

The Bodhisattva with the Flask in Gandharan Narrative Scenes

In memoriam Maurizio Taddei

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This article is based on a research carried out almost ten years ago, when I was preparing a section of my M.A. thesis on the Tuṣita episodes in the Life of the Buddha under the supervision of Maurizio Taddei in Rome and Naples ⁽¹⁾. As it was immediately relevant to my topic, the focus of our interest was the controversy arising from an article by Wibke Lobo (1987, 1991) ⁽²⁾ regarding the identity of the Bodhisattva with the flask in Gandharan art ⁽³⁾. While, in my opinion, this question

⁽¹⁾ Besides Taddei many other scholars have contributed examples, ideas or criticism to this paper or a previous version of it, including Joe Cribb, Max Deeg, Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and Anna Maria Quagliotti. The gathering of relevant examples for this topic – and far beyond it – has greatly benefited from the photographic collections of IsIAO housed at the MNAOr in Rome (where cited the respective negative number is given), and of the university library at Naples. I am also grateful to Marianne Yaldiz and the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin for allowing me to study the holdings in the storerooms at a very early stage of this work. In the absence of Stan Czuma, Nancy Grossman was kind enough to let me see the relief belonging to the Cleveland Museum of Art in their storeroom. Completing this study on Maitreya was made possible by a research grant from the Austrian Academy of Sciences (APART), while previous research was generously supported by the Austrian Research Fund (FWF).

⁽²⁾ Lobo first published the article in a German version (Lobo 1987) which in terms of content is almost identical to the later English version (Lobo 1991). As the English version is more accessible for most readers, I refer to this version when discussing the text alone. The number and sequence of figures is different in the two versions and plate references are thus given to both versions of her article. In the English version a relief from an auction catalogue (No. 16; Christie's London, 10.10.1989, fig. 251) has been added to her list of relevant pieces.

⁽³⁾ Initially, the work resulted in a lengthy working paper entitled 'Remarks on the Gandhāran Iconography of the Bodhisattva with the Flask'. While numerous examples were collected, much of the present work being based on this data, and the discussion of the iconography of the Bodhisattva with the flask was considerably refined, the controversy regarding the identity of the Bodhisattva with the flask was not solved satisfactorily and the article was never published. Taddei subsequently suggested to me that I might well reconsider the whole question all over again. However, I was unable to find an alternative perspective for reconsidering the problem. It was only in late 2000, partly due to the untimely and unexpected demise of Maurizio Taddei, that I took up the topic again and taught a seminar on the iconography of Maitreya in India.



Fig. 1 - The Birth of the Buddha and the discussion scene. Musée Guimet, MG 26360; l. 58.5 cm, h. 22 cm, d. 9.1 cm. (After Giès 1996: no. 177).

can only be evaluated properly from a much wider perspective, this being one of the reasons why I was unable to complete this work at such an early stage of my studies, the present article focuses on a more narrowly defined aspect of it by considering the flask-holding Bodhisattva only within the context of narrative depictions. The reader must bear in mind that the conclusion suggested here is partly based on much wider considerations, namely the role of Maitreya in Gandharan Buddhism of the Kuṣāṇa period in general and its development, which will be dealt with in a parallel article⁽⁴⁾.

The starting point for the present discussion is a group of Gandharan narrative relief sculptures with a Bodhisattva in the centre sitting in *padmāsana* below an umbrella or canopy on a throne with a footstool. He performs *abhayamudrā* with his right hand and holds a flask (*kalaśa*, *kamaṇḍalu*) in the left. He is attended by seated figures, mostly wearing turbans, of which at least one is usually portrayed in a vague attitude of conversation or discussion. I shall here refer to this as a 'discussion scene'.

Images of this type are usually identified as Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven, but have also been interpreted as representing Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven before his last rebirth (Lobo 1987, 1991). Here the identity of this Bodhisattva and his narrative context will be reconsidered. In comparing a large number of relevant relief panels several types of representation can be differentiated. An iconographic context for some of these representations provides clues for possible identification of some of the different types.

STATE OF RESEARCH

One of the key pieces for this topic has already been published and extensively discussed by Foucher. This relief panel from the Musée Guimet (Fig. 1) shows the

⁽⁴⁾ This is the subject of a more extensive monographic study entitled 'Maitreya in Gandhāran Art' of which the present article represents one section.

birth of the Bodhisattva to the left of the discussion scene. In this relief the Bodhisattva is sitting in *padmāsana* on a throne without a footstool, his right hand raised in *abhayamudrā*, his left resting on the lower leg with a flask suspended between his fingers. He has a topknot, earrings and a necklace and he sits in a building with a trapezoid roof resting on columns. Perching on the pitched sides of the roof are two birds. The attendant images are only half the size of the Bodhisattva and sit in European fashion (*bhadrāsana*). The figure to the Bodhisattva's left performs a gesture indicating conversation and behind him is another standing image in *añjalimudrā*, while the figures to his right are almost completely broken off.

In *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhâra* (later *AGBG*), Volume I, Foucher initially identified this relief (fig. 164*b*) as being the 'adolescence du Bouddha', with his father Śuddhodana on his left, in the place of honour, and his wife on his right (*AGBG*: I, 320-22) ⁽⁵⁾. However, in the second volume Foucher changes his interpretation significantly, saying:

Nous l'avons notamment méconnue sur la figure 146b [meaning fig. 164*b*], qui la place aussitôt après la Nativité, en sautant toutes les scènes intermédiaires de l'enfance et de la jeunesse. Il s'agit de ce samcodana, de cette 'instigation' à quitter le monde, [...] (*AGBG*: II, 219-20). ⁽⁶⁾

Among others, Scherman (1928: 290, fig. 17), Meunié (1942: 36-38, pls. 13, 45-47), Marshall (1916: 16, pl. 9*e*) and Ingholt (1957: 58, fig. 37) ⁽⁷⁾ follow Foucher's latter interpretation.

Wibke Lobo (1991: 99) identifies the same scene as representing the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni in Tuṣita, an interpretation that had already been suggested by Marshall (1960: 79). Lobo understands the flask as a sign of his divine status (*amṛtaghaṭa*), and she finds a corresponding description for the lion throne and the conversing images in the *Lalitavistara*, a text that is considerably later than the discussed panels. Lobo does not refer to the false window gable in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 2).

On the other hand, it is generally accepted that the flask held in the left hand is the iconographic characteristic of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. Consequently all single standing Bodhisattva figures with flask and other minor iconographic characteristics (the iconographic characteristics of Maitreya are summarized below) and even fragments thereof are identified as representing the Bodhisattva Maitreya. In addition, numerous other relief panel representations of a seated Bodhisattva with flask surrounded by secondary figures are identified as Maitreya as well. Relief

⁽⁵⁾ I refer to the three volumes of Foucher's compendium (1905, 1918, 1951) as *AGBG* with the volume indicated in front of the page or figure numbers.

⁽⁶⁾ Cf. also *AGBG*: II, 838 where he places the new interpretation in the right context.

⁽⁷⁾ Who says: 'It must, however, be admitted that both the coiffure and the water flask are unusual for Siddhārta, so perhaps one should rather identify the enthroned figure with the Buddha of the future, Maitreya'.

panels featuring the iconography under discussion are interpreted as depicting the future Buddha Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven (Taddei 1962: n. 71).

This leads to the rather curious situation that relief panels of a Bodhisattva with the same iconography and within a similar context are assigned different identifications ⁽⁸⁾. Interestingly, none of the publications attempts to establish iconographic criteria that would allow a differentiation between Maitreya and Śākyamuni holding a flask ⁽⁹⁾. Needless to say, even when one considers the wide range of variations in the early iconography of Gandharan art, this situation is unsatisfactory and provides the motivation for reconsidering these identifications.

TYPES OF THE DISCUSSION SCENE

Before examining the identifications suggested above more closely and in the wider context of Gandharan narrative depictions, the most relevant relief panels should be described ⁽¹⁰⁾. One of the peculiarities of relief panels with the Bodhisattva holding a flask is the amazing degree of variation they display. Here I concentrate only on those scenes in which have some element of discussion is recognizable, as only these can with certainty be considered as narrative and related to the Guimet example.

The representations of the discussion scene can be arranged in several typological groups, of which only the key pieces and/or those which have been extensively published are introduced here. These groups have mainly been differentiated on the basis of the throne on which the central Bodhisattva is seated.

Type A

The central Bodhisattva sits on a simple square seat with turned wooden legs, covered with cloth and usually with a footstool in front of it ⁽¹¹⁾. The throne

⁽⁸⁾ To take Wladimir Zwalf's exemplary catalogue of the Gandharan sculpture in the British Museum (Zwalf 1996) as an example: Maitreya idols, nos. 50-75; Maitreya flanked by lay worshippers, no. 89; Maitreya flanked by gods or lay people worshipping, no. 125; Maitreya flanked by ascetics, no. 126; Śvetaketu (= Śākyamuni) in Tuṣita heaven flanked by large seated turbaned figures, no. 160; Śākyamuni flanked by Brahmā and Indra worshipping and an additional figure (*samcodana*), no. 172; Śvetaketu in Tuṣita heaven flanked by seated turbaned figures, no. 251.

⁽⁹⁾ From most of the examples cited by Lobo it appears that the accompanying seated figures engaged in discussion or worship might represent a possible criterion and Zwalf appears to differentiate the two Bodhisattvas by this context.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A complete list of relevant relief panels with more detailed descriptions and related examples is found in the article mentioned in note 4.



Fig. 2 - False window gable with scenes of the Buddha's life. Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. no. 58.474; gift of G.P. Bickford; h. 68 cm, w. 41.3 cm. (After Czuma 1985: no. 101).

occasionally has a backrest and there is often an umbrella (round) or canopy (square) represented above it. In the more complex examples the canopy is supported by two posts projecting from the legs of the seat.

The most important relief panel of this type is the false window gable in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Inv. no. 58.474; Fig. 2). This relief represents the most extensive context for the discussion scene. Read from top to bottom the five scenes carved on it can be identified as follows: the Birth, the discussion scene, the Bodhisattva amusing himself in the harem, the Bodhisattva leaving the sleeping women and the Great Departure. In the discussion scene the Bodhisattva, with halo and a round topknot, has neither footstool nor an umbrella or canopy. To either side sit two figures, those closer to the Bodhisattva seated in relaxed fashion and wearing a turban, while those behind have only a topknot, with their hands joined in *añjalimudrā*. Behind the Bodhisattva's shoulders are the heads of two other figures⁽¹²⁾. It is remarkable that in this scene the Bodhisattva wears a necklace and an amulet-string, while in the departure scenes he only wears a circular necklace.

Another extensively published relief of this type is held by the Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich (no. 12-57-1, Sammlung Cassire)⁽¹³⁾.

Type B

Type B contains the same elements as type A but the structure of the throne is more complex. The legs of the throne supporting the pillars of the canopy are now lion-shaped. In addition, two cherubs stand on intermediate capitals of the pillars attending the Bodhisattva with a flywhisk or fan. While the iconographic content of this type does not differ from type A, chronologically panels of type B are rather more recent.

The best-known relief of this type is certainly the one excavated in Ruin L (Marshall 1951: 251) in the Dharmarājika Stūpa area at Taxila, today in the Taxila Museum⁽¹⁴⁾. On this relief the central Bodhisattva is seated under a canopy with a

⁽¹¹⁾ For Foucher (1903: 227-28) this simple throne indicates that the Bodhisattva is on a visit somewhere.

⁽¹²⁾ Marcus (1967: 254, fig. 13) identifies the discussion scene as 'Visit of the Sage Asita, seated in the centre' while Czuma (1985: 188-89, no. 101) writes: 'The second scene shows Prince Siddhārtha surrounded by his courtly retinue'; photograph MNAOr, Gandhāra 21, neg. 30922.

⁽¹³⁾ Published in Scherman (1928: abb. 17; 1929); Meunié (1942: pl. 13, 46); Lommel (1968: abb. 4, kat. no. 1) with the caption: 'Die Götter ermutigen den Buddha zur Askese', he thus identifies the main secondary figures as Indra and Brahmā; Lommel (1974: fig. 3); Mallebrein (1984: 29-30, no. 15) who identifies the main figure as Maitreya; and Lobo (1987: abb. 7; 1991: no.1, fig. 1) who identifies the main figure as Śākyamuni.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Published in Marshall 1916: pl. 9e who writes on p. 16: '[...] representing the exhortation of the gods to Buddha to declare his law to the world'; '[...] six figures (Brahmā, Indra and four Lokapālas)



Fig. 3 - The discussion scene. Taxila Museum, no. 365. (After Ingholt 1957: fig. 37).

garland and tufts at the edges and has a topknot with two loops. Of the flywhisk-bearing cherubs the one to the proper right of the Bodhisattva has its back to the viewer. The primary attendants are seated and have halos, the figure to the proper right of the Bodhisattva sits in *bhadrāsana* and performs *añjalimudrā*, while the figure to the opposite side sits with legs crossed at the ankles and is in an attitude of discussion. There are four more standing figures in the background.

A fragmentary relief from Shotorak (no. 104), today in the Musée Guimet (no. 081 353/1), is of the same type ⁽¹⁵⁾.

in attitudes of entreaty...'; Meunié 1942: pl. 13.47; Marshall 1951: pl. 217, no. 93, identified by H. Hargreaves on p. 712-13 as 'Instigation of the Bodhisattva' with Indra to the left and Brahmā to the right; Marshall 1960: 102; Ingholt (1957: 58, fig. 37), who says: 'It must, however, be admitted that both the coiffure and the water flask are unusual for Siddhārtha, so perhaps one should rather identify the enthroned figure with the Buddha of the future, Maitreya'; and Lobo 1991: no. 6, fig. 5.

⁽¹⁵⁾ W. 48 cm, h. 50 cm; published in Meunié 1942: 36-38, pl. XIII, 45 and given in Lobo 1991: no. 5; photographic archive of the Museum: neg. MG 18 961.

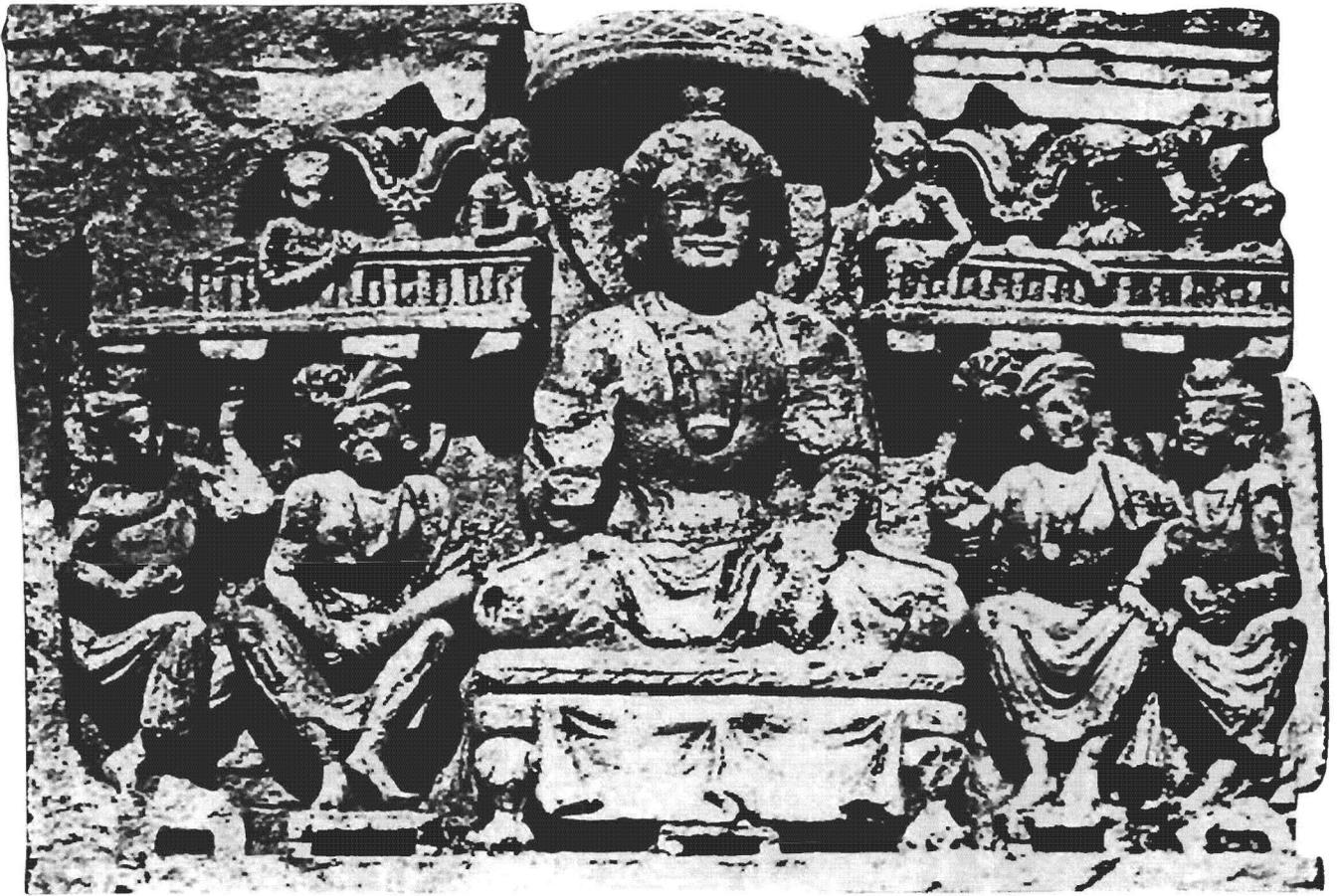


Fig. 4 - The Bodhisattva with the flask in his paradise. Present location unknown. (Photo MNAOr, Gandhāra 1227).

Type C

In contrast to the above types, type C relief panels and those of the following types display evident signs of a paradise context for the scene. Balconies with torsos of additional venerating or offering figures depicted on them are commonly added to the composition. The relationship of the protagonist to the secondary figures is also different, with the main image usually being considerably larger than the secondary figures. Apparently, this and the following types developed later than the previous types. Type C reliefs share the simpler throne construction of type A reliefs.

As an example I introduce a relief photographed by E. Lizioli in Karachi in 1972 (Fig. 4). On this relief the much larger central Bodhisattva with a small parted topknot is depicted frontally seated under a round umbrella on a throne. In contrast to his static position all four seated attendants are engaged in lively conversation, the figures near the Bodhisattva even turning away from him. On either side of the Bodhisattva's head are wide balconies containing both male and female figures.



Fig. 5 - Relief with the *parinirvāṇa* and the discussion scene. (After Kurita 1988: no. 484)

Another example of this type, albeit rather unusual, is found on a false gable with two scenes from the British Museum (no. OA 1890.8-5.1) ⁽¹⁶⁾. In the gable scene four attendants flank a disproportionately large standing Bodhisattva, those on his left being couple. The scene below shows a disproportionately small Bodhisattva seated on a wide throne beneath a canopy. He is flanked by two large seated turbaned and haloed figures, both of them apparently holding a bunch of flowers. A balcony with four pairs of figures separated by pillars occupies the top of the panel.

Remarkably, no narrative context can be ascertained for any examples of this type known to me so far and it is thus uncertain whether they should be interpreted in the same way as the other discussion scenes.

Type D

Type D combines the composition of type C with the thrones of type B. A stone slab from the Taxila Museum with two narrative scenes side by side may serve as an example (Fig. 5) ⁽¹⁷⁾. The discussion scene on the right-hand side of the slab is partly damaged, with the canopy and the cherubs as well as the right hand of the Bodhisattva having broken off. Of the four attendants the two inner ones are seated while the outer ones stand and perform *añjalimudrā*. At the height of the large central Bodhisattva's head are balconies with women standing on them. In the scene on the left-hand side the *parinirvāṇa* is shown.

Type E

In depictions of type E the canopy construction and the flanking balconies are joined to form a palatial environment for the protagonist. This type is best

⁽¹⁶⁾ Published in Zwalf 1996: no. 160 and given in Lobo 1991: no. 15.

⁽¹⁷⁾ In Kurita (1988: no. 484, corrected in Kurita 1990: 313) erroneously attributed to the museum at Peshawar. Miyaji (1992: fig. 168) identifies the discussion scene as: 'Maitreya in Tuṣita (?)'.

represented by the relief from Musée Guimet (MG 26360) which is said to be from Southern Swat (for a description cf. above; Fig. 1) ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Related Relief Panels

In addition to these types there are a number of compositionally and structurally related relief panels that contain unusual additional elements, such as kneeling figures in front of the throne, or the main image depicted in a different sitting posture. These unusual elements make it doubtful if such scenes should be interpreted in the same way as those described above, and they thus are not included in this article.

In general, discussion scenes are comparatively rare and their compositions are subject to great variation. Often the scenes are fragmentary, and many of the comparable examples have come to light only recently ⁽¹⁹⁾. Bearing the variety of types as well as the two pieces from Cleveland and the Musée Guimet with a clear narrative context in mind, let us now reconsider in greater detail the identifications suggested for the scene in the literature.

ŚĀKYAMUNI WITH THE FLASK?

As mentioned above, some of the discussion scenes have been interpreted as representing Śākyamuni in two different episodes of his life. According to one interpretation the scenes represent Śākyamuni ⁽²⁰⁾ while still residing in Tuṣita heaven (Lobo), according to the other Śākyamuni is shown inside the palace when the *deva* instigate him to leave his family (Foucher). Both interpretations, as will be shown, have their strengths and weaknesses.

The saṃcodana

Foucher states that in certain cases, at critical points in his life, the Buddha-to-be is shown with costume or attributes that indicate his future destiny; for example in

⁽¹⁸⁾ This relief panel has been published by Foucher (*AGBG*: I, fig. 164); Kurita 1990: 24, fig. 45; Lobo 1987: abb. 8; 1991: no. 2, fig. 2; and Giès 1996: 233-34, no. 177.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Kurita has published a number of relief panels of this kind for the first time (Kurita 1988, 1990), while others, generously made available to me by Taddei, have been photographed on the art market. Note that Kurita often uses the old museum numbers rather than the current ones (cf. the review of Kurita 1988 by Quagliotti 1990).

⁽²⁰⁾ Or rather Śvetaketu, the name of the Bodhisattva in Tuṣita heaven according the *Lalitavistara*.

Tuṣita heaven he is shown with turban, jewellery and in monastic dress (see below). In the case of our scene, the *saṃcodana*, Foucher states of the flask:

Dans la main du Bodhisattva princier, *s'il a un sens*, il fait apparemment pressentir sa future entrée en religion: dans celle du brahmacārin il signifie sûrement que celui-ci a déjà prononcé ses vœux de jeune clerc. (AGBG: II, 218, my emphasis). ⁽²¹⁾

Taddei justly remarks here 'that there is no evident relation between a monastic dress and ascetics' (Taddei 1962: n. 71). Thus the iconological meaning of the flask as an attribute of Śākyamuni remains enigmatic.

This interpretation (as well as Foucher's previous one) is based on reading the only relief with a narrative sequence known during his time, i.e., that from the Musée Guimet (Fig. 1), from right to left, as would be customary ⁽²²⁾ Lobo (1991: 98-99) by reversing the reading of this relief uses it to prove her thesis. However, she did not know the relief from Cleveland, which shows our scene in the middle of other clearly identifiable scenes in chronological order (cf. Fig. 2). This relief not only strongly supports Foucher's reading (with regard to the direction), but proves in any case that there exists a depiction of a Bodhisattva with a flask in his left hand in the context of the Buddha's life between the Birth and the Great Departure. Even if one reverses the chronology of the two upper scenes, saying that the birth can be considered more important than an event in Tuṣita heaven and was thus placed at the top of the stele ⁽²³⁾ there can be no doubt that the main image in all the scenes is the same person.

As clear as this chronological order may be, the interpretation of the scene remains a mystery. Would it not be expected that Indra and Brahmā entreat the Bodhisattva themselves? These two great Indian gods have a clearly established iconography in Gandharan art and, as depictions of other similar events suggest, one would expect them to be shown with their hands joined in *añjalimudrā* as is the case

⁽²¹⁾ These interpretations are based on the different appearances of the future Śākyamuni in his previous existences as a human e.g. as a noble (Viśvantara) or an ascetic (Śyāma or Megha, AGBG: II, 216-17). As an ascetic he is depicted carrying a flask. In the Dīpaṃkara Jātaka he is also depicted carrying a flask (e.g. AGBG: I, figs. 139-140, in the latter he even has a hair loop) and one may understand the flask as a sign of the prediction which is soon going to be fulfilled. However, after the Departure Śākyamuni was not understood as an ascetic and does not carry the flask. This argument was used by Lobo (1991: 98) to refute Foucher's interpretation. Of the other examples which Foucher identifies as the same scene (AGBG: II, 221), two (figs. 348, 459c) are clearly Maitreya, while the fourth (fig. 479) agrees better with his interpretation than the discussion scene (see below). At the end of the section he further qualifies his conclusions by demonstrating *contaminations* of these iconographies (AGBG: II, 221-22).

⁽²²⁾ Cf. Foucher (AGBG: I, 268) and 'De toute manière, la place du panneau immédiatement à la gauche de la Nativité, qu'il suit ainsi par ordre chronologique, nous force à reconnaître en lui le Bodhisattva Siddhārtha' (AGBG: I, 324).

⁽²³⁾ This reversal of the chronological order is unlikely for Gandharan art, as scenes representing an event in heaven are commonly shown above, as is very obvious on a window gable from the National Museum in New Delhi (no. 48.3/40, e.g. Tissot 1987: fig. 95; and Klimburg-Salter 1995: no. 178).

in the scene of Brahmā's invitation to preach (e.g. *AGBG*: I, figs. 212, 213, 215). If one accepts that the Bodhisattva holds a flask at the *saṃcodana*, Foucher's interpretation best matches his fig. 479, where Brahmā and Indra approach such a Bodhisattva with their hands in *añjalimudrā*. On that relief another (badly damaged) figure stands behind Brahmā, and the Bodhisattva turns slightly towards these two figures. However, as it is carved on the pedestal of a standing image, this scene has no narrative context and to identify this Bodhisattva as Śākyamuni as well would make the identification of flask-holding Bodhisattvas even more confusing⁽²⁴⁾. By contrast, in the case of the discussion scene the attendants are not clearly differentiated by their iconography, even if they do have a halo.

Considering composition and respective context, the Cleveland piece (Fig. 2) suggests that the discussion scene is chronologically closer to the following scenes showing details of the Great Departure. An unusual relief panel from the Chandigarh Museum may be read as supporting a close connection between the discussion and the Great Departure, as it shows the flask-bearing Bodhisattva being entertained⁽²⁵⁾. However, no textual evidence has been found for an interpretation of the discussion scene within the wider context of the Great Departure.

Śākyamuni in Tuṣita Heaven

Leaving aside the group of reliefs under discussion, there are only a few relief panels that can reasonably be identified as representing the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven, only one of them from Gandhāra. Among these, the group of narrative relief panels from Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunikoṇḍa are the least problematic. In these panels, the descent from Tuṣita heaven occupies three panels: the first shows the Buddha-to-be in Tuṣita heaven surrounded by gods, the second scene shows his descent *as* an elephant in a pavilion carried by the gods, and the third scene shows the dream of Māyā. The only preserved textual source which can constitute the basis for the descent *as* an elephant (and not as usual *appearing as* an elephant in Māyā's dream) is a verse in the *Mahāvastu*:

When the mighty and mindful one passed away from his abode in Tuṣita, taking on the form of an elephant of the colour of a snow-white boar,

⁽²⁴⁾ On a similar pedestal Brahmā and Indra are joined by monks (Fussman 1985: fig. 1). I do not agree with Fussman that the attendant figures refer to the main image standing on the pedestal rather than to the Bodhisattva between them, as in this case the representation of the latter would make no sense. In such a case surely an artist would have chosen to depict something that equally refers to the main image, such as a fire offering, at the centre of the composition.

⁽²⁵⁾ Chandigarh Museum, Inv. no. 862. On this fragmentary relief a Bodhisattva with flask is seated in royal ease on a throne of type B. Attendant figures to his proper right are shown in dance-like poses (Paul 1986: 94, no. 862).

Mindful, self-possessed and virtuous he descended into his mother's womb as she lay abed high up in the palace, fasting and clothed in pure raiment. ⁽²⁶⁾

However, the depicted scenes are more detailed than the text, proving that other more detailed literary and/or oral accounts related to the *Mahāvastu* existed ⁽²⁷⁾.

In Gandhāra the situation is different, as only the relief on the Sikri Stūpa in the Lahore Museum has been plausibly identified as depicting the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven. On this panel the main image wears a turban, jewelry and monastic dress, and sits in peaceful meditation on a lotus seat with down-turned petals. Four figures with turbans and jewelry and four with topknots and haloes (in the background) venerate the central image ⁽²⁸⁾. However, this relief is unique and its context is also uncertain, as the scenes around the *stūpa* were rearranged during reconstruction ⁽²⁹⁾.

Klimburg-Salter (1988: 206), by taking into account only the reasonably certain examples mentioned above (Andhra and Sikri) and comparing them with later depictions up to the time of West Tibetan art, observes that the surrounding of masculine gods, who are in attitudes of exhortation and adoration, is an 'absolutely fixed feature of all the images [of the Bodhisattva Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven] in a narrative context'. Frequently the main image also sits on a lotus with down-turned petals instead of a throne.

Lobo's identification of the discussion scene panels as representing the Bodhisattva Śākyamuni in Tuṣita heaven is based on the narration in the

⁽²⁶⁾ Transl. Jones 1949-1956: I, 164 and II, 11. 'so yaṃ mahānubhāvo smṛtimāṃ tuṣitabhavanā cyavītvāna | āṇḍaravarāhakanibho bhavitva gajarūpi śaḍḍanto || vīraśayane śayantiye poṣadhikāye viśuddhavasānāye | smṛta samrajānakuśalo mātuḥ kuḥṣismiṃ okrānto ||' (ed. Senart 1882: II, 11,18-21; cf. I, 207, 7-10).

⁽²⁷⁾ An invention of this kind (no earlier depictions, known to me, are so detailed) certainly requires the support of a strong oral or literary tradition. In this case, the pictorial account has preserved a tradition which has otherwise almost completely vanished.

⁽²⁸⁾ Cf. Ingholt 1957: fig. 8 and Marshall 1960: 79-80, fig. 74. In Marshall the scene is interpreted as depicting Śākyamuni in Tuṣita entreated by the gods. He says: '[...] if it was in the Tushita heaven, it was natural that he should be represented as Maitreya!'

⁽²⁹⁾ To support her view Lobo (1991: 99) tries to reinterpret this scene as well, and sees it as 'one of the several meditations' of the prince before departure. 'The Meditation [now in the singular] belongs to the preparatory phase preceding the Great Departure [...]' and she further states that 'the meditation' and the request of gods are also combined in a single scene. However, the 'rather unambiguous example' she presents is not as clear as she claims, as on this relief panel the Bodhisattva is sitting under a tree. That 'his seat is covered with lotus leaves' is not only doubtful from the picture but also from the narrative context it is identified with. As Lobo does not try to differentiate clearly between the First Meditation (which is clearly identifiable on the Sikri panels) and probable other ones, a short series of inconsequent comparisons allows her to interpret the Tuṣita panel of the Sikri Stūpa as the request to leave home (1991: 99-100). It is also remarkable that the key piece for her reasoning is as unique as the Sikri scene, and that she ignores the Buddha dress of the main image of the Sikri relief.

Lalitavistara, a text which is only available to us in a version that was composed centuries after the Gandharan panels were created. In addition, the chapters concerned with the events in Tuṣita heaven are certainly among the latest included in the text. For example, the giving of a crown to Maitreya, thus inaugurating him as successor in Tuṣita heaven, only occurs in this last version (cf. *AGBG*: II, 232, n. 2). Earlier versions of the text are much less specific about the events in Tuṣita heaven (cf. below).

I have not seen all the examples given by Lobo, but from the examples known to me it is clear that she fails to consider the context of the panels she lists. For example, she does not differentiate between scenes found in a clearly narrative context (such as that in the Musée Guimet) and other panels located in a lunette or at the top of steles, where it is unclear whether these scenes should be interpreted in the context of the Buddha's life. As she interprets both equally as *narratives* she thinks that a Bodhisattva depicted with a flask in lunettes or on pedestals cannot be Maitreya either (Lobo 1987: abb. 11; 1991: 98-99, fig. 4) ⁽³⁰⁾.

Nevertheless, Lobo's interpretation of the discussion scene as a heavenly one explains some of the compositional elements in these panels much better than the other suggestions discussed so far. But how does the last life of the Buddha usually commence in Gandharan art?

First Scene of the Buddha's Life in Gandharan Art

A statistical approach, merely counting the relief panels of different life scenes in extensive archaeological publications such as the one from Butkara, shows that *possible* Tuṣita scenes are far less common than Birth scenes. In Butkara we find the Dream of Māyā occurring five times, the Interpretation of the Dream four times, the Birth ten times, two panels with a flask-bearing Bodhisattva venerated by attendants (WS.60, WS.107) ⁽³¹⁾ and no other scene that could possibly be identified as representing an event in Tuṣita heaven.

More decisive than the statistical approach are observations that can be made with regard to relief panels on which the first scene of the Buddha's life is found within a context that explains its position. There are a number of relief panels that show the Conception or Dream of Māyā in combination with the prediction by Buddha Dīpaṅkara. While on some examples the two scenes are found side by side (Kurita 1988: nos. 16 and 18) on others there are intermediate scenes. The latter is the case in a narrative *stūpa* frieze in the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin

⁽³⁰⁾ But compare Rosenfield 1967: 233-34 on 'Maitreya and Śākyamuni combined'.

⁽³¹⁾ Both of these are from the collection of the late Wali Saheb of Swat (information received from Maurizio Taddei).



Fig. 6 - Narrative frieze with three scenes (from right to left) Dīpaṃkara, unidentified Rebirth scene, Conception. (MIK Berlin, I 96).

(I 96; Fig. 6) ⁽³²⁾. Regardless of how the middle scene on this frieze is to be identified, it can be excluded as representing a Tuṣita episode ⁽³³⁾. Rather than plainly representing the story of the Buddha's last life these depictions stress the spiritual development in the Buddha's biography as Taddei (1993, 1999) repeatedly pointed out.

Another example of a narrative *stūpa* frieze discovered at Butkara, Inv. no. 1186, shows the Great Departure on the right and the conception on the left (1964: pl. CDLIX, description by Taddei p. 140). The departure scene is considerably higher than the other scene, and it appears that it was part of a false window on the front side of the *stūpa*, possibly opposite an entrance leading to it. In fact, the Great Departure is frequently depicted on such window gables, such as the piece from Cleveland (Fig. 2). The Conception or Dream of Māyā represented to the left of the Great Departure then marks the actual beginning of the narrative cycle around the *stūpa*.

A three-scene frieze from a private collection, a photograph of which I was able to examine in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome ⁽³⁴⁾ can be interpreted in a similar way. The three scenes divided by columns represent in *pradakṣiṇa* (from right to left): veneration of a *stūpa*, veneration of a meditating Buddha and Conception or Dream of Māyā. One can reasonably suppose that the middle scene marks the front of the *stūpa*, where the *pradakṣiṇa* begins and ends. The other two scenes then would be the beginning (Conception) and the end of the narrative cycle unfolding around the *stūpa*.

⁽³²⁾ Asthana & Yaldiz 1992: no. 33; photograph MNAOr, Gandhāra 730.

⁽³³⁾ The scene is thought of as representing the *Maitrakanyakajātaka*.

⁽³⁴⁾ Photograph MNAOr, Gandhāra 1265, Neg. R 2493/1.



Fig. 7 - Narrative *stūpa* frieze with three scenes: Tuṣita heaven (?), Māyā's Dream and Interpretation of the Dream. (After Kurita 1988: no. 17).

More problematic is the interpretation of another three-scene frieze from a Japanese private collection published by Kurita (1988: no. 17), as it adds an unusual depiction in front of Māyā's Dream and the Interpretation of this dream (Fig. 7). In this scene a mustached figure, seated on a throne with the knees wide apart and heels touching each other, holds a bunch of flowers in his right hand. Two venerating male figures sitting in the same pose flank the main image. Schlingloff (2000: 304-307) suggests identifying the scene as representing the Bodhisattva in Tuṣita heaven ⁽³⁵⁾. Indeed, if this is a Tuṣita scene ⁽³⁶⁾, the unusual iconography of the main figure shows that the depiction of this topic was not yet well established ⁽³⁷⁾.

In this connection, it is a pity that the complete relief cycles on the *stūpa* of Loriyān Tangai and Gandhairi, today in the Indian Museum in Calcutta, have not yet been published properly. However, the description of one of them by Majumdar (1937: II, 116-17), as well as the partial publication of them by Foucher and others make it possible to reconstruct the narrative cycle depicted on the Loriyān Tangai *stūpa* ⁽³⁸⁾. On the square base of this *stūpa* are the following scenes: Māyā's Dream and the Interpretation of it (AGBG: I, fig. 160a, b; Franz 1978: abb. 22; Kurita 1988: no. 25); Birth and First Bath; Return to Kapilavastu and Asita (AGBG: I, figs. 71, 160c, d; Kurita 1988: no. 26); Great Departure and Farewell (AGBG: I, fig. 184a, b;

⁽³⁵⁾ Schlingloff concludes this simply from the succession of the scenes and notes that a flask is not visible in the other hand.

⁽³⁶⁾ I wonder if this scene should not rather be identified as representing King Śuddhodana with attendants. Note that the male figure in the Interpretation of the dream is depicted in a similar manner.

⁽³⁷⁾ The scene is reminiscent of the royal figure or Bodhisattva sitting cross-legged on a beautiful relief from Mardan, today in the Peshawar Museum (no. 13, old number 2067; see Kurita 1988: pl. IV).

⁽³⁸⁾ Sadly, on my visit to the museum in December 1999 the relevant gallery was not accessible. For a general view of the *stūpa* cf. Foucher (AGBG: I, fig. 71); Kurita 1988: no. 24.

Kurita 1988: no. 27). On the *stūpa* at Gandhairi, too, eight scenes of the Buddha's life are depicted on the square base; however, only four of these have been published: Dream of Māyā, Interpretation of the Dream (Nehru 1989: fig. 4); Return from Lumbinī, and Asita (Nehru 1989: fig. 4) ⁽³⁹⁾.

I think this survey is sufficient to prove that depictions of the Buddha's last life (and not of his spiritual career as a whole) in Gandharan art commonly commenced with Māyā's Dream. Furthermore, it shows that it is unlikely that Śākyamuni's stay in Tuṣita heaven was frequently depicted in Gandharan art.

Tuṣita Heaven

Dieter Schlingloff, in his most recent extensive publication on the narrative depictions in the Ajanta murals, generally considers the sojourn of the Bodhisattva in Tuṣita heaven as belonging to the oldest transmissions of the Buddha's life ⁽⁴⁰⁾ and accordingly identifies an extremely fragmentary scene of the murals in Cave 10 as representing this event ⁽⁴¹⁾. Indeed, the textual sources unanimously agree that before the Buddha-to-be is reborn for the final time he stays in Tuṣita heaven, from which he then descends. However, it is the descent that is accompanied by miraculous events and thus receives prominent attention in canonical Pāli literature ⁽⁴²⁾. Accordingly, it

⁽³⁹⁾ For a general view cf. Foucher, *AGBG*: I, fig. 72; Franz 1965: 148, 'today not to be found'; Tissot 1985: 170, pl. IX, fig. 1; Kurita 1990: no. 792, after another publication!

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Schlingloff (2000: 39-46) notes on p. 46 that the concept goes back to the time of king Aśoka as one of his edicts, the Bhabra or Calcutta-Bairāt Edict, mentions a text in which Śāriputra, a pupil of Buddha Śākyamuni, mentions his origin from Tuṣita heaven (cf. Norman 1992: 108-11, in particular verse 955). However, it is unclear whether the text mentioned in the edict is in fact the Śāriputta (Norman 1992: xxix-xxx) and even if it is, it tells us no more than what can be concluded from the textual sources and depictions alike, i.e., that the Buddha descended from Tuṣita heaven. In general, the attribution of the earliest Ajanta paintings (cave IX and X) to the 2nd century B.C., which is based on a statement by Lüders in a letter to Yazdani more than six decades ago (Schlingloff 2000: I, 15-16, II, 206 with reference to Yazdani 1941), is problematic. What can be seen of the paintings from the line drawings could well be as late as the early Kuṣāṇa period, a date that would provide a much better explanation of the existence of a narrative of the Buddha's life in eight succeeding scenes in a row, an arrangement that, as Taddei (1993, 1999) has shown, was probably only introduced with Gandharan narrative art.

⁽⁴¹⁾ The identification of scene 1 in this cave is far from being certain in my opinion, and the remaining fragments are too unspecific to prove any particular interpretation. If Schlingloff is right and the scenes represent the Buddha's life in chronological order to be read from left to right, it is the Dream of Māyā that would be depicted preceding the Birth rather than Tuṣita heaven. In fact, given the importance of this scene at other sites and the importance of the Descent in the textual sources, it is almost inconceivable that the Dream of Māyā was not depicted in cave 10.

⁽⁴²⁾ Cf. the *Acchariyabbhutadhammasutta* (Majjhimanikaya 123, transl. Horner 1967-76: 163-69) and the *Mahāpadānasutta* (Rhys Davids 1977: II, 1-41), the latter also being preserved in Sanskrit (Waldschmidt 1953). Cf. also the discussion on this matter in Windisch 1908: 6, 103-12.

is the Dream of Māyā that is depicted in earliest Buddhist art as, for example, on the east gateway of Sāñcī Stūpa 1 ⁽⁴³⁾.

Thus, the extant evidence indicates that in Gandharan art the depiction of the Buddha's last life usually begins with the Dream of Māyā. There is also no particular reason to assume that in Gandharan art Śākyamuni would be shown in Tuṣita heaven outside the narrative cycle of his last life ⁽⁴⁴⁾. Furthermore, none of the interpretations suggested so far offers any clues as to why in this scene, and only in this scene, Śākyamuni should hold a flask in his left hand. Thus, although the different interpretations all have their advantages, none of them is really convincing in the sense that they are explaining all peculiarities of the scene. Let us now turn to the Bodhisattva who commonly holds a flask.

MAITREYA

From the earliest depictions onwards the iconography of the Bodhisattva Maitreya is fairly consistent. In addition, there are a number of images from the Kuṣāṇa period that name the Bodhisattva. Particularly telling are the coins of Kaniṣka I showing a Bodhisattva seated on a throne and inscribed 'Mētrago Boudo'. This figure performs *abhayamudrā*, holds a flask (*kamaṇḍalu*) and wears 'earrings, necklaces and bracelets on wrist and upper arm' (Cribb 1980: 81; 1999/2000: 177) and has a nimbus ⁽⁴⁵⁾. On one coin type Maitreya is seated in a very unusual way and seems to be performing *dharmacakramudrā* (Huntington 1993; Tanabe 1993: 107). However, as Cribb (1999/2000: figs. 4-6) shows in his most recent study on the subject, this type also depicts Maitreya in his usual iconography ⁽⁴⁶⁾. For Cribb

⁽⁴³⁾ Schlingloff (2000: 46) also identifies a scene from Bharhut as representing the Bodhisattva in Tuṣita heaven following Lüder's interpretation of an accompanying (?) inscription. However, the interpretation of this inscription is far from being clear as it only mentions a descent.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Klimburg-Salter (1989) suggests such an iconic Tuṣita representation for certain Buddha depictions from Bāmiyān, which she interprets as the Buddha-to-Be Śākyamuni receiving an *abhiṣeka* in Tuṣita heaven. These Buddhas wear monastic dress, jewellery (including a crown) and a jewelled cape. They also have 'shoulder effulgences', hold a *pātra* and perform *vitarkamudrā* (Klimburg-Salter 1989: 200-202). However, her examples are from the Buddhist art of the Hindu Kush from the 7th-9th centuries and from Greater Kashmir of the 8th-10th centuries (*ibid.*: 99-104), and their interpretation is based on peculiar local circumstances. As far as the interpretation is concerned, it appears doubtful to me whether it is the Tuṣita heaven where the Bodhisattva receives his final *abhiṣeka* of the 10th *bhūmi* (*ibid.*: 101-102).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Lobo (1991: 101) mentions neither the Mathurā depictions of the seven Buddhas with Maitreya nor the coins. She understands a seated Bodhisattva with a flask as generally depicting a Future Buddha. Thereby she assumes that the earlier narrative scenes were understood as depicting Śākyamuni, while later, with the development of the Maitreya cult, it was Maitreya who was predominantly represented.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ I am very grateful to Joe Cribb for our discussion on this subject and the offprint of his article. Indeed, as will be shown in a more extensive publication on Maitreya in Gandhāra (cf. n. 4), there is no

(1980) the Buddhist images on the coins were based on already existing sculptures as they are represented frontally, in contrast to other gods depicted on coins ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Two early Maitreya images from the Mathurā school of sculpture, although of peripheral importance to our core topic, are noteworthy for their inscriptions. One is the fragmentary image of a seated Maitreya image holding a flask in his right hand from Girdharpur, Mathurā District ⁽⁴⁸⁾. The fragmentary inscription of the famous image of Ahicchatra ⁽⁴⁹⁾ even mentions Maitreya by name. One legible part of the caption reads: 'The image of Maitreya installed for the benefit and happiness off all beings' (Rosenfield 1967: 231). On stylistic grounds Rosenfield (1967: 231) holds this image to be contemporary or slightly older than the Dharmaguptaka fragment mentioned above ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Thus, the principal iconographic features of Maitreya are as follows: the Bodhisattva wears *paridhāna*, *uttariya*, some jewellery and a *yajñopavīta* ⁽⁵¹⁾ and has a clearly marked *ūrṇā*. His right hand is raised in *abhayamudrā* ⁽⁵²⁾ and his left hand holds the flask. When he is seated, the right hand holding the flask rests near his right knee. In addition the hair of the Bodhisattva is caught at the top in a large knot with braids lying on his shoulders, the head being surrounded by a nimbus.

Besides these more usual features Maurizio Taddei (1969: 378-81) established other significant details which support the identification of the Bodhisattva Maitreya in Gandharan art, such as the arrangement of the hair in a double-looped

indication that Maitreya was actually thought of as a Bodhisattva teaching in Tuṣita heaven by the 2nd century A.D.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ He is followed by Zeymal (1997: 249). Although Cribb may on principle be right on this point, his idea that the style of the Buddha and Bodhisattva images might originally be related to sculptures is rather optimistic in my view. This is particularly evident with regard to the Maitreya images, where the engravers had to depict a seated image in relief, which resulted in the legs being depicted in a peculiar way forming a triangle. Stylistically two types of Maitreya depictions can be differentiated among the coins: a more sophisticated round form with thick hair and huge top-knot (Cribb 1999/2000: figs. 1-3 and the majority of the dies) and an elongated more graphic form with a prominent nimbus (Cribb 1999/2000: figs. 4-6, pl. 5, nos. 83, 85-88). Neither of these forms are found as such among the sculptures.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ An inscription on the pedestal reads: 'In the year 29 of the Mahārāja Huvishka, first month of the rainy season, first day; on that day [as specified above] this image was installed by Karaṭita [a resident] of Āraki in the [...] *vihāra* for the acceptance of the Dharmaguptikas [sic] for the welfare of all beings' (Rosenfield 1967: 229-30). According to Rosenfield (*ibid.*: 230, n. 61) the Dharmaguptaka were strong supporters of the cult of the Bodhisattvas and added a Bodhisattvapīṭaka to their Tripiṭaka in honour of this class of deity.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ This image was found in 1940 in the wall of a local temple at Ramnagar (ancient Ahicchatra).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ There also exists a Gandharan sculpture with an inscription mentioning Maitreya (Mukherjee 1993), but I have not seen a picture of it.

⁽⁵¹⁾ According to Kim (1997: 35) this is not generally the case, although it would be logical for Maitreya to wear the sacred thread.

⁽⁵²⁾ The earliest image may have its hand turned slightly inwards in a gesture Härtel (1985) calls *vyavṛtṭya*.

topknot with a pear-shaped jewel at the centre of the knot (⁵³). Sometimes a crescent-shaped ornament refers to the lunar character of Maitreya (Taddei 1969: 380-81; Bussagli 1992). As a variant to *abhayamudrā* Maitreya may also perform a gesture where the right hand is raised to the shoulder with the palm turned inward. This gesture is identified as a gesture 'of subordination and deference' (Taddei 1969: 375) (⁵⁴). Like the flask in his right hand this gesture refers to the final birth of Maitreya into a Brahman family. It also is a regular feature in depictions of Brahmans in Gandharan art.

The Seven Buddhas and Maitreya

The notion that another Buddha will follow Buddha Śākyamuni can be seen as a logical result of the tradition that Buddha Śākyamuni had several predecessors. This tradition already resulted in a major cult at the time of Maurya King Asoka (Aśoka), who was consecrated in 268-267 B.C. As mentioned in two of his inscriptions, Aśoka (10th and 12th year of his reign) visited and extended the *stūpa* of Buddha Kanakamuni/Koāgamana, one of Śākyamuni's predecessors.

A group of seven 'historical' Buddhas with Śākyamuni as the last Buddha is already present in earliest Indian Buddhist art. In these depictions the Buddhas are represented by their respective trees of enlightenment (the east gate at Sāñcī, uppermost architrave). The seven Buddhas of the past are also mentioned in the canonical literature of the Theravāda. The *Mahāpadānasuttanta* (MASu), which also is preserved in Sanskrit (*Mahāvādānasūtra*, ed. Waldschmidt 1953), declares the events in a Buddha's last life all follow a common principle. These lives only differ as to their circumstances (average life span, location, caste etc.), and the text thus only relates the life of a Buddha (from the Descent from Tuṣita heaven to the First

(⁵³) In the earliest depiction the hair-knot was possibly meant as the *uṣṇīṣa* and thus as a Buddha's hairstyle, as proposed by Kim (1997: 33-43).

(⁵⁴) As Taddei points out, this gesture is also displayed by ascetics and Brahmā, and confirms the close link between Brahmā, the brahmanic caste and Maitreya, who will ultimately be born in this caste. On a stele from Sahrī Bahlol (Peshawar Museum, no.158) both Brahmā and Maitreya are shown performing this *mudrā* of deference (Ingholt 1957: no. 254). The flask and the topknot, as already established by Foucher, are also common to both (AGBG: II, 218, 226-27). Huntington (1972: 91) quoting Bhattacharya (1968: 437) calls this gesture *namaskāramudrā*. However, this seems to be a misunderstanding on Huntington's part, as it is said, and he even quotes it, that in this *mudrā* the palm is turned *upwards* and not towards the shoulder (cf. de Mallmann 1986: 34, pl. II.5). Lacking a convincing name for it, I shall call it the '*mudrā* of deference'. The same *mudrā* was used by Huntington (1972) to prove that some of these images represent Avalokiteśvara. As he is concluding retrospectively from more recent Kashmiri bronzes to Gandhāra, and finally even makes the flask an exclusive sign of Avalokiteśvara, his conclusion is misleading. It shows, however, earlier examples of the interdependent influence of the iconographies of Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, which are characteristic of late Buddhist art in India and reflected in early West Tibetan art.

Sermon) according to the example of the first of the seven Buddhas, Vipaśyin/Vipassin. It is important to note that neither this text nor the *Acchariyabbhutadhammasutta* (ABSu), which relates the Life of a Buddha from the Rebirth in Tuṣita heaven to the events after the Birth and can also be seen as valid for all Buddhas alike (Windisch 1908: 103-105) ⁽⁵⁵⁾, narrates details regarding the sojourn in Tuṣita and the descent from it (Windisch 1908: 6, 104-105). Not even the Dream of queen Māyā occurs there as such ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Still at an early stage the future Buddha is identified with a certain Maitreya, whose name occasionally occurs in different canonical stories ⁽⁵⁷⁾. At the end of the *Cakkavattisihanādasuttanta* (CSSu 1977: 72-74), again part of the Pāli canonical literature, the world in which Maitreya/Metteyya attains Buddhahood is described. At that time people will live 80,000 years and a King called Śaṅkha/Sankha will reign in the royal city Ketumatī ⁽⁵⁸⁾. In his last life Maitreya will of course undergo the same events as his predecessors. The prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) of a future Buddha Maitreya occurs in many texts across all sects and does not vary to any great extent as regards the main content (cf. Lamotte 1988 [1958]: 701-702 [777-79]).

The popularity of these prediction texts is the result of the common religious practice to generate the wish to be reborn on earth during the age when Maitreya attains Buddhahood. In addition, the birth of Maitreya in the city of Ketumatī will herald a paradisiacal age where people do not have to work and live in harmony with one another. It is not uncommon in Theravāda countries even today for people to pray in front of a Buddha sculpture to be reborn when Maitreya descends to attain enlightenment (cf. Williams 1989: 228; Carter 1993: 145). This goal in the veneration of Maitreya is apparently the earliest form of the Maitreya cult. It is no coincidence that both the old and new Buddhist schools alike exhibit features of this cult. Even after the development of the Tuṣita cults mentioned below, this cult apparently remained the most common practice.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Windisch discusses each sentence of the ABSu in the following chapters (107-137) and compares them with other texts relating the Buddha's life (Nd, MV, LV).

⁽⁵⁶⁾ The texts mainly concentrate on the miraculous events accompanying the Descent, particularly the radiance lighting the whole universe (Windisch 1908: 110-12); MASu (Waldschmidt 1953: 18; 1977: II, 9).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ See, for example, Lamotte (1988 [1958]: 699-701 [775-77]) for the Indian sources and Chavannes (1962) for stories connected with Maitreya in the Chinese Tripiṭaka. Regarding Lamotte's *Histoire du Bouddhisme* I refer to the updated English version of 1988 with the page references of the French version [Lamotte, 1958 #1426] added in brackets.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ In this story there is no connection made between Maitreya and a listener in the assembly, nor is it said specifically that Maitreya will be the next Buddha after Śākyamuni. However, the latter may well be inferred.

It is unclear whether or not the notion of the *present* sojourn of Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven was already established in early Kuṣāṇa times. It certainly did not exist at the very beginning of Maitreya's history. By contrast, in its earliest stages Maitreya was likely to be thought of being on the arduous Bodhisattva path, collecting merit through endless rebirths like Śākyamuni ⁽⁵⁹⁾. His coming was predicted in an age in the very distant future where people live to the age of 80,000. This of course also means that Maitreya was thought of from the very beginning as already existing in some rebirth and practising the Bodhisattva's path ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

Nevertheless, at a certain stage during the Kuṣāṇa epoch Maitreya was thought of as sojourning in Tuṣita heaven at the present time and awaiting his rebirth. This notion had already found its way into the earliest Mahāyāna scriptures, e.g. the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, where Bodhisattvas are classified into four categories, the last of which is to be 'separated from Buddhahood by only one existence (*ekajātīpratibaddha*)' (Lamotte 1998: 43). Although not specified as such, this implies that a Bodhisattva of this kind is already awaiting his final birth in Tuṣita heaven. It was then just a matter of time before this notion was connected with Maitreya.

Not only could one now pray to be reborn in Maitreya's Tuṣita heaven once he was thought of as being already reborn there; Maitreya was now immediately accessible to devout believers and for current religious issues. As Rosenfield (1967: 231, n. 63) puts it:

Maitreya, as Śākyamuni's designated successor, remained an identifiable divine force, active or immanent in the affairs of men, residing in the proximate realm of the Tuṣita Paradise, satisfying the popular need that the source of the Dharma be more than a vanished mortal whose memory each day receded deeper into irretrievable past.

This shift is most evident in the many stories describing the visits made by an *arhat* to Maitreya's heaven. The most well known of these is the story of the colossal Bodhisattva image at Darel, which is said to have marked the beginning of the Buddhist conquest of Eastern Asia. According to Faxian, the image at Darel was erected some three hundred years after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha by an *arhat*, a woodcarver, who ascended to Tuṣita three times to observe the size, colour and appearance of Maitreya Bodhisattva.

Given the large number of Maitreya sculptures and relief panels in Gandharan art and the evidence briefly summarized above, it is clear that in Kuṣāṇa times two

⁽⁵⁹⁾ On possible traces in the textual sources concerning early stages in Maitreya's career cf. Jaini 1988: 56-59.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Cf. Williams 1989: 228. For example, it is clear that at the time and in the religious milieu the *Mahāvastu* was written, the presence of Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven had not yet been established.

cults of Maitreya were established. There is neither textual nor art-historical evidence that these Maitreya cults spread beyond the Kuṣāṇa era and realm on the Indian subcontinent ⁽⁶¹⁾. In fact it disappeared and was replaced throughout India by the more general concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

THE FUTURE LIFE OF MAITREYA

Now to return to our key pieces, where a scene similar to depictions identified as Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven occurs in the context of the life of a Buddha. Indeed, the scene on the Guimet panel clearly displays paradise elements in the isolation of the main image in a central structure flanked by balconies. On the other hand, the Cleveland stele places the scene under discussion in a clear context between the Birth and the Great Departure. It is not necessarily a court scene, as the architectural framing used in the Great Departure scenes has not been used.

As Kim (1997: 110, n. 96) has stated:

[...] the scenes could possibly represent Maitreya's earthly life which is identical to that of Śākyamuni Buddha.

However, while he does not follow up this question, despite referring to the narration of this Buddha's life in the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* literature, I think it is indeed a viable alternative. Following the *Mahāpadanasutta* which teaches that all the Buddhas undergo a similar final existence, the same events are seen to be true for Maitreya as well, and an abridged version of the Life was included in the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* literature. The narration of Maitreya's life is already found in the earliest Chinese version, the translation of which is attributed to Dharmarakṣa (T 453, translated between 265 and 316) ⁽⁶²⁾.

The advantages of such an interpretation are obvious, as it resolves most of the contradictions in the previous interpretations. As the Cleveland example shows, the second scene may functionally have served as a marker identifying the future life of Maitreya (Fig. 2). Iconographically it is a reference to the fortunate age into which Maitreya is supposed to be born. Maitreya, seated frontally in *dhyānāsana* at the centre, is surrounded by the fortunate inhabitants of Ketumatī who can spend their time discussing religious matters. Maitreya is venerated due to the excellent signs with which he has been born. The scene can also be read as referring to the episode of the jewelled seat which Maitreya received from King Śaṅkha and gave to the Brahmans. By dividing the seat among themselves the Brahmans reminded Maitreya of the impermanence of all things and provoked his Great Departure. In the Guimet

⁽⁶¹⁾ On Maitreya cults in different Asian countries cf. Sponberg & Hardacre 1988.

⁽⁶²⁾ It is possibly this text that is translated by Watanabe in Leumann 1919: 245-54.

example (Fig. 1) the paradisiacal nature of Ketumatī is particularly emphasized by the addition of a roof under which Maitreya is seated, as well as the flanking balconies.

On the other hand, this means that representations of Tuṣita heaven and Ketumatī can hardly be differentiated on iconographic grounds. Scenes with the Bodhisattva seated in meditation can be interpreted as Tuṣita and Ketumatī alike if the context does not favour one of the interpretations. Ketumatī is thus only identifiable in the context of the narrative depictions of a Buddha's life, and these are few and far between.

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MAURIZIO TADDEI

This volume is dedicated in commemoration
of the 5th anniversary of His Parinirvāṇa
February 5, 2000

Edited by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Anna Filigenzi

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