

The Story of the Conversion of Nanda in Borobudur

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The methods established for the identification of Indian Buddhist narrative reliefs and paintings are not suitable for the identification of the reliefs in Borobudur. The methods are based on the belief that the ancient artists constructed images using the same logic as the one we use today to understand them and therefore, that paying attention to tiny details in a relief or painting is the key to understanding the whole piece. The difficulties in identifying the reliefs in Borobudur result partly from the fact that it is often not possible to attribute any meaning to details, since the artists might have followed a textual tradition erroneously or might have imitated visual originals incorrectly (BROWN 1994). Moreover, people and buildings are depicted in Borobudur according to convention and inconsistently: the same person may look quite different in one scene than in another. The logic of composition is far from our own: much space is devoted to scenes of little importance to the plot (such as conversations or processions), whereas the most essential events are presented briefly or are not shown at all, particularly if they are violent or brutal. Finally, visual anticipations or anachronisms make the proper interpretation of reliefs problematic. A famous example of an element of narration which occurs anachronistically is that of the hunter in the relief from the *Sudhanāvadāna* who is wearing splendid clothes he has not yet even been given by the Nāga king (FONTEIN 2000: 5). Due to the difficulties described above, which clearly indicate the limitations of our perception of narrative art developed according to a different logic, numerous reliefs in Borobudur still remain unidentified.

The first gallery in Borobudur on the stūpa side displays two rows of reliefs, the lower one (Ib) depicts several *avadānas*, the upper one (Ia) the story of the Buddha according to the *Lalitavistara*. Each sequence consists of 120 reliefs. On the balustrade side of the gallery there are also two rows of reliefs depicting *jātakas* and *avadānas*. The lower sequence (I B.b) consists of 128 reliefs, the upper one (I B.a) of as many as 372.

We can be sure about the identification of the first 135 of the 372 reliefs of the upper row which

illustrate all 34 stories of the *Jātakamālā* of the poet Āryaśura. As far as the remaining 237 reliefs of this row are concerned, only a tiny proportion of them have been identified. Reliefs No. I B.a 241 and No. I B.a 371 present a wishing tree¹ and, as KROM (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Vol. 1: 400) points out, these reliefs may constitute a division between one series of tales and another. If this observation is correct, there are 156 reliefs illustrating a text between the two wishing trees.²

The argument that the reliefs between the wishing trees depict one collection of stories is supported by the fact that the reliefs have a specific character. For instance, none of the reliefs contain scenes depicting animals in main roles, and there are some scenes of an identifiable character (i.e. Nos. I B.a 259-261 represent Kubera and No. I B.a 291 the seven jewels of the Cakravartin). What is very typical of the entire series is that there are numerous scenes of monks and a lot of the Buddha himself. KROM (*ibid.*: 401) states: “Perhaps we ought to say ‘a’ Buddha considering the possibility that Buddhas before the time of Śākyamuni or even Pratyekabuddhas may be meant. This fact of the appearance of a Buddha is something that distinguishes the series of reliefs mentioned not only from those before, but at the same time from all the other series that are given to *jātakas* and *avadānas*.”

Certainly, KROM's argument that these reliefs represent ‘a’ Buddha cannot be completely disregarded. It should be pointed out that the depictions of the/a Buddha in the section under consideration are of two types. In the first, the Buddha sits on a lotus cushion with his hands in the *vitarkamudrā* and is worshipped by heavenly beings on the clouds. Such Buddhas occur in as many as 13 reliefs (Nos. I B.a 235, 239, 246?, 252, 256, 264, 303, 311, 320, 324, 328, 358 [or 353], 362) and each

1 No. I B.a 214, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 24, Vol. 4: 186 and No. I B.a 371, *ibid.* Pl. 42, Vol. 4: 204.

2 The very last relief of the gallery, the No. I B.a 372, has been identified as the story of the hermit, the dove, the raven, the snake and the deer (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: 431). It does not belong to the sequence between the two wishing trees and is not considered here.



Fig. 1 Borobudur, Java, reliefs on the balustrade side of the first gallery, upper sequence, Nos. I B.a 250 (right side), 251, 252, 253, 254 (left side), after KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 29-30

each scene is complemented by worshippers turning towards it, occupying one or more neighbouring reliefs on each side (Fig. 1)³. The meaning of such scenes – if they are anything more than just the worshipping of the teaching Buddha – will probably remain unknown. KROM's postulate that they are representations of 'a' Buddha still seems to be possible. What we may exclude is the fact that these could be Pratyekabuddhas since it is known (recently GAIL: 2003 with references) that a Pratyekabuddha does not teach, thus he cannot be shown giving a sermon or in the presence of monks. The *vitaktamudrā* replaces the *dharmacakramudrā* in Borobudur and, for example, is depicted in the scene of the First Sermon of the Buddha Śākyamuni.⁴ The scenes of worship like the ones presented in Fig. 1 occupy approximately 50 reliefs out of the series of 156 between the wishing trees (providing a more precise number is impossible due to the fact that the reliefs are frequently divided into two parts thematically and some pieces were possibly put on wrong places), there are thus still approximately 100 reliefs in the series under analysis that do not belong to such scenes.

The second type of representation of the Buddha in this series of reliefs does not fit the scheme above: the Buddha is presented not as the object of worship but as a person participating actively in the plot. This means that these reliefs are visual representations of the stories in which the Buddha takes part, i.e. which belong to the Buddha vita. Certainly, they may still be depictions of 'a' Buddha but the presence of monks here excludes the possibility that they are stories involving Pratyekabuddhas, and the range of themes from the life of Buddhas of former epochs is limited. Thus it must be our Buddha Śākyamuni. There are seven

scenes in which the Buddha takes an active part (Nos. I B.a 316, 342, 343, 345, 347, 349 and 353), and six of them (the exception is No. 316) are located close to one another and apparently belong to the same story.

It seems that this story embracing the reliefs from No. I B.a 339 to at least No. 350 – as presented in a drawing (Fig. 2)⁵ made on the basis of KROM / VAN ERP (actually the Indian reprint of it) – can be identified. Among the reliefs, there is one scene so characteristic that it would be emblematic of the whole story even if it were not accompanied by others. The relief (Fig. 3 = No. I B.a 345)⁶ depicts the Buddha who is followed by a lavishly dressed man carrying the monk's alms bowl.⁷ The motif is widely known and is frequently represented in India, in Amaravati, Nagarjunikonda, Gandhara and Ajanta: this is a story about Nanda.⁸

Nanda's story must have been extremely popular in its time as it is preserved in numerous versions.⁹

⁵ KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 38-39, Vol. 4: 200-201 The reliefs 341 (right-hand side), 342, 343, 344, 345 are also depicted in NAMIKAWA, B. (et al.) 1971: 80-81.

⁶ KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 39, Vol. 4: 201

⁷ KROM (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: 418): "... the Buddha is again seen walking, followed directly by a man dressed like a king and holding a filled-up alms bowl to him; ..."

⁸ For a list of all known representations of the story together with drawings cf. ZIN 2006: 187-191.

⁹ For references cf. SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No. 73, p. 420 and ZIN 2006: 171-177, the most important are: Pali: *Theragāthā* 157-158, ed. p. 21; transl. with commentary p. 127; *Paramatthadīpanī*, *Theragāthāṭṭhakathā* 139, ed. Vol. 2, pp. 31-34, transl. pp. 126-127; *Udāna* III.2, ed. pp. 21-24, transl. pp. 27-32; *Paramatthadīpanī*, *Udānaṭṭhakathā*, ed. pp. 168-179, transl. pp. 449-64; *Nidānakathā*, ed. p. 91, transl. p. 123; *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 115-125, transl. Vol. 1, pp. 217-228; *Paramatthajotikā*, *Suttanipāṭaṭṭhakathā*, ed. Vol. 1, p. 273; *Manorathapūraṇī*, *Aṅguttaranikāyaṭṭhakathā* I.XIV.8, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 315-318; *Saṅgāmāvacarajātaka*, No. 182, ed. Vol. 2, p. 92, transl. p. 63; Sanskrit: *Saundarananda*; *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* X, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 85-95; Chin.: *T 125* (*Tsen yi a han king*, *Ekottarāgama*), ch. 9, ed. Vol. 2, pp. 591a-592a, transl. HUYEN-VI / PASADIKKA, in: *Buddhist Studies Review*, 13.1, 1966, pp.55-66; *T 190* (*Fo pen hing tsi king*, *Abhiṅṣkramaṇasūtra*), ch. 50, ed. Vol. 3,

³ KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 29-30, Vol. 4: 190-91. A section on the right-hand side of No 254a belongs to a similar scene of worship further to the right.

⁴ No. I a 120, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 60, Vol. 3:102. For the possible special role of the *vitarkamudrā* in Borobudur cf. BOELES 1985 and FONTEIN 1991: 134.



Fig. 2 Reliefs nos. I B.a 339-351, after KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 38-39



Fig. 3 Relief no. I B.a 345, reproduced from KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31, Pl. 39

pp. 911b-914b, transl. BEAL 1875: 369-376; T 203 (*Tsa pao tsang king*), Nr. 96, ch. 8, ed. Vol. 4, pp. 485c-486c, trad. CHAVANNES 1910-34, Vol. 3, pp.87-94; T 1451 (*Ken pen chouo yi ts'ie yeou pou ni t'o no mou tö kia, Mūlasarvāstī-vādinayaksudrakavastu*), ch. 11, ed. Vol. 24, p. 251a-b; Tib.: *Mūlasarvāstīvādinaya*, ed. 44,47.5.3, analys. PANG-LUNG 1981: 175-176, cf. ROCKHILL 1884: 55; for another Tib. version cf. SCHIEFNER 1851: 265-267.



Fig. 4 Amaravati, Madras Government Museum. Photo: author's archive

It can be told briefly as follows: during a visit to his home town of Kapilavastu the Buddha persuades his half-brother Nanda to leave his beloved wife and join the order. The Buddha achieves this by giving Nanda his alms bowl to carry; Nanda does not dare put the bowl away or give it to someone else and so follows the Buddha to the monastery. Nanda, however, does not want to stay in the cloister because he misses his wife and is unhappy. In order to help Nanda overcome his sensual passion for a woman, the Buddha takes Nanda to the Trayastriṃśa Heaven. On the way there, in the Himalaya, they see a female monkey, while, on reaching heaven, the Buddha shows Nanda beautiful Apsarasas. The Buddha then asks Nanda if his wife is more beautiful than them and Nanda answers that his wife bears the same relation to Apsarasas as the monkey does to her. Back down on earth Nanda leads a religious life so that he will be worthy of Apsarasas in his next life. Having been taught about the transience of everything he meditates in order to achieve enlightenment; he succeeds in doing so and becomes an arhat after which the Buddha sends him to Kapilavastu to teach.

The story is, without doubt, very old, as the stanzas referring to Nanda in the *Theragāthā* (cf. Fn. 9) allude to the Buddha using a skilful method (*upāyakusala*) to lead Nanda out of his earlier sensual life (*kāmarāga*) and a more developed version of the story is found already in canonical literature (*Udāna*).

The versions of the Nanda story can be divided into two groups: Those known from Pali literature

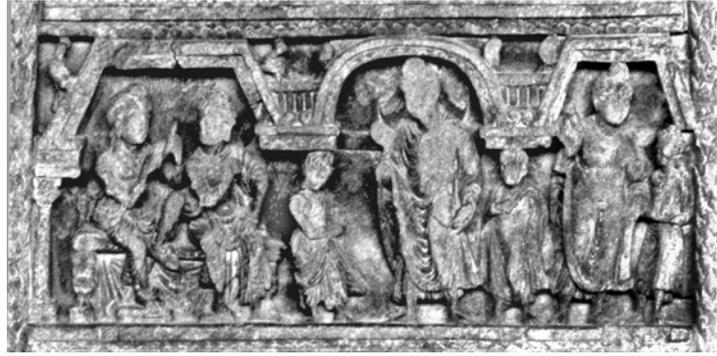


Fig. 5 Gandhara, Karachi, National Museum. Photo: author's archive

state that Nanda's wife, called here *Janapadakalyāṇī*, 'beauty of the country' was standing at the window with half-combed hair when Nanda followed the Buddha to the monastery. The retellings in Pali often say that the whole story took place on the day of Nanda's wedding. Other versions, known from the 'northern' sources in Sanskrit and translations into Chinese and Tibetan, do not mention either the wedding or the woman's position at the window with half-combed hair. In these tellings Nanda leaves his wife, often referred to as *Sundarī*, and promises to come back before her make-up dries. In the most famous version of the story, the poem *Saundarananda* of Aśvaghōṣa, Nanda is holding a mirror in front of *Sundarī* and she is putting her make-up on when Nanda leaves her. Aśvaghōṣa recounts that just then the Buddha comes to the door and the servants do not give him anything to eat, merely informing their master and mistress of what has happened. Nanda, on hearing this, runs out into the street to catch up with the Buddha and is given the Buddha's alms bowl to carry.

There is only one representation in visual art of *Janapadakalyāṇī* standing in the window with her hair flowing, this is in a badly preserved relief from Amaravati.¹⁰ The remaining reliefs, both from the south (Fig. 4)¹¹ and from the north (Fig. 5)¹² depict

¹⁰ Amaravati, Madras Government Museum, ill.: SIVARAMAMURTI 1942, Pl. 62.1; RAO 1984, Fig. 252; ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 183.

¹¹ Amaravati, Madras Government Museum, ill.: BURGESS 1887, Pl. 41.5; BACHHOFER 1929, Pl. 128; STERN/BÉNISTI 1961, Pl. 76; same scene in several other reliefs, e.g. in British Museum, Nos. 70 and 79, ill.: KNOX 1992, Fig. 69 and 72.

¹² Gandhara, Karachi, National Museum, ill.: KURITA 1988-90, Vol. 1, Fig. 318; S.A.A.P.C. I-1209.11: 26. Index and good quality reproductions of many reliefs in QUAGLIOTTI 2000-01.



Fig. 6 Ajanta, Cave XVI, left side-wall, reproduced from the copy by GRIFFITHS

Sundarī putting her make-up on or having her hair dressed by her servant. In the mural at Ajanta, which relates to the version of the legend according to Aśvaghōṣa (SCHLINGLOFF 1975 = 1987: 49-58; 2000: No. 73, pp. 415-426, especially p. 423), the make-up scene has unfortunately not been preserved. However, the mural does show (Fig. 6)¹³ the Buddha standing with his alms bowl in the company of another monk – depicted here with *uṣṇīṣa* (ZIN 2003) – in front of Nanda's house, where the servants worship the Buddha but do not give him anything to eat.

The same scene can be found in Borobudur (Fig. 7)¹⁴: the Buddha and the accompanying monk, (both of them have alms bowls and the neighbouring scene [No. I B.a 344; cf. Fig. 2] shows monks requesting alms) are worshipped by two people of lower status while the inhabitants inside the house on the left do not pay any attention to the honourable guest.¹⁵ The man, identifiable as

¹³ Ajanta, Cave XVI, left side-wall, Copy: GRIFFITHS 16A1, Victoria & Albert Museum, photo of the copy, *ibid.* No. 76-1887, India Office, Vol. 71, No. 6012; ill.: YAZDANI 1930-55, Vol. 3, Pl. 53; TAKATA 2000, Vol. 3, Pl. C.16-7b; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No. 73[3], Vol. 2, p. 81 (drawing).

¹⁴ No. I B.a 343, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 39, Vol. 4: 201.

¹⁵ KROM (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: 418): “No.343 shows a space inside a palisade, where a man in official dress is sitting with a woman and a waiting maid; outside, against the fence, a man in court-dress is kneeling and a Brahman or lower-class man (it is not easy to decide which), is standing, both with hands raised in *sembah*, holding a bud or fruit as turning towards the Buddha who is approaching, together

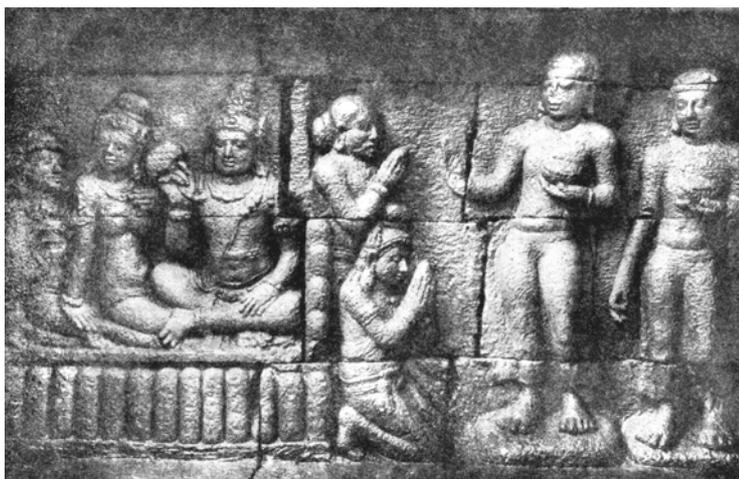


Fig. 7 No. I B.a 343, reproduced from KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 39

Nanda, is holding a round object in front of the woman's face.

The situation is described in the IV. Canto of the *Saundarananda*. It reads as follows (IV.20, 24-25)¹⁶:

“Then looking repeatedly at the face of her husband who had the mirror in his hand, she completed the painting on her cheek, the surface of which was wet from the *tamāla* leaf. (...) When Nanda was thus taking his delight inside his palace, which was like palace of the gods, the Tathāgata, whose time for begging had come, entered his house in search of alms. He stood in His brother's house, just as He would have in any other house, with downcast gaze and making no request for alms; then as the negligence of the servants led to His receiving nothing He went away again.”

The round object in the hand of the man depicted in Borobudur must be the mirror but, clearly, this has not been understood by the artist.

In the subsequent reliefs in Borobudur there is a continuation of Nanda's story that is similar to the Indian depictions. In these Indian representations

with a monk. Both carry an alms bowl, the master has his right hand raised.”

¹⁶ *Saundarananda* IV.20, 24-25, ed. pp. 25-26, transl. p. 22: *paṭyus tato darpaṇasaktapāṇer muhur muhur vaktram avekṣamāṇā/ tamālapatrārdratāle kapole samāpayām āsa viśeṣakam tat// (...)* *vimānakalye sa vimānagarbhe tatas tathā caiva nananda Nandaḥ/ Tathāgataś cāgatabhaiḥśakālo bhaiḥśāya tasya praviveśa veśma// avāṇmukho niṣpraṇayaś ca tasthau bhrātur gr̥he 'nyasya gr̥he yathaiiva/ tasmād atho preṣyajanapramādād bhikṣām alabdḥvaiva punar jagāma//*



Fig. 8 Nagarjunikonda, Site 3 (?), Nagarjunikonda Museum, Acc. No. 42. Photo: author's archive



Fig. 9 Goli, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mus. Nr. 30.29. Photo: author's archive



Fig. 10 Ajanta, Cave XVI, left side wall, reproduced from the copy by GRIFFITHS



Fig. 11 Goli, reproduced from ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 249

in Nagarjunikonda (Fig. 8)¹⁷, Goli (Fig. 9)¹⁸ or Ajanta (Fig. 10)¹⁹, the Buddha and Nanda are shown flying to heaven. During their flight, in the Himalayas, they see a monkey and later, in Indra's Heaven, Apsarasas (Fig. 11)²⁰.

The sculptor in Borobudur selected a mixture of narrative elements and showed the Buddha and Nanda not flying but standing (Fig. 12)²¹. That this scene is a depiction of the way to heaven, rather than heaven itself, is indicated by the absence of Indra and Apsarasas; moreover, among the rocks inhabited by Ṛṣis and a Yakṣa there is a monkey.

Saundarananda states (X.5-6, 14-15)²²:

“Quickly they came to Mount Himavat, supremely fragrant with deodars, possessing many rivers, lakes and torrents, full of gold ore and of divine seers. Arriving there they stood, as on an island of the unsupported

17 Nagarjunikonda, Site 3 (?), Nagarjunikonda Museum, Acc. No. 42, ill.: VOGEL 1930, Pl. 2a; LONGHURST 1938, Pl. 35a; RAY 1965, Fig. 19; SIVARAMAMURTI 1975, Fig. 327; RAO 1984, Fig. 376; ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 176, 179; RAMA 1995, Pl. 28; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No.73 [4], Vol. 2, p. 81 (drawing).

18 Goli, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mus. Nr. 30.29, ill.: MITRA 1971, Fig. 128 (right); RAO 1984, Fig. 435-436; ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 185, 250; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No.73 [3], Vol. 2, p. 81 (drawing).

19 Ajanta, Cave XVI, left side wall, Copy: GRIFFITHS 16A1, Victoria & Albert Museum, photo of the copy, *ibid.* No. 76-1887, India Office, Vol. 71, No. 6012; ill.: YAZDANI 1930-55, Vol. 3, Pl. 53; TAKATA 2000, Vol. 3, Pl. C.16-7f; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No. 73[10], Vol. 2, p. 83 (drawing). The flight of the Buddha and Nanda to heaven is also depicted in one relief in Gandhara ([Sahri Bahlol], Peshawar Museum, Mus.Nr. 152+153 [980], ill.: INGHOLT 1957, Fig. 94; SEHRAI 1985, Fig. 59 [mirror-inverted]; KURITA 1988-90, Vol. 1, Fig. 324; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No.73 [6], Vol. 2, p. 83 [drawing]); unfortunately the relief has suffered considerable damage and the monkey is not preserved.

20 Goli, cf. Fn. 18; RAO 1984, Fig. 435; ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 249.

21 No. I.B.a 347, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 39, Vol. 4: 201.

22 *Saundarananda* X.5-6, 14-15, ed. pp. 66-67, transl. pp. 54-56: *tau devadārūttamagandhavantaṃ nadīsaṃhprasavaṇaughavantaṃ/ ājagmatuḥ kāñcanadhātumantaṃ devaṛṣimantaṃ himavantam āśu// tasmīn girau cāraṇasiddhajaṣṭe śive havirdhūmakṛttotarīye/ āgamyā pārasya nirāśrayasya tau tashatur dvīpa ivāmbarsya// (...)* *nagānnagasyopari devadārūn āyāsayantaḥ kapayo viceruḥ/ tebhyaḥ phalaṃ nāpurato 'pajagmur modhaprasādebhya ivesvarebhyah// tasmāt tu yūthād apasāryamānāṃ niṣpīḍitālaktakaraktavaktrām/ śākhāmṛgīm ekavipannarṣṭīm dṛṣṭvā munir Nandam idaṃ babhāṣe//*

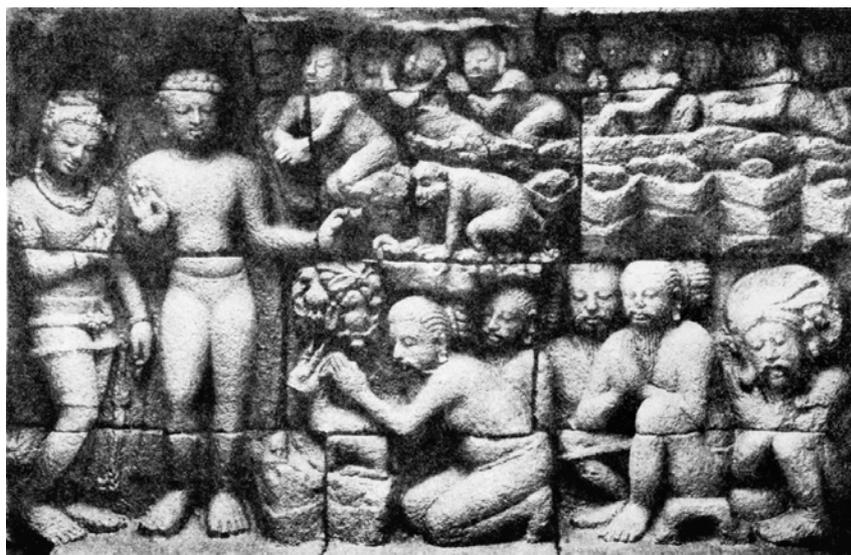


Fig. 12
No. 1 B.a 347,
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KROM / VAN ERP
1927-31: Pl. 39

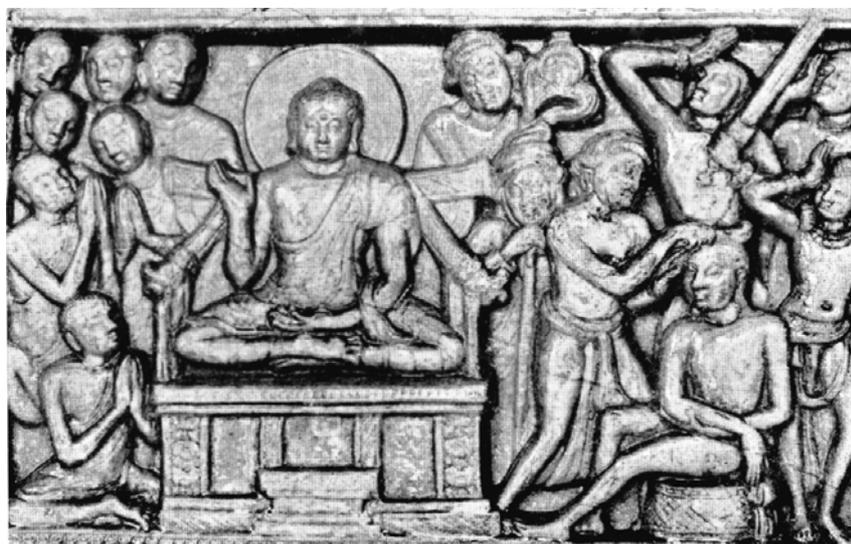


Fig. 13
Nagarjunikonda,
Nagarjunakonda
Museum. Photo:
author's archive

sky, on that holy mountain of the dwelling-less end of the world, which was frequented by Cāraṇas and Siddhas and was clad with the smoke of oblations. (...) Monkeys wandered along the mountains, keeping the deodars in perpetual commotion, and finding they bore no fruit departed from them, as from rich men whose favour is empty of gifts. The Sage saw in that herd a female monkey, with one eye gone and its face red as if lac had been pressed on it (...)."

The Borobudur relief represents the flight: in the upper part of the relief some of the characters (possibly Cāraṇas and Siddhas from the *Saundara-nanda*) are represented as flying. What makes an identification of the scene difficult is the fact that – contrary to Indian depictions – Nanda is shown here not as a monk but, similarly to the previous scenes,

as a prince.²³ This is obviously one of the ‘anachronisms’ typical of the Borobudur artists. Furthermore, the artists have not even attempted to represent the ordination of Nanda as it was frequently depicted in India (Fig. 13)²⁴ by means of showing

²³ KROM (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: 418): “On no.347 the Buddha appears again standing in the company of a royal personage with a halo, god or Bodhisattva. Most of the relief is taken by the worshippers. Above, there are a company of heavenly beings on clouds; below in the midst of a rocky wildness, are animals, a monkey, a pair of birds in a tree and a deer, placed too much in the foreground to be intended for decoration; they are surely members of the audience; finally on level ground, some hermits and a yakṣa quite in the corner. The hermits do not wear their hair in the usual twisted-up knot but have it brushed back smoothly and then fastened together.”

²⁴ Nagarjunikonda, cf. Fn. 17; ROSEN STONE 1994, Fig. 178; RAMA 1995, Pl. 27. The shaving of Nanda’s head is also presented in the relief from Goli in N.Y. (cf. Fn. 18), in several reliefs in Gandhara (in a relief from Takht i Bahi, ill.:



Fig. 14 No. I B.a 348, reproduced from KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 39



Fig. 15 No. I B.a 349, *ibid.*, Pl. 40



Fig. 16 No. I B.a 350, *ibid.*, Pl. 40

the shaving of his head. All the events in the monastery are commented on only by means of stereotypical representations of the monastery (No. I B.a 346, cf. Fig. 2). In Borobudur, Nanda still looks like a prince not only during the flight to heaven but also during his sojourn there: in the next scene (Fig. 14)²⁵ he can be seen meeting the Apsarasas.

The scenes which follow this one in Borobudur do not have any equivalent in Indian depictions, however they can be easily found in the literary versions of the story. The first of the reliefs (Fig. 15)²⁶ shows the Buddha with his hands in the *vitarkamudrā*. This scene is different from the ones of adoration analysed above (cf. Fig. 1), since the worshippers as well as the heavenly beings are missing from it. The relief represents a sermon, given not to the congregation but – in the context of our story – to Nanda.

The literary equivalent of this scene can be found in the *Saundarananda*, where after the return from heaven, the Buddha for a long time systematically presents his teaching to Nanda.²⁷ The result

of this instruction can be seen in the next relief (Fig. 16)²⁸ showing the meditating monk²⁹ who is Nanda.

According to the *Saundarananda* (XVII.1-4)³⁰: “So Nanda was thus instructed in the path to reality and then, entering the Path of Salvation, he did reverence to the Guru with all his heart and departed to the forest to eliminate the vices. There he saw a quiet glade in a group of trees with soft *dūrvā* grass and surrounded by a stream running noiselessly with water blue as beryl. There by the clean, auspicious and splendid root of a tree, after bathing his feet and putting on the girdle of resolution for Salvation, he took up the Yogin's posture, bent over his lap.”

The Borobudur artist seems to have attempted to show the meditation of Nanda in a place of seclusion in the forest by depicting trees and hares around the monk.

It is not possible to identify precisely what is depicted in the reliefs that follow in Borobudur, as

SPOONER 1922-23, Pl. 10a; in a relief from Jamal Garhi, in Indian Museum, Calcutta, G 11 [A23282], ill.: BURGESS 1897-1911, Vol. 1, Pl. 102, Fig. 1; FOUCHER 1905-51, Vol. 1, Fig. 238; MARSHALL 1960, Fig. 116; KURITA 1988-90, Vol. 1, Fig. 323; SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No. 73 [9], Vol. 2, p. 83 [drawing]; S.A.A.P.C. I-1232.2: 11; in a relief in the National Museum in New Delhi, No. 68.174, ill.: FOUCHER, *ibid.*, Fig. 237; ASTHANA 1991, Pl. 88.2; SCHLINGLOFF, [5], *ibid.*, p. 82 [drawing]; in a relief in a private collection in Japan, ill.: KURITA 1988-90, Vol. 1, Pl. P3-IV; SCHLINGLOFF, [14], *ibid.* [drawing] and in Ajanta, cf. Fn. 19, copy: *ibid.*; ill.: YAZDANI 1930-55, Pl. 54; SINGH 1965, Pl. 62, GHOSH 1967, Pl. 66; TAKATA 1971, Pl. 20; OKADA/NOU 1991: 27; TAKATA 2000, Pl. C.16-7d-e; SCHLINGLOFF, *ibid.*, No. 73(7).

²⁵ No. I B.a 348, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 39, Vol. 4: 201.

²⁶ No. I B.a 349, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 40, Vol. 4: 202.

²⁷ In *Saundarananda* Nanda asks the Buddha for instruction and the Buddha praises him for this (Canto XII), and then gives a sermon which embraces Canto XIII-XVI (ed. pp. 85-124, transl. pp. 69-100).

²⁸ No. I B.a 350, KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: Pl. 40, Vol. 4: 202.

²⁹ KROM (KROM / VAN ERP 1927-31: 419): “On no. 350 between two trees, a monk sits on a lotus cushion in *dhyānamudrā*; he has lost the top of his head, so we can not see if he wore a *uṣṇīṣa* and is intended for a Buddha, but the outline where it is broken off looks as if there had been no *uṣṇīṣa* and besides there is no halo. On both sides of him sits a hare, while more to the right is a water jug and left an incense-burner.”

³⁰ *Saundarananda* XVII.1-4, ed. p. 125, transl. p. 101: *athaivam ādeśitatattvamārgo Nandas tadā prāptavimokṣamārgaḥ/sarveṇa bhāvena gūrau praṇamya kleśaprahāṇāya vanam jagāma// tatrāvakaśam mṛdunīlaśaṣpaṃ dadaṛṣa sāntam taruṣaṇḍavantam/niḥśabdayā nimnagayopagūḍham vaidūryanīlodakayā vahantya// sa pādayas tatra vidhāya śaucaṃ śucau śive śrīmati vṛkṣamūle/ mokṣāya baddhvā vyavasāyakaṣāṃ paryaṅkam aṅkāvahitam babandha// rjūṃ samagram praṇidhāya kāyaṃ kāye smṛtiṃ cābhimukhīm vidhāya/sarvendriyāny ātmani saṃnidhāya sa tatra yogaṃ prayataḥ prapede//*

they are incomplete and their sequence is uncertain. What is striking is a great number of monks who appear in Nos. I B.a 351-358. According to the story, Nanda achieves the arhatship, so this, No. I B.a 351 (cf. Fig. 2), may be a depiction of monks listening to his sermon. Thus it is likely that the monk – that is Nanda after the enlightenment – was instructing them from the pedestal in the unreserved part of the relief on the right. SCHLINGLOFF (1987: 56) writes about the representation of the Nanda painting in Ajanta: “Depicting Nanda’s spiritual struggle for salvation, to which the poet devoted several cantos, was beyond the expressive skills of the pictorial artist” – the artist from Borobudur succeeded in showing this process by depicting Nanda first as a meditating monk in the wilderness and then being adored by other monks.

It seems that the reliefs placed in the beginning of the series, starting from No. I B.a 339 (cf. Fig. 2), most probably belong to the history about Nanda. In the first of them (Nos. 339-340), a man is worshipped and in the second a woman, and these may be treated as depictions of the main characters, Nanda and Sundarī. The next two reliefs (Nos. 341-342) represent a council before the Buddha’s sermon and later the sermon itself. The artist also here indicates that it cannot be a scene similar to our Fig. 1 by means of a lack of heavenly beings worshipping in the sky and also the asymmetry of depiction. It is thus likely that the Buddha’s sermon presented here took place in Kapilavastu, before the episode with Nanda.

The *Saundarananda* (IV.1) states³¹:

“But Nanda remained in his palace with his mistress, absorbed in love, though the Sage was expounding the Law there and his kinsfolk were proving their reverence for the Law.”

This sermon is also presented at Ajanta (SCHLINGLOFF 2000, No. 73[1]).

All the evidence points to the conclusion that the version of the Nanda story which was known to the artist in Borobudur was the *Saundarananda*. It may be assumed on the basis of *argumentum ex silentio* that in Borobudur events described in other versions of the story (e.g. the wedding of Nanda, his wife standing in the window, Nanda’s attempts to escape from the monastery, a female monkey described as burned and sitting in the burned-out forest, or Nanda’s trip to hell) are not present but the lack of these scenes in Borobudur might be

attributed to several reasons. The affiliation between the Borobudur reliefs and the poem of Aśvaghōṣa is proven by scene No. I B.a 343 (our Fig. 7) showing the Buddha in front of the house in which Nanda and Sundarī are busy with make-up as this has its only counterpart in the version of Aśvaghōṣa (cf. Fn. 16), as does the Buddha’s sermon in Kapilavastu (No. I B.a 342) (cf. Fn. 31) and the Buddha’s sermon for Nanda (cf. Fn. 30) (No. I B.a 349, our Fig. 15). Indeed, it would be rather illogical not to present this sermon when it occupies as many as four Cantos in the Aśvaghōṣa’s poem (cf. Fn. 27).

The Borobudur artist applied his own methods and did not hesitate to depict Nanda as a prince in two scenes, in which – according to the story – he was already a monk. The artist probably wanted the viewer to recognise Nanda from the preceding scenes. One fact seems to be absolutely certain: the artist from Borobudur knew the story of Nanda well, he had a knowledge of the lovers’ game, which caused the servants not to give any food to the Buddha, he knew about carrying the alms bowl, Nanda’s sojourn in the monastery, his visit to heaven, the monkey in the Himalaya, the Buddha’s sermon and the enlightenment of Nanda. All of these events were depicted by the artist in chronological order but in, what is for us, a rather inconsistent way, thus making it hard to identify the reliefs. If it were not for our difficulties with accepting this kind of reasoning, numerous further stories in Borobudur could be identified.

The story of Nanda idealises the concept of arhatship. The main message of the story is the abandonment of secular life for the sake of meditation in a monastery and the attainment of perfection and individual enlightenment. The fact that the story appeared in Borobudur, a Mahāyāna sanctuary, proves that the popularity of the masterpiece of the great Aśvaghōṣa was more important than the ideology.

The above considerations call into question KROM’s statement that one text is presented between reliefs No. I B.a 241 and No. 371 depicting the wishing trees. Of course, it is still a possibility that the story of Nanda in the version of Aśvaghōṣa was incorporated in a collection of stories that is unknown today. Nowadays it seems, however, that the series of reliefs was composed thematically, and that the stories of monks (or arhats) play a role in the selection. The Buddha appearing in the series is not ‘a’ Buddha, but the Buddha Śākyamuni.

³¹ *Saundarananda* IV.1, ed. p. 23, transl. p. 20: *sunau bruvāṇe ‘pi tu tatra dharmam dharmam prati jñātiṣu cādṛteṣu/ prāsā-dasamstho madanaikakāryaḥ priyāsahāyo vijahāra Nandaḥ//*

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