotham 2011: 243–244). Both Indo-Iranian (see for instance Kumar 2023) as well as Southeast Asian (e.g. Ray 2021) trade connections were also very well established by the times of Ajanta's second phase.

Therefore, the sudden increase in the availability of lapis lazuli in India during the second half of the 5th century cannot be attributed to the emergence of new trade routes in Indian territory, as these routes had been in place for many centuries by that time. Nevertheless, a certain change occurred in the north: based on Chinese pilgrim accounts, there was a change in the pilgrim route from China to Gandhara at the beginning of the 6th century. While the previous route arrived in Gandhara from the northeast, the route described in the years 518–520 came from the north. This means, that by the end of Ajanta's second phase, the last years of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th, the route passed through Zebāk and Chitrāl, closer than ever to the Badakshan mines. Later in the 6th century, the route changed again, tending to the west (Kuwayama 2006). Although Kuwayama (2006) only refers to pilgrim routes, it is very possible that the trade routes also experienced a change.

The political landscape

While the Indian trade network remained stable during the 5th century, the political landscape underwent significant changes. The fall of the Gupta Empire, which controlled much of northern India and maintained numerous alliances across the subcontinent, brought about a radical transformation of the political landscape. Ajanta, located within the territory of the Western Vākāṭakas, was likely impacted by the political upheavals occurring in the northern regions.

The Gupta Empire reigned over vast expanses of India during the 4th and 5th centuries. Marriage alliances with the Nāgas in the West and the Eastern Vākāṭakas in Central India enabled the Guptas to control the connections between overland networks and ports in Western India. After a period of relative stability in the first half of the 5th century, the Gupta dynasty experienced a sudden decline due to various factors, including internal strife, external threats and the increasing autonomy of regional subordinates (Neelis 2011: 155). The primary external threat during this time came from nomadic groups invading from the north. By the reign of Skandagupta (456–467), the "Hūṇas" – as they are referred to in Sanskrit sources and inscriptions – were exerting significant pressure. This is exemplified by the Bhitari stone pillar inscription, in which Skandagupta claims to have defeated them (Bakker 2020: 14, 41).

The group referred to as "Hūṇas*"* appear to have identified itself as the Alchon, based on numismatic evidence. The Alchon distinguished themselves from the Kidarites.[18] They were also connected to the Hephthalites,[19] as suggested by numismatic evidence: Hephthalite coins found in Bactria bear the same clan symbol (*tamga*) that appears on Alchon coinage (Alram 2016: 98).

The Alchon reached northern South Asia, including the Kabul Valley, Gandhara, Punjab, Gujarat and Malwa. Although little is known about the nature of their relationship with the Kidarites, there is no evidence to suggest that the two groups did not coexist peacefully (Pfisterer 2013: 42, Alram 2016: 71). Grenet (2002: 212–213) observes a proliferation of Indian cultural elements in Bactria and Sogdia during the fifth century, which may further indicate close contact between the Alchon[20] in India and the Kidarites and Hephthalites in these regions. A silver vessel dated to the second half of the 5th century

[18] The Kidarites began minting their own coinage in the second half of the fourth century and established a presence in Bactria and Sogdia, later extending their influence as far as Uddiyana in the Swat Valley, as well as Gandhara and Taxila in present-day Pakistan (Alram 2016: 35–36).

[19] The Hephtalites constituted another branch of the Huns that conquered Bactria in the latter half of the 5th century and subsequently expanded into Sogdia and Tokharistan.

[20] The author refers to the Alchon as Hephthalites but discusses Alchon rulers such as Toramāṇa, Mihirakula, and Khiṅgila in his paper (Grenet 2002: 211–212).

and discovered in Swat depicts two Kidarite elite members hunting alongside two members of the Alchon elite (Göbl 1967 II: 263–265, Marschak 1986: 32–33, Alram 2016: 71, Bakker 2020: 24–25), an image that has been interpreted as evidence of peaceful coexistence between the two groups (Errington 2010: 149).

Despite their fierce reputation, Hephthalites, Kidarites and Alchon served as both political and cultural intermediaries between India, Iran and Central Asia. They played a pivotal role in fostering trade and facilitating the spread of Buddhism (Neelis 2011: 169).

The Alchon fought against the Guptas and extended their reach into former Gupta territories, including Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Several dynasties from northern India acknowledged the authority of these invaders (Ferrier 2015: 185–186).[21] The Alchon's presence in India is documented in several inscriptions, including Buddhist donations (Melzer 2006), highlighting their influence on the cultural landscape. However, their dominance in India was short lived. By the mid-6th century, concurrently with the decline of the Hephthalites in Central Asia, the Alchon's power in India began to wane (Bakker 2020: 98).

Trade seems to have been florescent during Alchon's domination in northern India. Kuwayama (2002: 111–112) notes that the Alchon[22] engaged in conflict with Kashmir not to acquire territory, but to gain control over trade with the Salt Range region.

By the late 4th century, the Alchon had taken control of the Kabulistan region. Initially, they began minting their own coins following Sasanian models. The earliest Alchon coins bear the legend *alchanno* added to the Sasanian design, while subsequent issues feature the Alchon *tamgha* on the right (Pfisterer 2013: 32–33). In a later phase, the Alchon began issuing coins with entirely new designs, portraying their kings with the characteristically elongated skull. They also introduced coins bearing Indian Brāhmī legends, some of which are bilingual, with inscriptions in both Brāhmī and Bactrian. Although the texts in the two scripts do not replicate each other, but rather complement one another (Pfisterer 2013: 35), their bilingualism serves as evidence of the Alchon's transcultural intentions.

A copper-plate inscription dating to the reign of Toramāṇa, one of the Alchon rulers, records a donation made by a group of local traders as well as long-distance merchants arriving from all directions, including individuals with non-Indian names (Chakravarti 2008: 396–397). This inscription was discovered

[21] Ferrier refers to the northern invaders in India as Hephthalites and does not mention the name Alchon.

[22] The author refers to this group as the Hephthalites rather than the Alchon.

in Sanjeli, present-day Gujarat. The record not only suggests the existence of long-distance trade networks but also indicates a general flourishing of trade in a region under Alchon occupation.

Through their trade and political networks, the Alchon acted as political and cultural intermediaries between India and Central Asia, contributing to the development of transregional trade (Neelis 2011: 161).

Bakker (2020: 80) suggests that the Alchon's strength lay not solely in their military prowess but in their acumen as traders. Their connexions with Central Asia likely amplified the volume of goods exchanged within the pre-existing Indian trade network, possibly introducing new commodities, like the once rare and costly natural ultramarine pigment.

Conclusion

The technology to extract lazurite from lapis lazuli probably did not exist before the early centuries of the Common Era. The tested lazurite from Gla or Pompeii might have simply been ground lapis lazuli stone, since the evidence from both sites lacks the typical intensive blue of ultramarine. The oldest and most clearly preserved examples of natural ultramarine in wall paintings are the Kara Tepe paintings of the 4th century and those in the Bingling caves of the 5th century, provided that the dating is accurate, and the caves have not been repainted at a later stage. The next certain examples, and the oldest on the Indian Subcontinent, would be the Ajanta paintings in the latter half of the 5th century. The examples of Sanskrit literature mentioning lapis lazuli as a pigment for painting are all dated between the 5th and the 8th centuries, support the idea that natural ultramarine was not popular in South India before this time.

For this reason, I propose that the process of extracting lazurite from lapis lazuli to produce the intense blue of natural ultramarine pigment likely developed no earlier than the 4th century. This hypothesis is based on examples such as those from Kara Tepe, where an intense ultramarine colour is observed, although these have not yet been scientifically tested. Therefore, it is plausible that ground lapis lazuli continued to be used in certain contexts where the natural ultramarine pigment was unaffordable.

The main conclusion of this article is derived from observations of the Ajanta caves. The earliest paintings from the second phase, dating to the mid-5th century, along with additions and over-paintings in earlier caves, lack blue pigment. However, caves in their vicinity, which appear to be only slightly later, exhibit a moderate use of blue. In contrast, caves displaying extensive use of blue are located on both outlying sides of the "horse-shoe" and are associated with the latest phase of construction and decoration. This study does not seek

to establish a revised chronology or definitive dates but rather to support the accepted relative chronology for the development of these caves during the second half of the 5th century.

A sudden increment of natural ultramarine in India towards the end of the 5th century may be explained through the florescence of trade during the Alchon domination of northern India. Brancaccio (2013: 114) suggests that Buddhist monks played a significant role in the diffusion of artistic motifs. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that it was monastics themselves who brought the pigment from the north. The sudden increase in the availability of the pigment could, consequently, be attributed to increased exchanges among monks and nuns. Around the end of the 5th century, Brancaccio (2011) notes a growing influence of the Gandharan region on India,[23] which implies stronger connections with the Gandharan territories. She further attributes these connections to the presence of the Alchon (Brancaccio 2011: 105–107).

The basic idea that the increased availability of lapis lazuli as the result of the increased wealth of donors and their ability to spend larger amounts on the expensive natural ultramarine can also not be dismissed. Increased wealth could be also result of trade, which would be, again, due to the influence of the Alchon.

Yet, another question lingers unanswered: the Ellora caves, dating later than Ajanta to the 6th and 7th centuries, and the paintings in Badami, which also date to this period, exhibit no traces of blue pigment (Sharma and Singh 2021, Table 3).[24] Why did this pigment, once prevalent during the Ajanta period, vanish from Indian art for a century?

The Alchon's power dissipated following the fall of Toramāṇa (ca. 500–520) and his son Mihirakula (ca. 520–550), coinciding with the decline of Hephthalite authority in Central Asia during the mid-6th century. Was the retreat of the Alchon also responsible for the lack of natural ultramarine in India during the 7th century? I leave this question open for future research.

Acknowledgements

For their assistance in obtaining and translating texts, I extend special thanks to Luca De Fabritiis, Bulgun Mantsaeva and Fang Wang. For providing photographs from the inaccessible caves, I extend my gratitude to Rajesh Kumar Singh.

[23] Brancaccio refers for instance to the monumental *parinirvāṇa* sculptures of the 5th century, most of them concentrated today in Afghanistan, but also present in Indian Caves in Ajanta and Aurangabad, both in Maharashtra (Brancaccio 2011: 198–199). A fragment of wall-painting found at Jinan Wali Dheri, in today's Pakistan, shows a style extremely close to those of Ajanta (Brancaccio 2013: 111).

[24] The dating offered in this table for the Bagh Caves as the 7th century cannot be accepted. The paintings are contemporary to Ajanta.

Special thanks to all the experts who patiently answered my questions and provided invaluable suggestions: Catharina Blaensdorf, Osmund Bopearachchi, Pia Brancaccio, Giulia Forgione, Laura Giuliano, Ines Konczak-Nagel, Carlo Lippolis, Ciro Lo Muzio, Robert Schulz, Steven Sidebotham, Manager Rajdeo Singh and Monika Zin.

Abbreviations

Schlingloff = Schlingloff (2000, 2013: vol. I).

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Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia 38 (2025): 273–295
https://doi.org/10.60018/AcAsVa.kgmq5047

Society in the Pit of Suffering, Society in the Ocean of Bliss – How the Ironical Language of Nārāyaṇa Guru Contributed to His Politics of Social Transformation with the Help of the Tamil Siddhas' Concept of the Lord's Grace

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Abstract: The paper is an attempt to analyse the ironical language of selected philosophical works by Nārāyaṇa Guru – the mystic and social reformer from Kerala. As a follower of the tradition of Tamil Siddhas, based on the idea of liberative grace of the Lord, Nārāyaṇa Guru applies the same conceptual patterns in his poems. In order to promote the politics of social transformation, Nārāyaṇa Guru does not hesitate to introduce a highly sophisticated ironical language, which allows him to shift the sphere of esoteric mysticism and place emphasis on the realm of "social" mysticism, while claiming firmly that the process of Self-realisation should be aimed at the whole of society.

Keywords: Nārāyaṇa Guru, twilight language of Siddhas, *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam*, *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam,* Śaivism

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The goal of Nārāyaṇa Guru's[1] social reforms, pointed at in his devotional and philosophical poems like *Daiva Daśakam* ("Ten Stanzas on the Universal God"), *Jāti Nirṇayam* ("A Critique of the Caste"), *Anukampā Daśakam* ("Ten Verses on Mercy"), and *Śiva Śatakam* ("One Hundred Stanzas Devoted to Śivan")[2], *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam* ("The Hymn on *Arddhanārīśvara*"), *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam* ("One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction"), was to turn the status of the untouchable ones, affected by darkness and the illusion of diversity, into the ocean of bliss (*ānanda-kaṭal*, *paramāḷi*) attainable through the Lord's grace, love and compassion (*aruḷ*, *anbu*, *anukampa*) alone. The main literary source for such a social and mystic system could be the Tamil *Tirumandiram* composed by Tirumūlar.[3] The monistic Śaivism of the Tamil author,[4] developed under the influence of the Kashmiri doctrine,[5] was able to provide the perfect background for Nārāyaṇa Guru's philosophy based on the politics of liberative grace activated within the one realm of individual souls bound with *iruḷ*, i.e., darkness or ignorance, which was the main obstacle in the process of social, as well as spiritual, uplifting.[6]

The biography – or, to be more specific – biographies of Nārāyaṇa Guru could themselves be treated as a hagiographic pattern, in which a variety of motifs (such as the unusual behaviour of the new-born child) seems to be the common part of a *curriculum vitae* of sages, or enlightened ones. Therefore, the social application of the Nārāyaṇa Guru's high-register ideas has been limited by the author of the article to the simple pattern of the Lord's grace bestowed on the low-caste people in the form of rain. The co-existence of the pattern and other elements or events, such as establishment of the temple, in many cases seems to be based on more or less approved oral transmissions. As this author remains

1 Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856–1928) – a liberated Soul, mystic and social reformer from Kerala. He was the author of over sixty works composed in Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil, comprising devotional hymns, works of moral value and philosophical poems. His syncretic philosophical system mainly follows *Advaita Vedānta*, *Śaiva Siddhānta*, Śaivism and Śaktism. As regards his social reforms, Nārāyaṇa Guru becomes a representative of both the realistic and the monistic systems, synchronised under the banner of the concept of grace (*aruḷ*), which becomes the path and means for Self-realisation, conceived individually as well as in social context.

2 The selected stanzas (64, 65) of another of Nārāyaṇa Guru's poem, *Śiva Śatakam*, have been interpreted by the author in a separate article (Urbańska 2021: 557–574) in the context of the social philosophy of Siddhas employing the *aruḷ-iruḷ* idea in the service of politics. The ambiguous term *āḷi*, mentioned many times in Nārāyaṇa Guru's works, plays the key role in the exposition of his politics of grace (*aruḷ*), which emphasises the transformative function of the Lord's mercy in the process of social and religious uplifting of the "dark", untouchable ones.

3 Kumaran (2014: 55); Balachandran (2015: 21); Krishnan (2018: 63).

4 Ganapathy (2006b: 248–267).

5 Anand and Ganapathy (2006: 463–510). Cf. also Arumugam (2006a: 3–11).

6 Cf. Arumugam (2006d: 426–437); Arumugam (2006c: 58–92); Ganapathy (2010a: XXXV–LXXI).

partly sceptical about them (and partly not), she decided, as a philologist, to emphasise the linguistic dimension of the selected stanzas and works rather than to explore the social application of the analysed examples.

In stanza 1 of the *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam* (AS – "Hymn to the Half-Woman Lord") composed for the sake of society tormented with a severe drought, Nārāyaṇa Guru introduces the term *āḻi* ("depths of ocean") in its another meaning – *tīkkuḻi* ("fiery pit"):

ayyōyī veyilkoṇṭu venturuki vāṭīṭunnu nīyenniyē kaiyēkiṭuvatinnu
kāṇkiloruvan kāruṇyavānārahō!
payyārnnī janamāḻiyil pativatinmunnē parannūḻiyil
peyyāṟākamē ghanāmbu kṛpayā gamgānadīdhāmamē //1//

(Prasād 2016a: 11)

Alas! All is fading, having melted under that scorching heat of the Sun –
Without You; while looking around for the hand given as support,
Who else would be merciful enough! Before this living being, afflicted by famine,
Falls into the fire pit (*āḻi*)[7], with all Your mercy the rain should be poured
All around the earth, O abode of the Gaṁga river![8]

The fact that people are in such a state is claimed to be the result of the *yogic* posture assumed by Śivan Himself, who is depicted in the 3rd stanza of AS as the one who remains in the root posture or in the basic state (*mūṭṭil tanneyirunniṭuka*):

ūṭṭittīṟṟi vaḷarttum unbartaṭinī nāthannumippōḻuyirkkūṭṭattōṭoru
kūṟumilla kathayentayyō kuḻappattilāyŭ nāṭṭil kkaṇṭataśēṣavum bata
naśiccīṭunnatum kaṇṭu nī
mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu muṟayō? mūḷarddhanārīśvarā //3//

(Prasād 2016a: 59)

Lord of the divine river, who gives nourishing food to bring up
The multitude of living beings, now shows no affection for them.
Alas! How is it possible? Having seen that destruction of all

[7] Svāmi Muni Nārāyaṇa Prasād's interpretation is *valiya tīkkuṇḍam* – "a huge fire vessel or pit" (Prasād 2019: 361); Bhāskaran (2015: 163) suggests the meaning *tīkkuḻi* – "a fiery pit", based on *Śabdatārāvali* (cf. Padmanābhapiḷḷa 2016: 299: *āḻi – kaṭal*, *cakram*, *ājñācakram*; *eriyunna tīyŭ*, *tīkkuḻi*). Nāyar (2010: 285) translates the phrase *āḻiyil patiyuka* ("to fall into the fiery pit") as *marikkuka* ("to die; perish"); similarly, Śaśīndran (2020: 834).

[8] Selected stanzas and commentaries in Malayalam as well as the verses of TM supplemented with Malayalam text of Nāyar (2007) have been translated by the author of the paper.

That exists – alas! – on the land put into confusion and muddle,
Is it proper that You remain in the primeval, unbound state
(*mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu*)[9]?
Make at least a sound to agree with me, o Arddhanārīśvaran!

As the one who is absorbed in the unbound state, Śivan is not now able to bestow the flood of grace on his devotees. The same posture assumed by Arddhanārīśvaran in the 5th stanza of AS is called the *Paramātmāvŭ* state, i.e., the state of being absorbed into transcendent, unbound Reality, which makes it impossible for grace to descend:

muppārokkeyitā muṭiññu muṭiyil colpoṅṅumappum dhari-
cceppōḻum paramātmaniṣṭhayilirunnīṭunnu nīyentahō!
ippār āriniyāḷum ippariṣayinnārōṭuraykkunnu nin
tṛppādattaṇalenniyē tuṇa namukkarddhanārīśvarā //5//

(Prasād 2016a: 64)

All three worlds have been ruined; and You, the one who bears on His head illustrious water,
Remain all the time in the state of *Paramātmāvŭ* (*paramātmaniṣṭhayil*)[10]

[9] *mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu* – "You remain yourself in the basic, original state". Bhāskaran understands the term *mūṭŭ* in accordance with *Śabdatārāvali* as *āsanam* and translates the whole phrase as "You remain in [*yogic*] posture" – *nī yōgāsanattiltanne irikkunnu* (Bhāskaran 2015: 165). Cf. Padmanābhapiḷḷa (2016: 1445): *mūṭŭ – vērŭ*; *āsanam* (*mūlam*). Muni Nārāyaṇa Prasād interprets the term *mūṭŭ* as *kāraṇam* ("the primeval cause"): *anakkamillāte vṛkṣaccuvaṭṭilttanne* (*nissamganāyŭ ādikāraṇamāyi tanne*) – "[You remain] at the root of the tree without any movement, as the unbound one that is the primeval cause" (Prasād 2019: 364). *nīyippōḻ ā gaṁgaye talayil vaccukoṇṭu maraccu vaṭṭilirunnŭ tapassŭ ceyyukayāṇŭ. makkaḷāya ñaṅṅaḷōṭuḷḷa uttaravāditvattinṟe kāryamokke nī maṟannu. ninṟe tapassŭ kāraṇam gaṁgānadi ninṟe jaṭayilttanne uṟaññukūṭi. aṅṅane nāṭṭil veḷḷamillātāyi. ñaṅṅaḷellām kuḻappattilumāyi […] nīyākunna kāraṇattilninnāṇallō kāryarūpattiluḷḷañaṅṅaḷum ī lōkavumokke uṇṭāyatŭ. aṅṅane ñaṅṅalellām uṇṭāyatinuśēṣam ninikkini kēvalam kāraṇarūpattil mūṭāyiṭṭŭ (mūṭŭ = kāraṇam) tanne irikkān sādhikkumō? Kāryatteyokke maṟanniṭṭŭ ittarattil nīyirikkunnatŭ ēteṅkilum oru muṟayŭkkŭ cērnnatāṇō? Viśvatte nilaniṟuttunna vyavasthayŭkkŭ atu cērnnatāṇō?* – "Now, You keep practising penance, while hiding and retaining Gaṁga river at the top of Your head, having fixed yourself as *saṁnyāsin* at the bottom of a tree. You forgot the whole effect of [Your] responsibility along with us, being Your children. For the sake of Your *tapas* alone the same Gaṁga river has been stabilised within matted hair of Yours. Thus, there is no water in the country. All of us are in trouble now. […] The whole universe, along with us, remains in the form of effect that evolves from the [primeval] cause which is You yourself. In such a way, as long as all of us exist [in the form of effects], is it possible for You to remain in the [essential] form of the Sole Cause, as the Origin itself? Having absorbed or concealed all effects, would You remain united with any rule or order? Would it be connection with the state that makes the whole universe cease with nothing left?" (Prasād 2019: 365). Similarly, Nāyar (2010: 286): *ellāṟṟinum ādikāraṇamāyi viḷaṅṅunnu* – "You shine in the form of the Primeval Cause for everyone".

[10] i.e., in the supreme state, without revealing Your grace which is necessary now. *parabrahmalīnāvasthayil* – "in the state of being absorbed in the transcendent reality"

– Alas! Why is it so? Who else will take care of this earth in the future?
To whom can this low folk complain today?
Is there any other help for us except for the shade [shelter] of Your
divine feet, o Arddhanārīśvaran?

The aforementioned attitude of Śivan, which is mocked by Nārāyaṇa Guru, may be analysed in the context of several visions exposed in the Tamil *Tirumandiram*. First of all, the whole image of rain being perceived as grace or blessings conferred by Civaṉ on living beings can be found in *Tirumandiram* 1 248 and 1 249[11]:

(Bhāskaran 2015: 166). *nīyākaṭṭe ňān paramātmāvāṇenna advaitānubhūtiyil amarnnirikkunnu* – "You remain absorbed in the non-dual self-experience of "I am *Paramātmāvŭ* itself" kind (Prasād 2019: 367). *brahmānandattil layiccirikkunnu* – "You remain absorbed in the Bliss that is Brahman itself" (Nāyar 2010: 287). *nī ninṟe jaṭakkeṭṭil sadā samayavum gaṁgājalatte muḻuvan pēṟikkoṇṭāṇŭ varttikkunnatennatŭ lōkaprasiddhamāṇŭ. jalamāṇŭ jīvikaḻuṭe nilanilpinnādhāram ennŭ ninakkaṟiyāmallō. atu vēṇṭavaṇṇam jīvajālaṅṅaḻkkŭ etticcu koṭukkuvānvēṇṭiyāṇŭ, avarkku tāṅṅāvunna tarattil etticcukoṭukkuvān vēṇṭiyāṇŭ, svarggattilninnu vanna gaṁgaye ninṟe jaṭakkeṭṭŭ tāṅṅi niṟuttiyatŭ. ennāl tapassil layiccŭ paramātmaniṣṭhayilirikkunna nī akkathayokke maṟannu. aṅṅane gaṁgānadiyum puṟattu cāṭān maṭiccŭ ninṟe jaṭakkeṭṭinuḻḻil otuṅṅikkūṭiyirikkunnu. ninnil ninnutanne jātarāya ňaṅṅaḻellām veḻḻamillāte tīyil vīṇatupōle dahikkāniṭayāvukayum ceyyunnu. paramātmasvarūpiyāya ninṟe aṁśaṅṅaḷ tanneyāṇallō ňaṅṅaḷ. appōḷ ňaṅṅaḻe maṟanniṭṭŭ ninakkeṅṅane advaitānubhūtiyil amarnnirikkān sādhikkum? ňaṅṅaḻuṭe nānātvavum ninṟe ēkatayum onnutanneyallē? ataṟiňňukoṇṭŭ nī tapassil layiccāl, ninṟe tapassutanne ňaṅṅaḻuṭe rakṣaykkāyi bhavikkum. aṅṅane ninṟe tuṇa eppōḻum ňaṅṅaḻkku labhikkum. ennutanneyalla, ninṟe paramātmasvarūpam aṅṅane ňaṅṅaḻum anubhavikkum. ňaṅṅaḻum paramātmaniṣṭhayilamarum* (Prasād 2016a: 65). "It is widely known that You remain while carrying the whole of Gaṁga water in Your matted hair all the time. You know that the same water is the basis for the existence of all living beings. For the sake of the support for a multitude of living being, and for the sake of delivery provided in a bearable way to them, Gaṁga, who had descended from the heavenly world, has been restrained to be carried within Your matted hair now. However, You yourself forgot the whole story, while remaining in the state of *Paramātmāvŭ* after being dissolved in Your penance! In such a way, Gaṁga river – since She hesitates to flow outside, remains restrained within Your matted hair. All of us, offsprings of Yours, could be burnt [now] as if thrown into blazing flames, with no water left. Yet, we are parts of You yourself, whose essential form is *Paramātmāvŭ*. Then, how is it possible for You to remain dissolved in non-dual experience after forgetting about us? Our diversity and Your soleness – are they not one and the same? If You became immersed in *tapas* while being aware of that, the same *tapas* of Yours would become our salvation and protection. In such a way, Your support would be always accessible to us. Not only that, Your essential form of *Paramātmāvŭ* would become our own experience. All of us will be merged in the state of *Paramātmāvŭ*."

[11] The English translation of all stanzas of the *Tirumandiram*, done by the author of the article, given above as supplemented with Malayalam translation by Nāyar, is based on Tamil edition (TM). The inconsistency in transcription of the Indian terms (Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil) could appear as a result of the following linguistic phenomena: 1. The absence of the keywords of the Sanskrit origin in the Tamil *Tirumandiram* (such as *Kuṇḍalinī*). 2. The inconsistency in the Tamil transliteration of Sanskrit terms, i.e., the presence of two or more equivalents of the Sanskrit nouns (Sanskrit *vidyā* appears as Tamil *vidiyai*, *vittiyā* etc.) is attested. As both

amṛtūṟum māmaḻanīr mahimayāl amṛtūṟum panmaram pāritil taḻacciṭum /
kamukūṟum teṅṅu karimbana vāḻa karimboṭu amṛtūṟum kāññiramīvakayē!

(Nāyar 2007: 102)

The water of the great rain (*māmaḻai*) flows in excess like *amṛta* (*amudu*);
It helps the surface of the Earth (or: the greatness of the Seer)[12]
To be covered with plenty of trees[13] – like *amṛta* (*amudu*);
Areca palm, juicy coconut, the plantain along with a sugarcane,
The strychnine tree[14] grows there – [in the rain flood] like *amṛta* (*amudu*).[15]

uttuṁga śṛṁgamatil ninnoḻuki varum gaṁganīr aruvi ottu collippukaḻān vākkillavaḻ cintayilūṟunnōḷ /
nurayillā māśillā oḷi vīśum teḷinīr atŭ kara illātoru kaḻumaṇi nīr kaṇṭaṟiññīṭuvin

(Nāyar 2007: 102)

From the mountain space (*varai iḍai*) the heavenly water (*vāṉ nīr*) springs to fall down;

There is no word [to describe it]; it remains welled up in the depths of the Heart [*uḷḷattu agattu*];
It is foamless and stainless, the subtle and sharp (*nuṇṇiya*) clear water;

Dravidian languages permit the Sanskrit loan-word as well as its Malayalam or Tamil versions (for example Sanskrit *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalini* in Malayalam), both versions can appear in the article, particularly in the general statements, which are the descriptions of the philosophy of Śaivism.

12 The phrase *pārmicai* can be understood here as the surface of the Earth or the excellence of the wise one or the seer, in accordance with the tendency to interiorise the whole process of water, i.e., *amudu*, descent.

13 The plentiful trees (*paṉmaram*) mentioned here can also be treated as an allusion to the *paṉai* [*maram*], i.e., the Palmyra tree or Palmyra palm. In another stanza of TM (9 2887) the same tree symbolises the *suṣumnā* channel, within which the snake, i.e., *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*, is hidden.

14 The variety of trees mentioned in the stanza quoted above includes the plants associated with the liberation path (such as sugarcane, cf. TM 8 2365, Kandaswamy 2010: 2650–2651) as well as those which create obstacles on the way to self-realisation (strychnine tree, cf. TM 1 204). "It presents the idea of duality natural to *māyā* and world. Darkness and light, pain and suffering, nutriment and poison – all are supported by the rains that give life to plants and animals, suggesting that although elements of the world may be life giving, there are inherent dangers (such as poison of strychnine), bringing awareness to the ultimate goal of transcending the earth together" (Venkataraman 2010a: 308).

15 "The fertilising flood of rains outpouring makes trees and plants bloom enriched with sap; the areca palm, coconut, cane and plantain green, and nux vomica – stand laden rich with crop" (Natarajan 2018: 38).

It has no banks, indeed, such a purified (or purifying) gem (*kaḻu-maṇi*)
of our Father.[16]

The water of the great rain is depicted as the *amṛta* flow, stainless and pure, bringing bliss to the surface of the Earth – or the greatness of the Seer, i.e., to the human Heart. Thus, the whole process becomes interiorised by Tirumūlar, who situates the point of transformation in the depths of the devotee's Heart. The rain is hailed as being born in the mountain space, which could be an allusion to the Kailāsa peak – the symbol of transcendence and the ultimate goal; however, the precious nectar becomes a gift of our Father[17]; therefore, such an intimacy enables the devotees to be showered with His grace.

In the context of *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga* of Tirumūlar,[18] the expression *tīkkuḻi* (fiery pit) – an equivalent of *āḻi*, i.e. the depth of ocean, now burning with grief, may be regarded as the ironical explanation of the fruit of Arddhanārīśvaran's indolence in bestowing His grace brought by His *yogic* posture assumed at the basis or the root. The *Tirumandiram* provides us with suggestive visions of *Civa Yōgis* who are able to kindle the fire at the root (*mūlattē*), i.e., in the lowest *cakra* of *mūlādhāra*; the same act of kindling can be interpreted as burning up suffering at the root (*uruga aḻal mūṭṭi*), as stated in TM 7 1937:

nōkkunna mātare nōkkātakannē pōyŭ ōrkkunna uḷḷam urukumāṟaḻal
uyartti /

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[16] "There is reference to Lord Śiva's great compassion that pours from the heavenly heights, filling one's heart with love in an indescribably beautiful manner. As the soul grasps its real nature by Lord Śiva's compassion and grace, it is filled with love and gratitude. God's grace flows like a spotless river, crystal clear and subtle, for He is without blemish. The river of God's compassion has no banks or limits" (Venkataraman 2010a: 309). In TM 8 2511, the interiorised vision of the same process of rain falling is depicted in the twilight language of Siddhas as follows: *parayil para, aparattōṭēkittirayilninnāya taṇ punal pōluṟum / urayuṇarnnāramṛtotta uṇarvvuḷōn karakaṇṭavanurayaṟṟa kaṇakkē* (Nāyar 2007: 771) "The sea of *Parai* merged into One along with the Lord – Possessor [of] *Param* – like a cool flood of waves ceased; having awakened with Word, the one who became aware with [such] sharp [roaring] *amudu* flow, is the one who attained the other shore alone, which transcends completely the word". The sharpness and purity of water that is indescribable and filled with sweetness, defines the attainment of the final stage of liberation, which is identical to immortality itself.

[17] In *Śaiva Siddhānta*, the five activities of Lord Śiva, *anugraha* in particular, are meant for the Self-realisation of the individual souls bound with *malas* in *sakala* state (cf. TM 8 2418; Arumugam 2006c: 65). Therefore, the Lord obtains in the *Tirumandiram* (2 382) a status of Father (*ayyaṉ*), who is easily approachable through His loving grace (*nayaṉ*); the one, who is both the means and result of the whole process of unification, is the Son (*payyaṉ*), called also *māmaṇi* (the Great Gem). Both these terms can be referred to Subrahmaṇya as well as to the individual soul, with its potency to activate *ājñā cakra*, where *aruḷ* becomes the leading power. Nārāyaṇa Guru introduces these motifs in plenty of hymns devoted to Śivan (cf. *Sadāśiva Darśanam*) and Subrahmaṇya (cf. *Subrahmaṇya Kīrttanam*).

[18] Cf. Ganapathy (2006d: 159–179).

nōkkunna nayana sukham keṭumāṟu mūlattil cērkkum yōgi śivayōgiyē
(Nāyar 2007: 586)

Not looking at glancing beauty, he keeps his distance, melting his Heart in consideration;
Having kindled his blazing flame [of *Kuṇḍalinī*] at the basis (or: having burnt the suffering at the basis) (*uruga aḻal mūṭṭi*)[19];
He allows the desire of glancing eyes to go in vain;
The *yogi* yoked at the root [*cakra*] is indeed the *Civa Yōgi* (*mūlattē cērkkiṉṟa civayōgi tāṉē*).[20]

According to stanza 2 424 of the *Tirumandiram*, it is [Higher] *Kuṇḍalinī* herself, who descends from the cloudy mountain top in the form of the noble creeper along with the shower of grace and nectar in order to set fire to that within the pit of *mūlādhāra*, which helps the soul to attain the final liberation:

koṇṭal girimēl ninniṟaṅṅi kulakkoṭi aṇḍattilūṟi ninnu aṣṭadikkādi / ventupatam ceytu ōm ennappuṟakkuṇḍattin mēl aṅkiyāyaṭaṅṅiyallō
(Nāyar 2007: 154)

From the Mountain crowned with the rain cloud (*koṇḍal varai*)
Flows [down] the Noble Creeper (*kula-koḍi* = Higher *Kuṇḍalinī*)
To abide within the Universe (*aṇḍattu uḷ*), in eight curls [or waves] twisting – beyond the AUM (*ōm*)

Which brought (or which is brought along with) the state (or feet) of Oneness (or of the One [Lord]);

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19 The term *aḻal* denotes the burning or flame, heat or inflammation of grief or affliction. The verb *urugu* means "to dissolve with heat, melt, become tender, kind, glow with love". The whole process of the kindling *Kuṇḍalinī* fire comprises two paths, i.e., the path of the dissolution of lower *tattvas* and the removal of grief and affliction brought by *malas*, and the path of attainment of the Lord's love and grace, brought along with melting one's mind with affection.

20 "[…] The *yogin* lays his mind upon God and allows it to melt in love and devotion. With concentration, He kindles the *kuṇḍalini* fire at the root centre or *mūlādhāra cakra*, and purifies it of associated desires. Those desires are inflamed by covetous eyes. The *yogin* makes such desire dissolve by turning his eyes to the eyebrow center at the plane of *bindu*, called the *bindusthāna*. Thereby all desire that comes through the eyes vanish. Such a *yogin* is the real *Śiva-yogin*" (Somasundaram 2010: 2128–2129). TM 2 345 states that the *Kuṇḍalini* fire is kindled (*mūḻ*) at the *mūḻa* [*cakra*], just as time (*kālaṉ*) becomes kicked out with the foot or breath (*kāl*). One who is able to attain that through *Agni Yōgam*, becomes prosperous forever: *mūladvārattil mūḻum oruvane mēladvārattil amartti nōkki – mun / kālu uṟṟu kālanekkonnagni yōgamārnniṭil ňālattaṭiyūr kaṭannu nalamārnniṭām nāḷellām* (Nāyar 2007: 129). "Having perceived before the one who is kindled in the entrance of *mūla* [*cakra*] (*mūla-t tuvārattu mūḻum*) and risen up to the entrance at the top, having got in contact with foot (or: basis, wind or breath; channel – *kāl*), having burnt up the Time (*Kālaṉ*) through the *Agni Yōgam*, [*yogi*] resides in the good fame and prosperity at the land of *Kaḍavūr.*" Cf. Arumugam (2006b: 128–129).

Above the pit (*kuṇḍattiṉ mēl* = *mūlādhāra*) She kindles the fire (*aṅgi* = *agni*).[21]

While taking into consideration all these visions exposed in twilight language by Tamil Siddhas,[22] one can say that Arddhanārīśvaran becomes ironically indicted by Nārāyaṇa Guru for the crime of being absolutely unsociable. He assumes the basic or root position as a *Yōgi* in order to remain in perfect and ultimate union with His grace, which has now been totally re-absorbed. At the same time, the whole territory inhabited by His devotees, devoid of grace and the rain of *amṛtam*, turns into a fiery pit, which is not the pit of kindled *Kuṇḍalinī*, but a pit filled with burning grief. The question arises as to whether such an ironical presentation could be the indirect recommendation or advice given to the people by Nārāyaṇa Guru; as stated in his biography by Parameśvaran, as soon as Nārāyaṇa Guru has composed the hymn, he ordered the people "to chant it with heart-felt devotion after bath" (Parameśvaran 1979: 63). In other words, he could suggest that society should assume the very same posture as Śivan did in order to achieve the state which transforms the pit of suffering into the pit of

[21] The Mountain crowned with the Rain Cloud symbolises the top of *Kailāsa* – the Twelfth End, where *amudu* is accumulated (and, in fact, the state identical to immortality). *kulakoḍi* = *kulastrī* = Noble Virgin. *Kuṇḍalinī Śaṅkhinī* may be mentioned here. *eṉ – tirai* – within the Universe, i.e., in the sphere of the *Mahā Laya*, above *turīya*. These eight curls are: three stages of *Parai*, three stages of *Paraṉ*, the Eleventh State and the Twelfth State; or, supreme *Bindu*, supreme *Nādam*, three stages of *Parai* and three stages of *Paraṉ* (i.e., beyond the OM (*turīyātīta*) up to the oneness of *Para Civaṉ*). The term *kuṇḍam* mentioned by Tirumūlar in the stanza quoted above appears in TM 2 360: *nallōr navakuṇḍam onbatum inbam uṟa pallōr amarar parijña pakarukennatum villāpuram viḷaṅṅiṭum eri kōrttavan pollā asurare ellām ericcuvallō* (Nāyar 2007: 133). "May the excellent nine fresh pits (*nava-kuṇḍam*) be filled with sweetness (*iṉbam*); many immortals (*amarar*), oppressed by sorrow, fled to [the Lord]: 'Bestow Your grace (*aruḷ*) with affection! (*parindu*)'. The archer, who strings arrows with his bow, flared the city [the body] up, filled with brightness, and reduced the vicious Asuras (*acurargaḷ*) to ashes." The sacrificial pits can be interpreted as six *ādhāras*, two eyes and *sahasrāra* (Ganapathy 2006a: 552). The famous myth of destroying the three cities symbolises the destruction of the three defilements (Arumugam 2006b: 124–125). Thus, the twilight language introduced here by Siddhas depicts the process of the awakening and ascension of *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*: the fire or blaze can denote the activation of the *mūlādhāra cakra*, the region of activation is the city or body itself (*puram*); the bow of Śiva (*vil*) represents the *ājñā cakra* (cf. Ganapathy 2006a: 553); the activation of the latter results in the attainment of pure brightness (*viḷaṅgu*) and the cremation of *malas* (defilements) or desires. The whole process becomes possible thanks to the Lord's grace (*aruḷ*), and its final or ultimate goal is the sweetness of Bliss (*iṉbu*). When confronting the immortals and Lord Śiva in the first part of the stanza, Tirumūlar uses the equivocal verb *pari*[*ndu*], which can be related to the deities immersed in sorrow, i.e., bound with *āṇava mala* or *iruḷ* (darkness or ignorance), as well as to Śiva – the bestower of affection (*nēyam*). Cf. "Lord's grace pours down, like rains from the mountains, envelops the earth and fills oceans all-around; as the Lord's grace nourishes, His *nāda* sets fire blazing upon the sacrificial altar" (Venkataraman 2010b: 518).

[22] As stated by Ganapathy, "the twilight language is a clothed language in which the highest truths are hidden in the form of the lowest, the most sacred in the form of the most ordinary, the transcendent in the form of the most earthy" (Ganapathy 2006c: 295).

blazing *Kuṇḍalinī,* which can grant the rain of bliss by means of grace.

In his most famous philosophical poem *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam* ("One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction") Nārāyaṇa Guru includes a chapter (stanzas 21–26) devoted to social duties. His definition of *priyam* – "that which is dear or precious" runs in accordance with the *Advaitic* concept of the ultimate *ānanda*, i.e., Bliss being the aspect of the Absolute that has Its spark in the human world in the form of individual *priya*s.[23] As a result, what is dear (*priyam*) to one person, should be dear to another – *aparan*, as stated in stanza 21:

priyamoru jātiyitenpriyam tvadīyapriyamapara priyamennanēkamāyi /
priyaviṣayam prati vanniṭum bhramam tanpriyamapara
priyamennaṟiññiṭēṇam //21//

What is dear is of one kind[24]; this is dear to me, something else is dear to you:
In such a way confusion (*bhramam*) arises as regards differentiated objects of endearment.
What is dear to one person, is dear to another (*apara priyam*) – this should be comprehended.[25]

However, as a *jñānin* of action Guru harnesses such a *Vedāntic* concept to the service of his social politics, which are influenced by the Tamil Siddhas'

[23] Cf. *Advaita Dīpika* 8 by Nārāyaṇa Guru: *ajñānaveḷayilum asti vibhāti raṇṭum ajñātam alla sukhavum vilasunnu mūnnum / rajjusvarūpam ahiyoṭum idantayārnnu nilkkunnatinniha nidarśanamām itorttāl* (Prasād 2010: 95). "Even in the state of ignorance, 'exists', 'shines forth': these two aspects are never unknown; as the third [of these aspects], 'bliss' appears; when the essential form of the rope becomes associated with a snake, it assumes its 'thisness'; when considered, this example illustrates the aforementioned". Cf. Prasād (2010: 96): "*Asti*, *bhāti*, *priya* are three conjoined technical terms of *Vedānta*. *Brahman* or *Ātmā* is defined as *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*. These three, as an individual experiences, are signified by the terms *asti*, *bhāti*, and *priya*. *Sat* means 'Existence', and is experienced by an individual as 'I exist'. This existence of self-existence is referred to as *asti*, meaning 'something exists'. The essential content of self-existence is pure Consciousness (*cit*) – the consciousness of beingness, effulgence in essence. Never remaining inactive, it incessantly finds expression as stream-like experiences. This function of *cit* is named *bhāti* meaning, 'the shining forth of something'. Every such experience is more than an event of knowing. It involves an evaluation also, relating the object known to one's own value notions or likes and dislikes, and thus treating it as pleasurable, painful or indifferent. This phase of the evaluating function of consciousness denotes 'the state of being dear' termed *priya*". Cf. also Śāstrikaḷ (2014: 78–79); Yati (2013: 152–153).

[24] Nārāyaṇa Guru treats the term *jāti* ("kind, race, rank, caste") as a logical category, and, more specifically, one that is generic (*sāmānyam*), that is to say eternal (*nityam*), one (*ēkam*) and existing equally within a diversity or multiplicity of specific objects. *Jāti* represents the whole of humanity (*manuṣyatvam*) endowed with action (*karmmam*) and a quality (*guṇam*) that is bliss (*sukham*; *priyam*) (cf. Śāstrikaḷ 2014: 78).

[25] Translation based on Yati (2009).

philosophy of grace. In the consecutive stanza 22 of AŚ he explains that such a concept of *priyam* realises itself through *kriya,* i.e., an action:

priyamaparanteyatenpriyam svakīyapriyamaparapriyamiprakāramāk um /
nayamatināle narannu nanma nalkum kriyayaparapriya
hētuvāyvarēṇam //22//

What is dear to another, is also dear to me;
One's own joy is the joy of another – in such a way it would be.
The action (*kriya*) which brings goodness to one person, thanks to loving grace (*nayam*)[26]
Should appear as the cause of the joy of another.

Thus, as a social reformer he brings the proper definition of *priyam*; it means an activity, which brings goodness to one person (stanza 23 of AŚ) and appears as a source of goodness for another (*aparan*), all thanks to the grace called *nayam* and strictly associated with Sanskrit *kṛpā* (compassion)[27]:

aparanu vēṇṭiyaharnniśam prayatnam kṛpaṇata viṭṭu kṛpālu ceytiṭunnu /
kṛpaṇan adhōmukhanāyŭ kiṭannu ceyyunnapajaya
karmmamavannuvēṇṭi mātram //23//

The compassionate one (*kṛpālu*) keeps performing (*ceytiṭunnu*) his deeds day and night

[26] Nāṭarāja Guru firmly states that stanzas 21–26 are "not meant to be a code of ethics […] which would belong more to the side of action rather than to understanding" (Nāṭarāja 2006: 108). The reason for that is that "the present work is devoted mainly to Self-realisation and should be free from the social and obligatory aspects of morality. Therefore, the author contents himself with broad generalizations which have more of a wisdom interest than one of obligatory social action" (Nāṭarāja 2006: 108). It is, however, worth emphasising here that Nārāyaṇa Guru subordinates all kind of action to the Siddha concept of loving grace (*nayam*), hence each and every deed should be performed under the banner of the Lord's grace alone. Therefore, the process of Self-realisation gives the right value to *karmmam*. In other words, Self-realisation, i.e. a direct experience of grace (*aruḷ*) becomes the *conditio sine qua non* within any kind of activity. In the social context, the term *nayam* can be treated as an equivalent of the perfectly balanced union of the Tamil term *nayam* (loving grace, happiness, goodness, civility, piety, devotion – cf. Emeneau and Burrow 1961: 239) and the Sanskrit noun *naya* (prudent conduct, good management, civil and military government, wisdom, principle, doctrine – Monier-Williams 2011: 528). The Malayalam term *nayam* comprises both semantic scopes (Padmanābhapiḷḷa 2016: 1058; Dakṣiṇāmūrtti 2002: 874). Śāstrikaḷ states that the term *nayam* should be treated as the method, device or means (*upāyam*) that is used to provide the authority for Wisdom or Knowledge (*jñānam*), which is the direct instrument for achieving Self-realisation (*mōkṣattinŭ sākṣātŭ sādhanam*). Thus, the term *nayam* can be understood as the divine, higher power or greatness (*vaibhavam*) of the ultimate worship or accomplishment of Transcendence (Śāstrikaḷ 2014: 81).

[27] The same term *kṛpā* (Mal. *krpa* – compassion, mercy, beneficence, desire to do good selflessly. Vāriyar et al. (2016: 333) defines the Lord's attitude toward devotees during the process of Self-realisation (cf. *Śiva Śatakam* 36: Prasād 2016b: 127–129).

For the sake of another, having rejected wretchedness (*kṛpaṇata*[28]);
The wretched person (*kṛpaṇan*) rests as a downward-faced one
Performs unsuccessful deeds (*karmmam*) for the sake of himself [alone].

In *Tirumandiram* 5 1437 such a *nayam* or *nēyam* denotes the loving grace by means of which *Siddhānta Siddhi* transgresses the sphere of diversity and contradiction[29] – also within religious systems – to attain the state of Perfect Oneness identical to *Civam*, i.e. Ultimate Bliss, the Śaivic equivalent of the ultimate *ānanda*, representing the absolute dimension of *priya*:

onnum raṇṭum illāta onnāyŭ ninnu mata nirākaraṇam nīṅṅi prājñanāyŭ /
ninnu parāparai tan pādakkamalamatil cennu śivamākuka siddhānta
śaktiyē

(Nāyar 2007: 443–444)

One, two, nothing; remaining in oneness, having escaped from contradictions
(or: insignificance) within religious systems[30], remaining as a wise one,

Having united with loving grace (*nēyam*) of *Parāparai* by means of the

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[28] It seems that Nārāyaṇa Guru deliberately selects this term instead of the frequently used *kāruṇyam* (mercy, kindness, pity, sympathy) or *anugraham* (favour, kindness, blessing, grace), since its two derivatives – *kṛpālu* (the compassionate person) and *kṛpaṇan* (the poor, wretched person) – present the two "socially" opposite attitudes. The ironical attitude of Nārāyaṇa Guru himself can be traced in confronting these two meanings as well: in fact, it is *kṛpaṇan* (the covetous one) who deserves compassion and pity, and his attitude contributes to the definition of social misery (*kṛpaṇata* – poverty, miserliness). Yati (2013: 163) translates *kṛpaṇata* as "self-centered interests", and *kṛpaṇan* – as "self-centered man".

[29] Cf. also TM 6 1651: *kāyattērēṟi manappākan kai teḷikkavē māyattērēṟi mayaṅṅi nilkkum; uṇarvuṟṟu / nēyattērēṟi nirmalan aruḷaṭaṅṅāl āyattērēṟi avan ivanāyiṭām* (Nāyar 2007: 502). "Having mounted the chariot of the body (*kāya-ttēr ēṟi*) which is driven by the charioteer of the mind; having mounted the chariot of delusion (*māya-tēr*), they become stupefied; if they mount the chariot of gracious love (*nēya-tēr*) to obtain the grace of the Pure One (*nimalaṉ aruḷ*), having mounted the chariot of Mother (*āya-tēr*), this one becomes that one (*avaṉ ivaṉ āmē*)." Cf. Ganapathy (2010b: 1798–1799).

[30] *Camaya nirāgāram nīṅgi* – "having abandoned insignificance (*nirākāram*) or contradiction (*nirākāram*) of doctrine or practice (*samaya*)". Cf. "There is contention among the various schools of philosophy regarding reality. To the idealists, reality is one, an Absolute Brahman. To the realist, reality is two – the *Puruṣa* and the *Prakṛti* – the spiritual and the material. To the nihilists, there is nothing called reality; only *śūnya* exists. The sincere practitioner should remain detached from these contending religions because contention – philosophical or ordinary – serves no purpose. Only practice and devotion serve the purpose. Concentrating on the holy feet of the Lord, discarding contention, will bring results. This requires that one remembers the presence of the Lord within, by various methods. […] when one holds on to the holy feet steadfastly, the rest will be taken care by *Parāparai*, the grace-power of the Lord. The practitioner is showered with grace (*śakti-nipāda*). This helps him to become *Śivam*, that is, attaining Śivahood. This attainment is called *Siddhānta Siddhi*" (Arumugam 2010: 1552–1553).

holy feet
(*Parāparai nēyattaip-pādattāl ceṉṟu*), the *Siddhānta Siddhi* remains
Civam Itself.

TM 5 1420 claims that the loving grace of *Śaivas* is identical to eternity (*nityam*) and transcendence (*param*); it goes far beyond the realm of any differentiation or duality, even such as *sat* (existence) and *asat* (non-existence).[31] The same loving grace, as stated in TM 7 1958, allows the *Śaiva* to be adept at kindling the fire of *Kuṇḍalinī* and lifting it to the sphere of the sun (i.e., the heart *cakra*), above the throat *cakra* up to the moon region of the head and beyond (*sahasrāra*, *dvādaśānta*), where the appearance of the cool *amṛta* announces the attainment of the stage of *ānanda* or *Civam*, i.e., the absolute Bliss:

vinduvām bījam mēviya mūla nandiyatine agniyāl nayamārnneri /
ccantamillā [ati]bhānuvatine kaṇṭham mēlākki ccandranil ccālikkil
taṇṇamṛtē

(Nāyar 2007: 592)

Having burnt lovingly (*nayam*) with the increased fire (*nandiya aṅgi*)
The seed of *Bindu* (*vinduveṉ vījam*) [laid] in the abode of the root
(*mūlam*),
Having raised it to the endless Sun (*bāṉu* = *bhānu*) and above the throat
[*cakra* = *kaṇṭha*],
As soon as one unites with the Moon (*candiraṉ*) [region], the cool
amudu [appears].[32]

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[31] *sattum asattum sadasattum tān kaṇṭu siddhum asiddhum cērnniṭā mēlninnŭ śuddhum aśuddhum kalarnniṭātuyarnnŭ nityam paraśuddham śaivartam prēmamē* (Nāyar 2007: 439). "Having realised the Existence, Non-Existence and Existence-Non-Existence alone after breaking connection with consciousness and unconsciousness; having remained with no immersion in the pure as well as impure – what is eternal (*nittam* = *nityam*) and transcendent (*param*) is the loving grace (*nēyam*) of [extremely] pure *Śaivas* (*paraňcutta caivar*)."

[32] "Here is described the white seed of *bindu* with the ever-rising fire of *kuṇḍalini śakti* in the abiding *mūlādhāra*. The *yogin* raises it to the ever-lasting region of the sun. Then it is kept near the cool moon, which will produce ambrosia to be consumed. The sun region is the space between the navel and heart. The moon region lies in between the eye-brows and extends to the crest. If the *bindu* is awakened with the fire of *kuṇḍalini śakti* and coursed with the breath to the *sahasrāra*, ambrosia will manifest. That will bestow longevity and everlasting bliss to the *yogin*. The exact method for doing so is reserved for initiation by an adept in *kuṇḍalini yoga*" (Somasundaram 2010: 2150). Cf. also TM 1 304: *ĭśanavan aruḷīṭuvatallō janimṛti cakram pāśamōṭēṟṟu piṟarkkuraceytu bhaktipūṇṭu / nēśamōṭu ninnāl katir oḷicintum vāsamalargandhan vannaṇaňňu vāḷttumallō* (Nāyar 2007: 116). "The Lord's grace, death and birth (*īcaṉ aruḷum iṟappum piṟappaiyum*): you remain praising, squeezing (*pitaṟṟuka*) within and obtaining joy; the gracious love will come (*nēcam* = *nēyam*); having settled as the shining Brilliant Light (*nigaḻ-oḷi*), He would stay permanently [like] a scent of a fragrant flower (*vāca* = *vāsa*) *malar-k-kandam*) [within you]."

Nārāyaṇa Guru seems to select such a *Śaiva* system of dynamic transformation on account of the fact that it gives preference to the loving grace of the Father as well as to the famous motto of the *Siddhas*: "There is only one race, one God; do think only of goodness" (expressed in TM 7 2104). However, the metaphysical reflection of the social and religious transformation was not enough for Nārāyaṇa Guru. As a *jñānin* of action he preferred such a transformation to be in fact implemented within Kerala's body[33] – representative of the pit of suffering, which was to be transformed into the pit of bliss. Thus, in the following stanzas of AŚ (23; 25, 26) the posture of an "unsociable" man is presented ironically by Nārāyaṇa Guru by means of several key-words from the *Śaiva Siddhānta* doctrine. In stanza 23, Nārāyaṇa Guru hails the attitude of the compassionate one (*kṛpālu*) who keeps performing his deeds for the sake of another day and night. On the other hand, the wretched person (*kṛpaṇan*) remains non-active and rests (*kiṭannu*) as *adhōmukhan* – the downward faced one, performing unsuccessful deeds for himself alone. In order to mock the egocentric posture of those who perform actions for themselves, Nārāyaṇa Guru ironically calls such a person *kṛpaṇa* – a wretched person – as opposed to *kṛpa*, the Lord's grace; he also ridicules his posture with the compound (*adhōmukhan* i.e., downward faced one), which constitutes an epithet praising the Merciful Lord Civaṉ in TM 2 521:

aṇḍamoṭu eṇdiśatāṅṅum adhōmukha kaṇṭham kaṟutta karuttuṇarunnilla nērāyŭ /
uṇṭatu naṅcennuracciṭuvōr uṇarvvillātōr veṇṭala māla viri jaṭayōneyaṅṅē

(Nāyar 2007: 182–183)

The Downward-Faced Lord (*adōmugam*) supports eight directions along with the Egg of Universe;
The darkened throat, nobody knows the purpose of that;
"He consumed the poison" – the non-awakened would quarrel like that;
The One who wears reddish matted hair and the garland of white skulls.[34]

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[33] Kerala's body in such a case can be treated as a representation of individual beings, who are to be liberated collectively - in social terms - in the process of Self-transformation by means of the Lord's grace.

[34] "The skulls belong to the *devas*. Lord Śiva is the Lord of the universe, including all *devas*. It is this downward face that upholds the world, and emanates grace unto souls. The primary objective of grace is to redeem souls from ignorance, brought upon them by *āṇava-mala*. *Āṇava* plunges the soul in ignorance, which is darkness. The Lord's grace removes darkness. The blackness of the neck of the Lord may signify the ignorance of the soul. When the Lord carries out His fivefold action, with grace He creates the world, places the soul in it and provides worldly experiences for it to complete the *karmic* cycle. When the soul finally turns its attention away from the world and toward God, His grace operating through His downward

It is said that through the *adōmugam* Lord Civaṉ confers His grace upon living beings, as it is the Downward Face that is in intimate contact with devotees. "It showers compassion and leads souls from ignorance to the path of liberation". "The concept of Adhomukha provides a beautiful form through which the grace of the Lord visibly functions."[35]

Not only is *priyam* the spark of universal Bliss (*ānanda*), which is an aspect of the One Absolute itself. Each individual primordially is the essential form (*rūpam* or *svarūpam*) of such a Reality, which is named *Ātman* by Nārāyaṇa Guru in stanza 24 of AŚ:

avan ivan ennaṟiyunnatokkeyōrttālavaniyil ādimamāyŭ orātmarūpam /
avan avan ātmasukhattināćarikkunnavayaparannu sukhattināyŭ
varēṇam //24//

"This one", "that one" – all that is known in this world in such a way,
If contemplated, primordially (*ādimamāyŭ*) is the essential form of
Ātman alone (*ātmarūpam*);
Those deeds which are being performed for the happiness of such a self
[= the Self],
Should appear as that which brings happiness to another self
[= the Self][36].

The universal Self remains the basis for all individual "selves"; as a result, any deed performed for the sake of any individual self by definition should bring happiness (*sukham*) to the rest of the selves which are rooted in the one Self or *Ātman*. Such is the attitude of the real *Śiddhānta Siddhi*, who acts through loving grace (*nayam*, *nēyam*) for the sake of *poruḷ*, i.e., one Substance identical to *svarūpam*.

face removes the final vestiges of *āṇava-mala*. The blackness at the neck may point to the fact it is the Lord's grace that upholds all universe" (Venkataraman 2010b: 623). The proper meaning of the consumption of poison by Lord Śiva is the absorption of the real venom, that is *iruḷ* or darkness of ignorance, or *āṇava mala*. In such a process, the activation of *aruḷ*, i.e. the Lord's grace, is necessary, as the whole of *iruḷ* becomes finally transformed into *aruḷ*, in accordance with the realistic and monistic vision of Self-Wholeness and Singularity of *Civam*. Arumugam understands poison as semen: "Because the vital *Vindu* (semen), when wasted, brings death, it was interpreted as poison by Tirumūlar. He has also noted the dire consequences of wasting the *Vindu* and the benefits of retaining it. Since the down-flowing *Vindu* brings disaster it is considered as poison. The *Vindu* preserved and directed upward becomes nectar. This conversion is made possible by igniting the *Kuṇḍalinī* fire" (Arumugam 2006b: 131).

35 Venkataraman (2010b: 621).

36 The Sanskrit term *ātman* can be understood here in the *Upaniṣadic* meaning, i.e. the Absolute Self or Soul or the self (reflexive pronoun). Therefore, the compound *ātma*[*sva*]*rūpam* should be translated as the essential form or [each] self as well as the essential form of the Universal Self. Consequently, the second compound – *ātma-sukham* – when associated with two other terms: *avan* and *aparan* – obtains the meaning of "happiness to this self = the Self" and "happiness to another self = the Self".

In stanza 25 of AŚ, Nārāyaṇa Guru continues to ridicule the activity of the unsociable one. He is condemned as a person who brings extreme suffering to another, i.e., *param paritāpam*. The latter term is derived from the Sanskrit root *pari-tap* – "to undergo penance, practice austerities":

oruvanu nallatum anyanallalum cērpporu to̲lil ātmavirōdhiyōrttiṭēṇam /
paranu param paritāpam ēkiṭunnōr erinarakābdhiyil vīṇeriññiṭunnu //25//

What brings goodness to one person and misery – to another,
Such activity is opposed to the Self – you should remember that!
The one who brings extreme grief (burning – *paritāpam*)[37] to
another perWill fall and burn constantly in the fiery ocean of hell
(*erinarakābdhi*).

The attitde mentioned above brings to mind the self-centered posture assumed by Arddhanārīśvaran in the hymn analysed earlier. When juxtaposed with the term *param,* denoting transcendence, the whole phrase can define the attitude of one who strives for his own liberation alone, resulting in the state of *Paramātmāvŭ* – ultimate transcendence deprived of the intimacy that provides others with grace and compassion. Such egocentric behaviour, devoid of mercy (*kṛpa*) and filled with wretchedness (*kṛpaṇata*), can provide goodness to one person immersed in the burning penance aimed at transcendence; at the same time, it brings extreme suffering or burning pain to other people. The social responsibility established by means of the law of *Ātma-rūpam*, i.e., the essential identity of all human beings, makes such a self-centered person, who causes burning to others, suffer the same grief. He would fall and burn constantly in the fiery ocean of hell (*erinarakābdhi*), called in *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam* 1 *āḻi* ("depth of ocean") identical to *tīkkuḻi* – the fiery pit. As a follower of the Siddhas' tradition, Nārāyaṇa Guru approves the concept of kindling the fire in the pit of *mūlādhara cakra*, which is identical to burning the seed of suffering; as a social reformer, he ridicules the idea of striving for liberation as an ultimate goal in itself. Such a process should be always set in the social context, as the law of *Ātma-rūpam* requires a commitment whose goal is the transformation of the fiery pit into the ocean of bliss *in toto*, i.e., for the sake of the whole society.

Once again Nārāyaṇa Guru mocks the attitude assumed by the self-centered one in stanza 26 of *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam*. Such a person suppresses all his limbs together as if in the *yogic* posture. As a result, he remains immovable, while resembling a small peg (*āṇi*). As the same term denotes excellence or superiority in Tamil, the usage of such a word can be regarded as an ironical description of the self-centered one: although erected excellently, in fact it is like a small peg, he keeps veiling his life-breath, or *svarūpam*, with ignorance:

[37] *Paritāpa* itself, apart from the meaning given in the translation above, has another meaning of a particular hell in the Sanskrit literary tradition (Monier-Williams 2011: 595).

avayavamokkeyamarttiyāṇiyāyŭ ninnavayaviyāviyeyāvaricciṭunnu /
avan ivan ennatināl avan ninaykkunnavaśatayām avivēkam
onninālē //26//

Suppressing all limbs together, remaining immovable like a peg (or excellence – *āṇi*)[38] –

[38] Nāyar (2010: 604) interprets the phrase *āṇiyāyŭ ninnavayavi as ellā pravarttanaṅṅaḷuṯēyum kēndramāyi ninnirunna ňān ňān enna jīvan*, i.e. "the individual soul [that assumes the form of self-consciousness] such as: 'I am indeed the central point of all events'". Thus, according to him, such an attitude can be translated as "the self-centered person". Nāṭarāja Guru states: "As we press towards this culminating notion in which the self is compared to an airy nothing or vaporous something, we have to pass through an intermediate notion of the 'personality' or universal individual phenotype, which is here compared to a bolt that stands upright or erect in perfect vertical poise" (Nāṭarāja 2006: 118). The term *āvi* denotes breath, sigh, soul, steam, vapour or smoke (Emeneau and Burrow 1961: 28); in general, it can be associated with vital *prāṇa*. In TM 3 624, Tirumūlar equates vital breath with *vāyu* (i.e., wind) imprisoned within the body; such breath should be joined to the ground of *mūlādhāra* in the process of *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*. As a result, it can be released through loving grace that opens the third eye of *ājňā*; finally, the soul is able to consume the sweet fruit of ultimate liberation: *pūṭṭottameyyil poṟiyatilāya vāyuve tēṭṭam aṟṟŭ annilam cērumāṟu vaccē / nāṭṭatte viṭṭu nayanattilākkiyōrkku tōṭṭattu mānbaḻam kaniňňapōle* (Nāyar 2007: 212). "Having treasured the Breath (*vāyu*) joined to the ground (*nilam = mūlādhāra*) that is beyond searching, caught within the body (or truth – *mey*), which is like a closure: for those who remain united with loving grace (*nayaṉ*) while releasing their Eye, the ripe mango fruit of the garden awaits suspended [there]." Cf. Venkataraman (2010c: 747). Cf. also TM 3 714. Since the whole process of kindling the fire is presented as the *homa* sacrifice, the breath within assumes the shape of sharp, most subtle smoke (*nuṇ-pugai*), which unites with the nectar of immortality (*amudu*) in TM 4 1091. The minuteness, sharpness and extremity of such an experience refers to the *prāṇa* itself, *amudu* (cf. TM 1 249) as well as to the intellect or discrimination (in TM 9 2961 the sharp sword of the [bright] mind, *ayil maṉa vāḷ*, cf. Ganapathy 2010c: 3368). *tāmakkuḻali dayākkaṇṇi uḷḷilnilkkum ēvaliruḷ aṟttiṭum iḻamkoṭi / hōmapperum cuṭar uḷḷileḻum nuṇpuka mēviya amutoṭu mīṇṭatu kāṇuvin* (Nāyar 2007: 351). "The woman with curled hair adorned with flower-garland, her eyes [filled with] compassion, remains within the Heart; She is the tender creeper (*iḻaṅkoḍi*), which blows away the darkness spread within the loom [of (the) universe]; the sharp and subtle smoke (*nuṇpugai*) that rises within as the great effulgence (*peruňcuḍar*) of *ōma* [fire-sacrifice], when united [there] with *amudu* [*amṛtŭ*], comes back here – Oh! see!" Cf. commentary: "The inner murk is *āṇava mala*. The *homa*-fire burns in the *mūlādhāra*. The smoke is the power that blends with the vital air (*prāṇa-vāyu*); it reaches the *sahasrāra* and then descends with the elixir of immortality" (Ramachandran 2010: 1253). The term *āṇi*, on the other hand, means in Malayalam a metal nail, a spike, peg; a short piece of iron (Sanskrit *āṇi* or *aṇi* means the point of a needle; a linchpin, bolt or pin at the end of a carriage pole). There is, however, another Dravidian meaning of the same noun, that is excellence, superiority (Emeneau and Burrow 1961: 26); the compound *āṇi-ppoṉ* denotes in such a case gold of the finest quality (the same meaning is attested by *Śabdatārāvali*; cf. Padmanābhapiḷḷa 2016: 259). In the TM the aforementioned compound becomes the key-word of the metaphor of smelting the *amudam* (immortality nectar); apart from *mūlādhāra*, another forge is situated in *ājňā*, the place of Subrahmaṇya. Here, molten gold of the finest quality, when improved, turns to be *amṛta* at the end of the day (in *sahasrāra* and above, in *dvādaśānta*). Cf. TM 1 131: *māṇikyamuḷḷile marakatajyōtiyāyŭ māṇikyamuḷḷile marakatamāṭamāyŭ / āṇippon maṇḍapattilāṭum tirukkūttine pēṇittoḻuvinētu siddhiyārnnivar?* (Nāyar 2007: 64). "Like the Effulgence (*cōdi*) of the Emerald (*marakada*) within (in the Heart

The limb owner keeps covering (*āvaricciṭunnu*) his own life-vapour (*āvi*);
Thanks to that, he differentiates between "this one" and "that one" –
Due solely to the non-discrimination (*avivēkam*) which is disability itself.

Therefore, the self-centered one, as opposed to the Self-centered one, differentiates between "this person" and "that person" due to the non-discrimination (*avivēkam*). Such a disability is the result of the lack of loving grace (*nayam*), by which one conquers the sense of multiplicity and multitude.

* * *

The ironical language introduced by Nārāyaṇa Guru allows us to interpret the passages mentioned above in a wider, social context. The statements such as *aparanu vēṇṭi* ("for the sake of another") or *priyam oru jāti* ("bliss is of one kind") can be translated in accordance with Nārāyaṇa Guru's politics of grace as follows: "for the sake of inferior ones (*apara*)" and "what is blissful is the one caste (*oru jāti*)". Thus, the main social *mahāvākyas* propagated by Nārāyaṇa Guru, which could be traced in his devotional hymns and philosophical works, are as follows:

***aparanu vēṇṭi* (for the sake of another person) = for the sake of inferior ones (*apara*)**
***priyam oru jāti* (bliss is of one kind) = what is blissful is one caste (*oru jāti*)**

Nārāyaṇa Guru deliberately combines the terms and concepts of *Vedānta* and *Siddhānta*. The rigid philosophical system of *Vedānta* transferred in Sanskrit – the language reserved for upper caste people, has been supported with the realistic *Śaiva* system of the Siddhas, who claimed only one race and caste for all. The main concept of *Śaiva Siddhānta* – the loving grace of the Lord and

of) the Ruby (*māṇikkam*), like the Hall (*māḍam*) of the Emerald (*marakada*) within (in the Heart of) the Ruby (*māṇikkam*), that is the divine dance performed in the Hall (*maṉṟu*) of the Gold of the finest quality (*āṇi-ppoṉ*), when worshipping That with adoration, they can attain the Ultimate Childbirth (*pēṟu*)". Cf. TM 7 2064: *māṇikyamālapōl malarnneḻum maṇḍalam tannil āṇipponnāyŭ ninnamṛtam viḷayikkumatine / pēṇikkoṇṭuṇṭōr piṟapparṟirunnōr ūṇākki uṇṭu kaḷiccōr uṇarā manuṣyar* (NĀYAR 2007: 607). "In the region (circle – *maṇḍalam*), where the garland of the rubies (*māṇikka mālai*) flourishes, remains the gold of the finest quality (*āṇip-poṉ*) and the *amudam* ripens (*viḷaintadu*); those who cherish it while consuming, will become birthless (*piṟapparṟirundār*); those who do not realise it, remain for the sake of the body alone". Thus, both terms introduced by Nārāyaṇa Guru – *āvi* and *āṇi* – can denote insignificant or minor things when related to the self-centered personality; while interpreted in the context of *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga* and the politics of grace based on the Siddhas' twilight language, they constitute the basic aspects of the proper transformation and Self-realisation of each individual being. Therefore, the latter personality can be defined as the Self-centered one.

Father – has been used by Nārāyaṇa Guru as a tool for his politics of social transformation and reformation, which ridicules the concept of individual Self-realisation: since such loving grace of the Lord pervades the whole, equally real ocean of the universe, the liberation process should be aimed at the whole society.

The social application of the common pattern of the Lord's grace bestowed in the form of waters, both external (rain, flood) and internal (tears) can be easily extended throughout the reform movement started by Nārāyaṇa Guru. The installation of the stone resembling *Śivaliṅga* by Nārāyaṇa Guru in Aruvippuṟam, while shedding tears of compassion,[39] could become an excellent example of the universality and flexibility of such a pattern. Moreover, the answer given by Nārāyaṇa Guru, when being questioned by Brahmin society ("What I have installed is only *Iḷava* Śivan"),[40] brings to mind other possibilities of interpretation of the stanzas of the *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam*, while speaking of ironic language of Nārāyaṇa Guru in the light of his politics of grace, following the mystic system of Tirumūlar. The stanzas 1 248 and 1 249 of the TM, mentioned in the article, seem to have its equivalents in the magical hymns of the *Atharvaveda* (cf. 1.2.1, where the healing rain is called Father and protector, or 1.4.4, where *amṛta* is said to reside within heavenly waters).[41] Thus, recitation of the *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam*, showing the influence of Dravidian mystic system of the *Tirumandiram*, as well as the magic elements of Sanskrit *Atharvaveda*, as if opposition to the trinity of other *Vedas* is the source of Brahminism, reveals to us another dimension of the irony of the Nārāyaṇa Guru's language and attitude. This problem, however, requires further in-depth study.

Abbreviations

AS *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam.* Ed.: Prasād (2016a).

AŚ *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam.* Ed.: Prasād (2012).

TM *Tirumandiram.* Ed.: Ganapathy et al. (2010).

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[39] Kumaran (2014: 83–84).

[40] Kumaran (2014: 85).

[41] Rajesh (2005: 6–11).

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