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The Identification of Kizil Paintings VI

Monika Zin

The previous articles in this series, all of which appeared in the *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift*, dealt with stories of the young man **Yaśa** and the brahmin **Mākandika** (*IAZ* 9); stories of the child **Sudāya** and the potter **Bṛhaddyuti** (*IAZ* 11); the “cutting (of a bunch) of reeds” (*kalamacchedya*) episode from the Bodhisatva’s youth and the story of the brahmin **Sundarika-Bhāradvāja** (*IAZ* 12); they also dealt with the narrative of the sinful monk **Kapila** and the promises of the **Four Kings** to protect monks and lay-followers against malevolent demons (*IAZ* 14), with the pictorial programme of a **Painted dome from Simsim** and the story of the Nāga king **Elapatra** which is depicted both on the dome and also quite frequently in the paintings of the Kucha region (*IAZ* 15).

11. The Descent of the Buddha from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven of the god Indra

Several fragments of paintings from the Kucha region, kept in the study collection of the Asian Art Museum in Berlin, have not been published so far. In this paper, two of them will be published (**Figs. 1 and 6**), explained and set off against comparable depictions. The paintings had once decorated Cave 184 (Drittletzte Höhle/Third-last Cave) in Kizil; they were brought to Berlin by the 4th Prussian Expedition (1913-14). Both paintings are of the same size – approximately 90 cm long – and apparently belong together. As we shall see, comparative representations from Cave No. 189 in the vicinity show both scenes as counterparts.

Among the mandatory requirements in the life of every Buddha¹⁾ is the instruction he should teach his parents the *dharma*. Another rule requires that the mother of the Buddha dies seven days after giving birth.²⁾ As per these rules, the Buddha Śākyamuni, like every other Buddha, had to ascend to the Heaven of the god Indra, known as Trāyastriṃśa or [Heaven of] the Thirty-Three [Gods] – where his mother Māyā was re-born – in order to deliver his sermons there.

Perhaps it was filial piety that made the narrative so attractive, or perhaps it was the supremacy of the Buddha

who instructs the gods. The fact is that the story was popular and had been depicted since the earliest phase of Buddhist art in Bharhut and Sanchi, and later in the entire Buddhist world.³⁾ What the representations show is, for the most part, the descent of the Buddha from heaven. Here, special importance was given to the descent on the triple staircase or ladder, shown propped against Mount Sumeru and planted on the Earth in the vicinity of the city of Sāmkāśya, with the result it can even be presumed that the descent and the flights of stairs were the most important elements of the entire story. The inscription labelling the event, represented on one of the huge reliefs on the newly discovered *stūpa* at Kanaganahalli in Karnataka, refers to it as *devadaraṇo*,⁴⁾ *devāvatāraṇa*, the descent of the Buddha (from the heaven of the gods). The Buddha descended, accompanied by the gods. Several texts emphatically stated that the gods and the people could see each other⁵⁾ – which appears to be important for

1) So-called *avaśyakaraṇīyas*; cf. e.g. *Divyāvadāna* XII, ed. p. 150, transl. p. 258.

2) *Dīghanikāya* XIV.15.22, ed. Vol. 2, p. 14; transl. pp. 10-11.

3) For relevant literary sources and depictions in art cf. SCHLINGLOFF 2000, 1: 476-515, Nos. 84-87; *ibid.* for references to previous research; for drawings of several comparable depictions, see *ibid.*, 2: 95-99; for more recent research cf. SKILLING 2008, STRONG 2010 and 2012, ANĀLAYO 2012.

4) Excavation No. 26; for a short introduction on Kanaganahalli cf. ZIN 2011a.

5) E.g. the *Dhammapadāṭṭhakathā* (XIV.2, ed. p. 226; transl. Vol. 3, p. 53): *devā manusse passi su manussāpi deve passi su*; “Gods looked upon men, and men looked upon gods”, or the *Divyāvadāna* (ed. p. 401): *deva-manuṣya-sampad*; cf. SCHLINGLOFF (forthcoming): 19 and fn. 44.



Fig. 1 Kizil, Cave 184 (Drittletzte Höhle), Asian Art Museum, Berlin, Inv.No. III 525. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst. Photograph by Jürgen Liepe

the narrative. The stairway serves as a bridge between Heaven and Earth.

That such an event, popular in all the schools of art, is only rarely identifiable in the paintings of the Silk Road – as we shall see, representations of this event are very few – might be linked to the fact that the lowest part of the standing Buddha figures is often damaged. But once the iconography is identified, the scene will perhaps be found in other paintings too.

The first of our pictures in the study collection of the Asian Art Museum in Berlin⁶⁾ (**Fig. 1**) (cf. ‘List of paintings under discussion’ at the end of this paper) represents the descent of the Buddha from Indra’s heaven. It shows a standing Buddha encircled by two characteristic nimbi, the one around his head, and the other, mandorla-like, around his body. The nimbi are contoured by several bands in different colours. It may be presumed that the colours as they exist today do not reflect the original programme of the painter. The outer band – black – must have been light and bright, perhaps yellow, since flames radiating from the jewel in the upper right corner have also been painted in the same colour. Contrary to reality, the hair of the Buddha as we see it today is white. The painting must have originally been executed in bright colours, the background being red decorated with blue flowers.

Only the right hand of the Buddha is still preserved. He is holding it in front of his chest, the palm turned outward, with thumb and index finger touching each other – apparently to symbolize the Buddha discoursing.

The iconographic feature, mentioned earlier, that allows the incident from the Buddha’s life to be easily identified are the three stairways that appear behind the Buddha’s legs. The middle one is dark brown today, the ones on the side blue. It is usual in the paintings of the Kucha region for architectural structures to be represented on an entirely different scale, that is, much smaller than human figures. But it is not just here that the figure represented looks as if it is hovering over diminutive architectural devices.⁷⁾ We should therefore regard the Buddha as descending the stairs, not flying down. The diminutive size of the stairways had however made it impossible to represent the gods accompanying the Buddha on his way down to Earth.

Familiarity with the narrative makes it possible to recognize the figures represented in the lower part of the picture on both sides of the stairs. To the viewer’s left, a male figure dressed in a blue garment and green shawl is kneeling. His head has not been preserved, so it is not

6) I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Lilla Russel-Smith and the entire team of the Museum for giving me access to the study collection and archives, and providing me with excellent photos of the paintings.

7) Compare e.g. Maitrakanyaka descending the stairs in the depiction from Kizil Cave 212 (Seefahrerhöhle), illustrated in GRÜNWEDEL 1920: pls. 19-20 (left side).



Fig. 2 Simsim, Cave 48, lunette. After Kuche Kumtula Shiku 1994: fig. 179



Fig. 3 Simsim, Cave 48, lunette. After Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci 2008: fig. 305

possible to say if he was wearing a crown, but the ornaments on his body suggest that he was a person of rank, perhaps a king. The man is holding an oval-shaped object, black today, but originally no doubt light in colour. The narrative recounts that the first image of the Buddha was created during his sojourn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, in order that the people have an image of “the Buddha” to worship. Tradition credits King Prasenajit or King Udayana with the creation of the first image.⁸⁾ Even if there are no lines visible on the black oval today, the shape is so like the mandorla that the interpretation of the object as the representation of the Buddha image appears highly plausible.⁹⁾

In the lower right corner kneels a monastic figure clad in a green robe. As we will see, a similar depiction elsewhere shows the figure to be a nun, which is probably the case here too. Nuns were represented clad in an undergarment covering their upper body up to the neck.¹⁰⁾ At first glance the kneeling figure in our painting appears to have the right shoulder bare; there are, however, delicate lines forming a chequered pattern covering the right arm and the chest. It appears as if the painter realized, rather

late, that he was supposed to paint a female figure and added the pattern suggestive of the undergarment. Two animals behind the nun, an elephant and a horse, are the key to her identification. The narrative of the descent of the Buddha from the Heaven of the Trāyastriṃśa Gods contains a section on the nun Utpalavarṇā. Utpalavarṇā came too late, after a huge crowd of people had already gathered, expecting the Buddha in the vicinity of Sāṃkāśya. She therefore transformed herself into a *cakravartin* king, and the people let her take her place in the first row, as the *cakravartin* king is known to be in the possession of the Seven Jewels (*sapta ratnāni*). The Jewel of the Elephant (*gaja-ratna*) and the Jewel of the Horse (*aśva-ratna*) are among them. The imagery of the Seven Jewels was known in Kucha since they were represented on the ceiling of Cave No. 123.¹¹⁾

In both upper corners of the picture, a round disc and a cross-shaped flaming jewel appear; these are two more jewels possessed by the *cakravartin*: the Jewel of the Wheel (*cakra-ratna*) and the Jewel of the Gem (*maṇi-ratna*).

In the Gandharan relief from Zar-dheri,¹²⁾ all seven Jewels are represented beside the stairs, alongside the

8) Cf. SOPER 1959: 259-265, and CARTER 1990.

9) Cf. representations of the Buddha painting a picture of himself (as e.g. in the vault of Cave No. 34 – for an excellent illustration, see *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua*: Qiuci 2008: 57, fig. 166) – here, just the oval of the mandorla is visible.

10) In the paintings of Ajanta too, it is sometimes possible to identify the nuns; cf. ZIN 2003: 307.

11) Cave 123 (Höhle mit den ringtragenden Tauben), today in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin, Inv.No. III 9061a, illustrated e.g. in LECOQ/WALDSCHMIDT 1933: 57, pl. 23 and fig. 39; XU (*et al.*) 1983-85, 3: fig. 204; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China* 2009, 3: 82.

12) Illustrated e.g. in *Gandhara* 2008: 310-311.



Fig. 4 Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn), front wall, left from entrance. After XU (et al.) 1983-85, 3: fig. 77



Fig. 5 Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn), front and left wall. After XU (et al.) 1983-85, 3: fig. 64

descending Buddha. Apart from the jewels mentioned above, there are also the Jewel of the Wife (*strī-ratna*), the Jewel of the Citizen (*grhapati-ratna*) and the Jewel of the General (*nāyaka-ratna*).¹³

That the painting in the study collection is a depiction of the descent of the Buddha from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is confirmed by a picture in the lunette of cave No. 48 in Simsim, which is far better executed, fairly well-preserved and therefore readily identifiable (Fig. 2-3).¹⁴ The monastic figure depicted here is easily identifiable as a nun by her robe that covers the chest right up to the neck. Under the feet of the Buddha, lotus flowers are visible; behind them appears the triple-stairway which is

represented here in three colours: brown in the middle, green on the viewer's left and blue-grey on the right. As the texts state, the stairways were made out of three different materials: crystal, beryl and gold (cf. STRONG 2010: 971f.); the painter was apparently intent on representing them differently. Also in the Simsim painting, to the viewer's left, kneels a king (Prasenajit or Udayana); he holds an oval object, apparently an image of the Buddha. Represented behind the king and the nun are the Seven Jewels. On the right, the elephant and the horse are clearly visible, but there are also two other figures there: the upper figure, of whom only the bluish coat is visible on the dark photograph, has a military appearance – it probably represents the Jewel of the General. Behind the nun kneels a male figure with curly hair holding a tablet with offerings: the Jewel of the Citizen.¹⁵ The figure's complexion is blue, just like the complexion of the woman – the Jewel of the Wife – on the other side of the composition. In this way the painter distinguished between the Jewels and the “real” persons – the Buddha, the king, and the nun – whose skin tone is natural. Even if not recog-

¹³) The Ajanta painting illustrating the event differs from this: Utpalavarṇā is shown transformed into a *cakravartin* – she is riding the elephant surrounded by the retinue to which belong personifications of treasures and dwarfs carrying standards with *cakra* and *ratna*. Utpalavarṇā in Ajanta is not shown as a nun; she wears rich jewellery and a crown, but her breasts are very visible; cf. SCHLINGLOFF 2000: 486; ZIN 2003: 211.

¹⁴) The picture is identified in *Kuche Kumtula Shiku* 1994: 304, fig. 179, as per the story in T 99. The kneeling monastic figure is said to be Mahāmaudgalyāyana. In the book the elephant and the horse are recognized as the Jewels, but the person behind is explained as the representative of “the four groups of the Buddha's followers: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen”.

¹⁵) Compare a very similar man with curly blue hair holding a tablet in the painting with the Seven Jewels in cave 123 (cf. fn. 11); the person was explained by GRÜNWEDEL (1912: 123, fig. 273) to be a female servant.

nizable in the illustration, we can be sure that the Jewel of the Wheel and the Jewel of the Gem were depicted in the upper part of the picture.

The same scene may be recognized in yet another representation, namely in Cave No. 189 in Kizil (**Fig. 4**).¹⁶⁾ On the right side of the picture, above the cut-off fragment which must have borne the depiction of a nun, we can see a man with curly hair, kneeling and holding a tablet; a knight with a blue face, also kneeling; and a lady – all three are *ratnas* (the Jewel of the Citizen, the Jewel of the General and the Jewel of the Wife). On the right edge, remnants of white paint are visible, possibly denoting the figure of the elephant. Still visible are traces of the stairs on both sides of the (now destroyed) feet of the Buddha: on one side green, on the other blue, with the upper part of the flaming jewel to one side. The explanation of the scene as the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is corroborated by the detail on the left side of the picture: Like in both previous paintings, here too we find a male figure kneeling and holding an oval object in the shape of the mandorla surrounding the images of the Buddha. The object here is white, and it looks like it is even possible to recognize the circle of the nimbus around the standing Buddha in the upper part of the picture.

Looking at the images showing a part of the cave's narrative programme (**Fig. 5**) it becomes clear that our scene (**Fig. 4**), placed between the first sermon to the right and the *parinirvāṇa* above the door, is among the important events in the life of the Buddha.

As for the narrative programme of Cave 184, it may be presumed – in the context of the miracle-performing nun – that this perhaps has a connection with the *arhats*. Several standing monks have been depicted in the cave.¹⁷⁾

12. Crossing of the River Gaṅgā – The Legend of the Umbrellas

In the second painting from the study collection of the Asian Art Museum in Berlin (**Fig. 6**), the upper part of the Buddha has been destroyed. What survives shows that

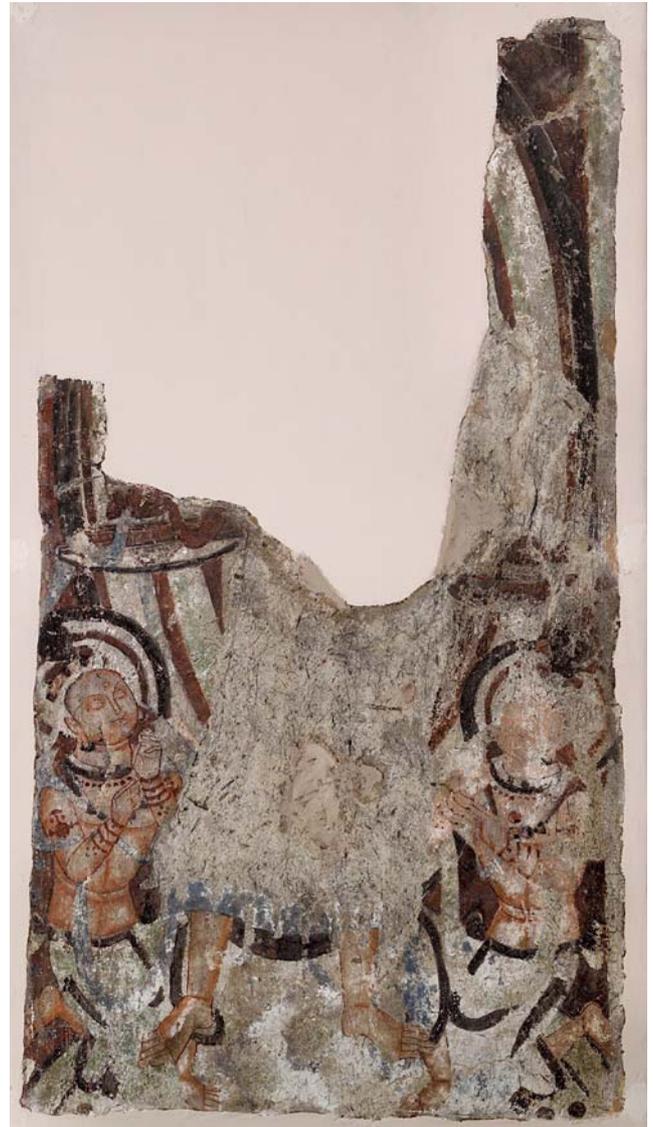


Fig. 6 Kizil, Cave 184 (Drittletzte Höhle), Asian Art Museum, Berlin, Inv.No. III 526. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst. Photograph by Jürgen Liepe

the colours of the mandorla have undergone the same chemical change as the painting in **Fig. 1**: the outer stripe is black today. The figure of the Buddha must have been represented in a very similar way, i.e. he is standing, as if floating, on an object represented beneath his feet. The object seen here is however not a stairway but something disc-like, whose edges have turned black but whose inner surface is blue. Unfortunately this part of the painting was destroyed and repainted in such a way that it is very difficult to identify the original painting. One can still see a loop under the right heel of the Buddha and a tiny black

¹⁶⁾ *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci* (2008: fig. 166) and *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China* (2009: 200-201) identify pictures as representing the descent from Heaven; the *ratnas* are not named.

¹⁷⁾ Paintings from Cave 184 were brought to Berlin (IB 8445 and 8448) during the 3rd Prussian Expedition; they have however been lost since; cf. *Verlust-Katalog* 2002: 146-147.



Fig. 7 Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn), right and front wall. After XU (et al.) 1983-85, 3: fig. 63

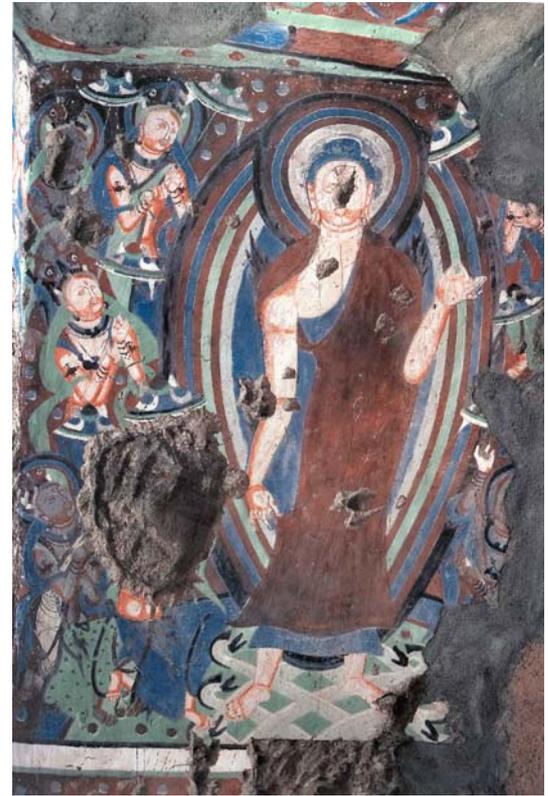


Fig. 8 Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn), front wall, right from entrance. After Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci 2008: fig. 168

stripe by the toes of his left foot. Something seems to have been represented here which has been lost to us today. The object on which the Buddha is standing must have been floating in the air, since the legs of two figures kneeling on both sides are visible beneath it. Both figures are shown kneeling on another round object, half of which is represented in the picture: it is green and surrounded by a likewise green band; in the middle of the picture, other round forms appear. The object undoubtedly represents a water tank filled with lotus flowers which, in Kizil, may well represent the ocean or simply a pond. Both persons kneeling on either side of the water tank are male, richly ornamented, with nimbi around their heads, indicating that they are men of high rank, or gods. Both hold umbrellas beautifully decorated with bands – or rather: the umbrellas appear above them and they hold their hands in such a way as if to suggest they are carrying the staffs, which are not (and never were) represented. We will never know if the missing staffs were intentionally left out or if the painter just forgot to draw them.

The offering of an umbrella is quite a popular motif in the paintings of the Kucha region. As KONCZAK has

recently shown, the theme should be understood as the forerunner of a motif of the so-called “Prajñādhī scenes” in which a king is offering an umbrella to one of the Buddhas of the past, while at the same time articulating his resolve to become the Buddha himself.¹⁸⁾ In such paintings, however, there appear not two kings but only one, and the water tank is not represented.

Both these features, the depiction of the water tank and more than just one umbrella, constitute the iconographic peculiarities of the scene.

Interestingly, the same elements are also repeated in the cave which we have already discussed as providing a comparable representation: the same scene is represented on another side of the door opening in Cave 189 (Fig. 7), providing a counterpart to the representation of the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (cf. Figs. 4-5).

This picture (Fig. 8) is bigger and far better executed than the representation in the study collection; it is also better preserved. The figure of the Buddha has clearly

¹⁸⁾ KONCZAK (forthcoming), chapter 3.1.4.7 „Das Bildmotiv eines Königs, der dem Buddha einen Schirm darbringt“.

identifiable flames issuing forth from the shoulders, which generally symbolize meditation: whatever the Buddha is doing here, he does it in the state of *samādhi*.¹⁹⁾

The round water tank is also depicted here; the inner part with lotus flowers is green, while the outer band is blue. An enlargement of the picture clearly reveals that the entire inner surface is covered with spiral lines indicating water. On the surface of the water too, we have two male persons of rank kneeling, both holding umbrellas. To the viewers left, there are four more figures shown holding umbrellas; on the right there are only two. The wall on this side is destroyed, so it looks like here too a larger number of persons were originally depicted – the total number of umbrellas probably being ten. The Buddha is standing on a mat woven by the bodies of six snakes.

Finally, one more illustration of what looks to be the same narrative may be perused here: the painting in Kumtura, Cave 23 (Fig. 9). The painting is located on the front wall, to the left of the entrance. The wall on the other side of the doorway is destroyed, but a tiny strip of the uppermost part of the picture is still preserved.²⁰⁾ Different as in the previously mentioned pictures showing the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (Figs. 1-5), the triple stairway was shown here in the upper part of the representation and is still visible in the preserved section of the painting, thereby clearly indicating that, here too, both representations were conceived as counterparts.

The iconography of the scene can hardly be understood without earlier examples. The Buddha, with nimbus and mandorla, holds his hands in front of his chest; the flames appear not only above his shoulders but also on either side of his hips. Under his feet white and black lines appear which criss-cross at right-angles on a green background – only a comparison with Fig. 8 makes us realize that the white and black lines must be snakes above the water. Here in Kumtura too, male persons holding umbrellas kneel on both sides of the Buddha. One more umbrella is seen in the upper part of the picture, above the Buddha.

The Buddha, held aloft by Nāgas, reminds us of the Great Miracle of Śrāvastī, and this is how the scene is explained in Chinese publications. The Miracle of Śrāvastī is however depicted with a fixed iconography

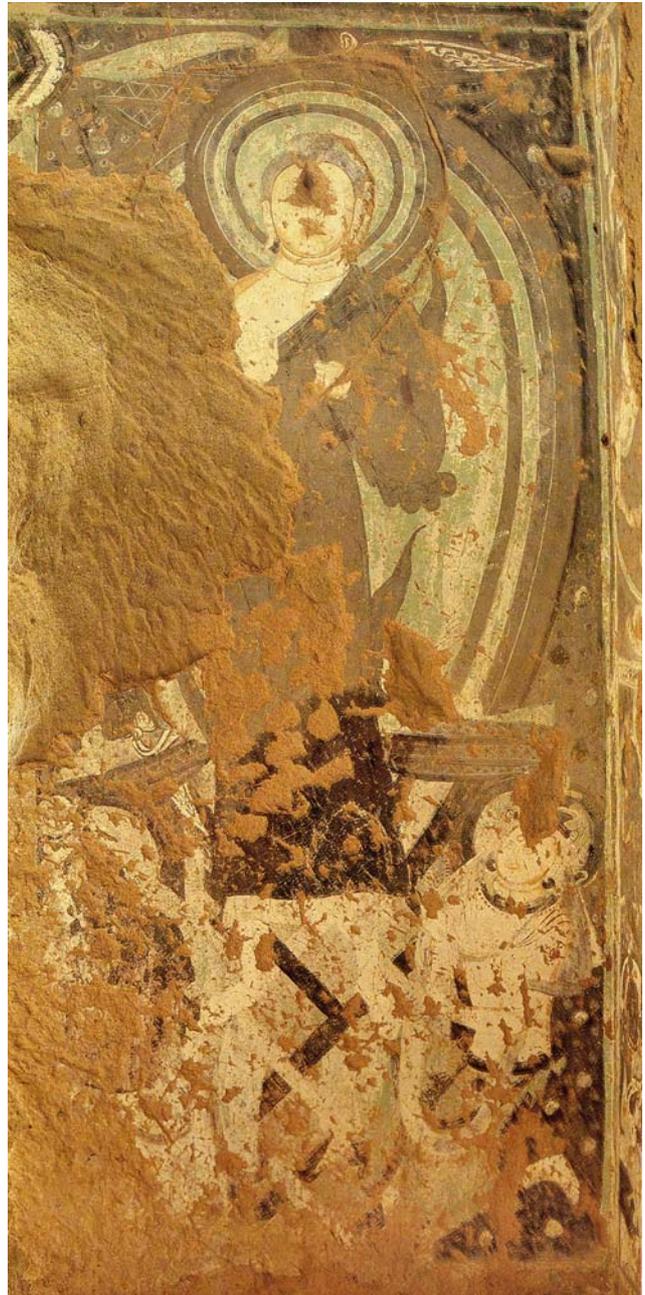


Fig. 9 Kumtura, Cave 23, front wall, left from entrance. After ZHAO (et al.) 1985: fig. 53

showing tiny Buddha figures in the mandorla,²¹⁾ so that the interpretation does not stand up to scrutiny.

Rather, what the picture shows is that the Nāgas carry the Buddha over the water tank; alternatively, he could be

19) For such an interpretation of flames in Buddhist art, cf. STACHE-WEISKE 1990.

20) Visible in ZHAO (et al.) 1985: fig. 52, above the doorway, left.

21) For literary sources and analysis cf. SCHLINGLOFF 1991 and 2000, 1: 488-515, nos. 88-92; comparable pictorial material in Vol. 2: 100-105; on Kucha see p. 105; cf. colossal Buddha representations from Rawak bearing the same iconography, illustrated in YALDIZ 1987: figs. 130-131.

standing on their bodies floating above the water – which brings to mind the narrative of the crossing of the River Ganges, a motif that appears several times in Buddhist scriptures. The most famous example is the narrative included in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Here, the Buddha is crossing the Ganges in the vicinity of Pāṭaligrāma (the future Pāṭaliputra).²²⁾ The narrative, as known from the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* or the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, cannot be taken as the likely basis for the painting, since the texts do not mention the Nāgas. Rather, in this case, the Buddha flies across to the other side of the river. The iconography following this version was established in Gandhara and Kizil.²³⁾

There is, however, a version of the same narrative of the crossing of the Ganges that relates the events differently; it is the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*. The story is not preserved any longer in the Sanskrit original, but in Chinese translation.²⁴⁾ The Sanskrit original has however survived in the collection of stories in the *Divyāvadāna*,²⁵⁾ where it was incorporated into another narrative, namely the legend of the future Buddha Maitreya.²⁶⁾

In the story there are two bridges made up of boats (*naukrama*) built by humans, one by king Ajātaśatru and another by the people of Vaiśālī, and a bridge built by the Nāgas which they fashion out of their own bodies – the *phaṇasaṃkrama* (or snake-hood bridge).²⁷⁾ The Buddha

allows the monks to use the bridges constructed by humans; but he himself, accompanied by Ānanda, takes the bridge fashioned by the Nāgas.²⁸⁾

The narrative as it came down to us in the *Maitreyāvādāna* of the *Divyāvadāna*, also known from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (preserved in Tibetan today),²⁹⁾ was definitely not the basis for our painting, since the text does not mention the umbrellas, while the representation of several umbrellas has been given importance in our paintings.³⁰⁾

The motif of the umbrellas, through which the Buddha is worshipped during the crossing of the Ganges, did not find its way to the *Divyāvadāna*; however, it was known in the original *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (cf. fn. 24).³¹⁾ This motif too survived not only in

Ajātaśatru (...), the son of Queen Videhī, had a bridge of boats constructed for his mother and father, then the Licchavis of Vaiśālī had a bridge of boats constructed for the sake of the Blessed One. The nāgas reflected, ‘We really should lay our bodies down and have the Blessed One cross the Gaṅgā River over a bridge made of our serpent hoods.’ They then constructed a bridge of their serpent hoods.”

22) The canonical Indian texts are, according to SCHLINGLOFF (1994), *Mahāvagga* VI.28.13, ed. p. 230; trans. Vol. 2, p. 104 = *Dīghanikāya* XVI.1.34 (*Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*); *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* in Sanskrit (ed. Vorgang 7.9, pp. 61ff., German trans. pp. 128-130).

23) Cf. SCHLINGLOFF 1994. What the illustrations in Gandhara and in Kizil show is the river flowing in an S-form from top to bottom and the Buddha standing on one bank (or floating in the air as in Kizil), ready to cross the river, while Vajrapāṇi is represented along with monks and lay-followers on both sides. Cf. *ibid.* for Kizil, Cave 224 (Māyā-Höhle) IB 8863, illustrated *inter alia* in LE COQ/WALDSCHMIDT 1928: pl. 13, *Verlust-Katalog* 2002: 174; today only fragments of the same are preserved.

24) T 1448, ch. 5, ed. Vol. 24, p. 22c, cf. WALDSCHMIDT 1944-48: 61 and BAREAU 1970-71, 2: 74f.

25) *Divyāvadāna* III, ed. pp. 55-56; trans. p. 119.

26) Later the story was also retold in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalātā* XVI, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 128-129.

27) *Divyāvadāna* III, ed. pp. 55: *yadā rājñā Māgadhen Ajātaśatruṇā Vaidehīputreṇa naukramo mātāpitror māpitas tadā Vaiśālakair Licchavibhir Bhagavato rthe naukramo māpitaḥ/ nāgāḥ saṃlakṣayanti/ vyaṃ vinipatitaśarīrā yan nu vyaṃ phaṇasaṃkramaṇa Bhagavantaṃ nadī-Gaṅgām uttārayameti/ taiḥ phaṇasaṃkramaṇa māpitaḥ/*; trans. p. 119: “When the Magadhan king

28) *Divyāvadāna* III, ed. pp. 55-56: *tatra Bhagavān bhikṣūn āmantrayate sma/ Rājagṛhāc Chrāvastīm gantum yo yuṣmākaṃ bhikṣava utsahate rājñō Māgadhasy Ajātaśatror Vaidehīputreṇa naukaṃkramaṇa nadī Gaṅgām uttartum sa tena taratu/ yo vā bhikṣavo Vaiśālakānām Licchavinām naukaṃkramaṇa so pi tenottaratu/ aham apy āyuṣmat Ānandena bhikṣuṇā sārḍhaṃ nāgānām phaṇasaṃkramaṇa nadī Gaṅgām uttariṣyāmi (...)* *Bhagavān apy āyuṣmat Ānandena sārḍhaṃ nāgānām phaṇasaṃkramaṇottīrṇah/*; transl.: p. 119: “Regarding this the Blessed One addressed the monks: ‘Whoever among you, monks, is eager to go from Rājagṛha to Śrāvastī [to Pāṭaliputra in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* – M.Z.], crossing the Gaṅgā River by the bridge of boats of the Magadhan king Ajātaśatru, the son of Queen Videhī, cross that way. And whoever, monks, wishes to cross by the bridge of boats of the Licchavis of Vaiśālī, cross that way. As for me, I will cross the Gaṅgā River, together with the venerable monk Ānanda, by the bridge made of nāgas’ serpent hoods,’ (...) As for the Blessed One, he crossed, together with the venerable Ānanda, over the bridge made of nāgas serpent hoods.”

29) The *vinaya* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin*, *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Tibetan, ed. 41.130.52, cf. PANGLUNG 1981: 21-22.

30) In the story of the crossing of the Ganges related in the *Maitreyāvādāna*, a particular iconographical element plays a prominent role: a sacrificial pole (*yūpa*) of the gods which is not depicted in our painting.

31) Cf. WALDSCHMIDT 1944-48: 61: “König Ajātaśatru faßt den Entschluß, dem Buddha persönlich seine Verehrung zu bezeigen und ihm mit 500 Schirmen Schatten zu spenden. Das Gleiche nehmen sich daraufhin die Licchavis von Vaiśālī vor, und ebenso die Schlangenkönige, die vier Himmelskönige und die Dreiunddreißig Götter. Alle fünf Gruppen kommen mit je 500 Schirmen herbei, um den Buddha zu verehren, und dieser bewirkt nun

Chinese translation but also in Sanskrit; however, it was again incorporated into another narrative. It is related in the *Mahāvastu*, where the entire chapter bears the title *Chatravastu* (“Umbrella topic”).³²⁾ The story here is set in Vaiśālī, where the *yakṣiṇī* Kuṇḍalā causes terrible epidemics which cannot be brought to a halt by any of the heretical teachers. The Licchavis of Vaiśālī thereupon send a messenger to the Buddha to invite him to their capital. Since the Buddha had already accepted an invitation from King Bimbisāra of Magadha, he first seeks the latter’s approval. The king agrees and escorts the Buddha from Rājagṛha to the river, where the Licchavis await him on the opposite bank. Three bridges made of boats (*nāvāsaṃkrama*) are built here by humans, one by King Bimbisāra and two by people from Vaiśālī. Two groups of Nāgas, the Kambalas and the Aśvataras, also build bridges. Since the Buddha does not wish to hurt anybody’s feelings, he performs a miracle: he makes it appear to each party that he is crossing the river using the bridge made by that very party.³³⁾ While the Buddha crosses the river King Bimbisāra pays his respects to him with 500 umbrellas. Seeing this, the people of Vaiśālī and the Nāgas follow his example, as do the *yakṣas*, Parānirmitavaśavartin, Brahmakāyika and Śuddhāvāsa gods, the Four Kings of the Directions, gods from the Trāyastriṃśa and the Tuṣita heavens. Among the gods listed, several are also referred to by their individual names: *deva* Sunirmitta, Śakra, Maheśvara and Brahmā. The entire sky was covered with thousands of umbrellas. And again, the Buddha made it appear to each and every person or god that he was walking under his

umbrella alone, so that one and all was satisfied.³⁴⁾

We will probably never know where the umbrella chapter originated, perhaps in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (cf. fn. 24), or perhaps it was taken from another narrative since it does not appear in any other rendering of the events preceding the *parinirvāṇa*; in the same text, the story of the umbrellas appears again, this time in the narrative of the conversion of the malevolent Nāga Apalāla: here too, the gods and the Nāgas worship the Buddha and hold 2,500 umbrellas above him.³⁵⁾

In all probability, the Kizil paintings follow the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, because this corresponds with the representation above the door in Cave 189 (cf. Fig. 5) – except for this, there is not the slightest hint of the stories of the conversions of Apalāla or Kuṇḍalā.

It is very difficult to say what induced the artist or the donors to represent both these scenes – the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and the crossing of the Ganges – as counterparts. Perhaps the reason was quite simple, and of a purely compositional nature: both scenes have a diminutive object depicted in the bottommost section; perhaps the words used to describe them was similar: *devāvatāraṇa* and **gaṅgotāraṇa*? But perhaps there was also quite a different reason: could the second scene have been meant to complement the first? There was no space for the gods in the scene of the descent from heaven and, as we have seen, the presence of the gods was very important for this event. Perhaps the depiction of the veneration was needed on the other side of the door?

In the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, the handsome and colourfully clad Licchavis of Vaiśālī are compared to the gods of the Trāyastriṃśa heaven,³⁶⁾ which could have been a well-known comparison since it is repeated in the *Mahāvastu* too.³⁷⁾

durch seine übernatürliche Kraft, daß jeder der Verehrer glaubt, nur er halte seinen Schirm über den Buddha.”

32) *Mahāvastu*, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 253-271; trans. pp. 208-225.

33) The *Mahāvastu* does not say that the Buddha crossed the river on the bridge of Nāgas, it says that he walked above the bridge of boats (*nāvāsaṃkrama*). The text, however, also refers to the bridge of Nāgas by the same term: *Mahāvastu* ed. Vol. 1, p. 263: *Bhagavāṃ nāvāsaṃkrame ārūḍho/ rājā Śreṇiyo Bimbisāro svake nāvāsaṃkrame Bhagavantaṃ paśyati/ Abhyantara-Vaiśālākā ca svake nāvāsaṃkrame Bhagavantaṃ paśyanti saśrāvaka-saṃghaṃ/ Bāhira-Vaiśālākā svake nāvāsaṃkrame Bhagavantaṃ paśyanti saśrāvakasamghaṃ/ Kambalāśvatarā pi Gāṅgeya-mahānāgā svake nāvāsaṃkrame Bhagavantaṃ paśyanti saśrāvakasamghaṃ taramāṇaṃ/*; transl. p. 218: “The Exalted One stepped on to a bridge of boats. King Śraṇiya Bimbisāra saw the Exalted One on his bridge. Those from within Vaiśālī saw the Exalted One and his company of disciples on theirs; those from without Vaiśālī saw them on theirs, and the Kambalas and Aśvataras, the great Nāgas of the Ganges, saw them crossing by their bridge.” Cf. VOGEL 1926: 117-118.

34) *Mahāvastu*, ed. Vol. 1, pp. 263-267; transl. pp. 218-221.

35) The *vinaya* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin*, *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Tibetan, ed. 41.125.2.2, cf. PANGLUNG 1981: 20-21; Chinese, T 1448, ch. 9, Vol. 24, pp. 40b6-41c1; French transl. PRZYLUKSKI 1914: 510-512; for the textual and pictorial tradition of the subjugation of Apalāla cf. ZIN 2006, ch. 3.

36) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Vorgang 11.9, WALDSCHMIDT 1950: 180-181; Pali, *Dīghanikāya* XVI.II.17, ed. p. 96; trans. p. 103: “O brethren, let those of the brethren who have never seen the Tāvatiṃsa gods, gaze upon this company of the Licchavis, behold his company of the Licchavis, compare this company of the Licchavis – for they are even as a company of Tāvatiṃsa gods.”

37) *Mahāvastu*, ed. Vol. 1, p. 262: *tādṛśāye va bhikṣavo ṛddhīye devā Trāyastriṃśā Sudarśanāti nagarāto udyānabhūmim abhi- niṣkramanti*; transl. p. 217: “Because, monks, it was with just

List of paintings under discussion

11. The Buddha descends from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven of the god Indra

- Kizil, Cave 184 (Drittletzte Höhle/Third-last Cave), Asian Art Museum, Berlin, Inv.No. III 525, 91.5 x 50 cm, not published previously (*supra*, **Fig. 1**).
- Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn/Second Cave from the Front), front wall, left from entrance; illus.: XU (*et al.*) 1983-85, 3: figs. 64, 77 (*supra*, **Fig. 4-5**), 78 (detail); *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci* 2008: 187, fig. 166; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China* 2009, 3: 200-201.
- Simsim, Cave 48, lunette; illus.: *Kuche Kumtula Shiku* 1994: fig. 179 (*supra*, **Fig. 2**); *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci* 2008: 276, fig. 305 (only right section) (*supra*, **Fig. 3**); *Paintings in Xinjiang of China* 2009, 5: 101 (only right section).

12. Crossing of the River Ganges – the legend of the umbrellas

- Kizil, Cave 184 (Drittletzte Höhle/Third-last Cave), Asian Art Museum, Berlin, Inv.No. III 526, 90 x 48 cm, not published previously (*supra*, **Fig. 6**).
- Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn/Second Cave from the Front), front wall, right from entrance; illus.: XU (*et al.*) 1983-85, 3: fig. 63 (*supra*, **Fig. 7**); *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci* 2008: 189, fig. 168 (*supra*, **Fig. 8**); *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China* 2009, 3: 198-199.
- Kumtura, Cave 23, front wall, left from entrance; illus.: ZHAO (*et al.*) 1985: figs. 52-53 (*supra*, **Fig. 9**).

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Artikel erklärt zwei bisher unpublizierte Malereifragmente aus Höhle 184 als **Herabstieg des Buddha aus dem Himmel des Gottes Indra (Figs. 1-5)** und als seine **Überquerung des Ganges (Figs. 6-8)**.