

# Aśvaghoṣa Between Gandhara and Kucha: The *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* and Its Narrative Expression in a Forgotten Slab from Mount Karamar

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## ABSTRACT

The article suggests identifying two scenes on a Gandhara slab from Karamar with plays written by Aśvaghoṣa. One, preserved in the Berlin Turfan collection, is among the oldest known Indian theatre plays (*Śāriputraprakaraṇa*) focusing on the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, two of the most important Buddhist monks certainly belonging to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The second scene shows the conversion of Nanda, the half-brother of the Buddha as described in the *Saundarananda* attributed to the same author. Attempts shall be made to identify the art historical templates and at the same time to trace its subtle iconography.

## KEYWORDS

Aśvaghoṣa, *Śāriputraprakaraṇa*, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, Gandhara, parivrājaka, Buddhist narratives, *Saundarananda*, Nanda, skull-tapper

## THE KARAMAR SLABS

When it comes to Buddhist art, objects from Gandhara very often serve as popular illustrations best comprehensible for observers more familiar with Western narratives. Such an assessment stays in a harsh contrast to our actual knowledge. Even after more than 100 years of research many interpretations stay vague and superficial. One reason for this is the early interest that Gandhara (nowadays Northwest Pakistan and the bordering provinces of Afghanistan) received

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with its art, which is reminiscent of Hellenistic models. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British colonial administration excavated various Buddhist sites with almost no documentation, so that until today it is difficult to establish a sustainable chronology or develop an idea of how the objects were placed in their original context. A second point, which makes it hard to put narrative scenes from Gandhara into a more differentiated interpretative framework, are the various difficulties related to written sources. Often it is possible to identify the represented story, but we are ignorant for the exact version depicted, either because the scene does not give enough details or because we are not aware of the template used. The scene to which this contribution is devoted can be taken as an example for such circumstances, but at the same time it serves as an exception, since it is possible to relate it to a written source which is attributed to Aśvaghoṣa and preserved in the Turfan collection in Berlin.



Fig. 1. Stone slab from Karamar, photographed in 1882. After British Library, [http://ogimages.bl.uk/images/019/019PH0000001003U01025000\[SVC2\].jpg](http://ogimages.bl.uk/images/019/019PH0000001003U01025000[SVC2].jpg) [Oct. 17th 2018], item no. 10031025.



The scene that will be the subject of the paper represents one of five narrative panels arranged on a stone slab of greyish schist (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> It was excavated in 1882 by the 10<sup>th</sup> Sappers and Miners Company under the supervision of Lieutenant C. Maxwell (1882), most probably in a Buddhist monastery (*vihāra*) on the southern slope of Mount Karamar, about 50 km from Peshawar. The stone slab is part of an ensemble consisting of at least three complete slabs and two fragments with a total of 19 preserved narrative scenes. All of them were later on brought to Lahore and photographed. Today the relief is kept in the Chandigarh Museum, India.

The first panel on the top of our slab can be clearly identified as Indra's visit to the Buddha meditating in the Indraśaila cave (*indraśailaguhā*) – a frequently depicted scene in which the heavenly musician (*gandharva*) Pañcaśikha awakens the Buddha from meditation by playing his harp (*vinā*) and asks him to receive Indra, the lord of gods (*devas*). The second panel has not yet been identified. It shows a Brahmin holding a short staff in his right hand while he is talking with the Buddha. The middle scene (Fig. 6) features the nimbate Buddha seated under a tree with his right hand raised in a preaching gesture directed to the viewer. He is flanked on both sides by attendants. On the Buddha's right, a young Brahmin and a monk direct their attention to the occurrences on the opposite side, where two equally dressed persons are approaching. The latter carry peculiar staffs over their shoulders, with a kind of a bundle hanging at the respective ends. Both cover their heads with hoods, under which a single curl is exposed above the forehead. In the background two divine beings and demon-like figures flank the Buddha. Explaining this scene will be the main aim of this article. The scene below represents the well-known assault on the Buddha's life by the drunken elephant Dhanapāla. This story is also frequently depicted in the art of Gandhara. The last scene at the bottom of the stone slab (Fig. 10), like the middle scene (Fig. 6) and the second scene above it, was not modelled after a common cliché, but there is reason to compare it with other panels that are interpreted as the conversion of Nanda, the half-brother of the Buddha, as I will discuss later.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF WANDERING ASCETICS (PARIVRĀJAKAS) IN GANDHARA

Unidentified narrative scenes like seen on the Karamar slab raise a very general problem: the meaning of a scene is usually expected to be understandable for the contemporaneous believer, or, to use a metaphor, the scene is supposed to be legible. But how can the legibility be insured in case of an unusual template? The easiest response to this question might be that the general vocabulary gave enough hints to decipher a well-known story. From this perspective, the presence of the Buddha in our scene (Fig. 6) is not very helpful, since he is the crux of the matter in most narrative reliefs known from Gandhara. The appearance of the Buddha just indicates that the story takes place after he has renounced his life in the palace. More valuable are the persons who approach on the Buddha's left side. They are well distinguished by the noticeable sticks with bundles they carry, the dress that consists of a cloth wrapped around their waist, combined with a fabric that covers their heads, and the small curl that sticks out underneath.

<sup>1</sup> Published in Foucher 1905: 189, fig. 74; Goswamy 1979: 261; Kurita 1988-90, vol. 1: 225, no. 466; Quagliotti 1990: 323–324, figs. 3, 4.



A comparable figure appears in a story first identified by Maurizio Taddei (1979)<sup>2</sup> as the ‘skull-tapper’. In the course of the tale a wandering mendicant, named Vaṅḡisa, is able to foretell the future birth of any deceased by tapping on their skull. However, when he is given a skull of an *arhat*, i.e. one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence, he cannot answer the question. Thereafter the Buddha narrates the reason for this. The mendicant is not able to foretell the incarnation, because an *arhat* escapes the circle of rebirth after his death.<sup>3</sup>

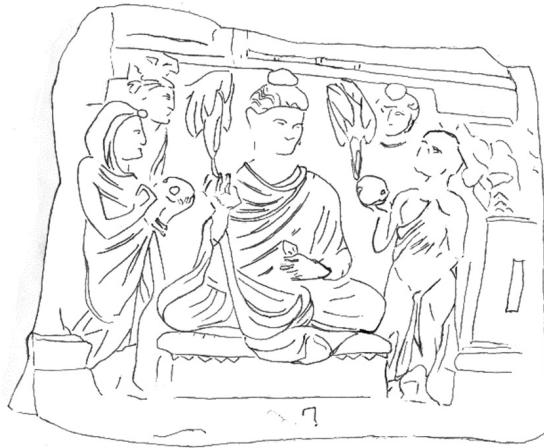


Fig. 2 Skull-tapper story, relief seen on the art market of Karachi.  
Drawing by the author after photographs published in Taddei 1979: figs. 1–2

In all known versions from Gandhara, the skull-tapper is dressed in the same manner as seen on the slab from Karamar, but carries a skull on which he performs a knocking gesture (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> Usually a monk is depicted on the opposite side, who also carries a skull or rather is about to give the mendicant the skull of the deceased *arhat*. Anna Maria Quagliotti (1990: 323) thought that the Karamar scene represents a version of this story. However, her interpretation entails several problems. The first reason for criticism is the monk on the Buddha’s right side: this portion has not been entirely preserved. In the position we would expect a skull; parts of the relief are miss-

<sup>2</sup> Taddei 1983. The same story was also identified in the murals of Kucha (Santoro 2010).

<sup>3</sup> *Theragāthā* XXI.264, transl. Rhys Davids 1913: 395–410; *Aṅuttaranikāya commentary on Etadaggavagga* III.4; *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* XXVI.37, transl. Burlingame 1921, vol. 3: 334–336; *Samyuttanikāya* VIII, transl. Rhys Davids and Woodward 1917–20, vol. 1: 234–249; *Suttanipāta*, transl. Fausböll 1881: 162–164.

<sup>4</sup> Thirteen specimens of the story are known from Gandhara, 10 of them were gathered in Taddei 1979: 397–404, 411; Taddei 1983: 333–334; one more in the Ikuo Hirayama Silk Road Museum, Yamanashi, Japan, identified by Tanabe 2011; in a private collection in Zurich, see Russek 1987: 54, fig. 54, which was identified by Santoro 2010: 830–831, fig. 4. A skull-tapper is also preserved at the side of a scene showing Maitreya, who was obviously part of another, now lost, scene coming from the same collection in Zurich, see Russek 1987: 72, fig. 78. In Kucha (Xinjiang, China) Santoro (2010: fig. 2) identified a scene with the skull-tapper story in Kumtura Cave 43; see also the ceiling of Kizil Cave 163, identified by Satomi Hiyama on occasion of an exhibition at Bukkyo University, Kyoto, March 2018: ‘Hirayama Ikuo Shirukurōdo Bijutsukan ni nemuru Saiiki Hekiga Danpen 平山郁夫シルクロード美術館に眠る西域壁画断片 (Mural fragments from the Silk Road kept in the Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum)’.



ing, not allowing any definite judgment, while the ascetics on the opposite side were certainly not depicted with a skull, which is the initial element to recognize the story. Secondly, on the Karamar slab, two persons approach the Buddha performing the same talking gesture, but according to the preserved textual versions of the story, only the soothsayer addresses the Buddha. Hence it is rather unlikely that the scene represents the skull-tapper story.

It should be mentioned at this junction that Taddei's identification is also not free of contradictions, as he himself admitted or other authors remarked in comments on his contribution (Taddei 1983). The known reliefs show a lot of variations that are not always related to written sources, e.g. different gestures of the skull-tapper, a varying number of attendants, and two skulls on all complete preserved panels, while the sources record either four or five, etc. These arguments seem minor, but compared to other stories known from Gandhara, it is obvious that the artists have indeed very often paid attention to such details. Eventually, these inconsistencies are not surprising, since the sources quoted by Taddei are all part of the commentaries on the Pali Canon and later literature that are generally not expected to be popular in the northern tradition of Buddhism, i.e. the inaccuracies may not be explained by the artist's popular understanding of the story, but with the narrative used.

In a letter responding on Taddei's article, Dieter Schlingloff directed the attention of Taddei to a very similar story in the *Cīvaravastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* preserved in the *Gilgit Manuscripts*<sup>5</sup> (Taddei 1983: 334). Here the protagonist is named Mṛgaśīras, which means literally 'Gazelle Horn'. In fact, the template fits even less than the aforementioned Pali versions. Here Ānanda questions Mṛgaśīras alone, again with four skulls, and Mṛgaśīras name is explained with the help of an interpolated story, according to which he is the son of a gazelle and a Brahmanical ascetic (*r̥ṣi*) and therefore has the horn of the animal, which certainly is not reflected in the narrative reliefs of Gandhara. Interestingly, the Mṛgaśīras story also appears together with that of Vaṅgīsa as a bifurcated tale in the Pali *Theragāthā* (IV.151, transl. Rhys Davids 1913: 138–139). It might be doubtful that both versions represent independent stories, since the general narrative strand is so similar, but it is instructive that the Mṛgaśīras story of the *Theragāthā* dispels almost all problems previously mentioned. Here the name of Mṛgaśīras is explained with the zodiac sign under which he was born, and the Buddha himself tests Mṛgaśīras with only two skulls. Even the moment when Mṛgaśīras turns the skull in all directions, not being able to say anything about the deceased's incarnation, is indicated in several scenes.<sup>6</sup> Étienne Lamotte (1944–80, vol. 2: 1085, fn. 1) thought that the *Theragāthā* version is derived from the northern tradition, which seems to be reasonable. Aside from the *Cīvaravastu*, the Mṛgaśīras story is also included in the Chinese *Ekottarikāgama* (T02n0125p0650c–0652b) and *Dharmapada* (T04n0210p0573b3–4, transl. Dhammajoti 1995; and T04n0212p0733b14–15).<sup>7</sup> Beyond that Mṛgaśīras is introduced in a Sanskrit version of the *Suttanipāta* (*sutta* no. 10 of the *Aṭṭhakkavagga*), which was acquired by Aurel

<sup>5</sup> Ed. Dutt 1939–43, III.2: 79–83. For a translation of the passage to which Schlingloff refers in the letter, see Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 2: 1085–1088, fn. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. a relief kept in the Übersee Museum, Bremen illustrated in Taddei 1979: pl. 7; and a relief kept in the Musée Guimet, Paris: Taddei 1983: pl. 1; in both cases the skull is held upside down.

<sup>7</sup> In the Chinese translations Mṛgaśīras is rendered as 'Lutou 鹿头 [Lou t'ou] or 'Miliēshiluo 蜜哩識尸囉 [Mi li ngo che lo]. For further references and discussions see Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 2: 1085, fn. 1, with allusions in the Tibetan *Udānavarga*, XXVI.10, transl. Rockhill 1883: 117. The Chinese translation in T04n0213p0790c9–10, transl. Willemen 1978; T25n1509p0193c, transl. Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 2: 1084–1090; the Chinese *Abhidharma* T27n1545p0388c1, transl. de La Vallée Poussin 1930: 247–248.



Stein and presumably originates from Khadalik in Khotan (Hoernle 1916: 731–732). However, Mṛgaśīras does not appear in the Pali version of the text (transl. Fausböll 1881: 162–164).

The versions also include a particular detail, the skull-tapper named Mṛgaśīras is labelled as *parivrājaka*, i.e. a wandering ascetic,<sup>8</sup> whereas Vaṅṅisa is always just called a Brahmin.<sup>9</sup> The best known *parivrājaka* in Buddhist literature is Subhādra, the last *bhikṣu* ordained by the Buddha before his entrance into *parinirvāṇa*. According to the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (ed. Waldschmidt 1950–51: Vorgang 40)<sup>10</sup> Subhādra was an old *parivrājaka* who heard of the coming death of the Buddha and decided to take his last chance to dispel his doubts related to various teachings. But when he arrived, Ānanda, the monk closest to the Buddha, refused his desire to enable his master to pass away undisturbed. However, having known Subhādra's abilities the Exalted One permitted to question him. As a result, Subhādra proved his perceptivity, so that the Buddha immediately ordained him as his last monk against the later rules of the community. Subhādra reached the stage of an *arhat* and entered the *nirvāṇa* even before his teacher.

In the art of Gandhara the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha is represented countless times,<sup>11</sup> in which Subhādra appears as one of the most eye-catching figures. He sits in the centre of the composition, lost in reverie of the dramatic occurrences, but sometimes he also stands on the right side engaged in discussion with Ānanda (see Figs. 3 and 4). His head is covered, with a small curl visible under the hood, similar to the skull-tapper and the figures on the Karamar slab. Sometimes his immersion is emphasized even more by turning his back to the viewer. Almost always there is a kind of tripod on his side, with a vessel hanging from the staff's junction, which in turn is reminiscent of the staff carried on the shoulders of the persons approaching the Buddha in the Karamar scene. As Alfred Foucher (1922: 260–263) showed, this identification is quite reliable. Additionally we might refer to the *Manorathapūraṇī*, a commentary of the *Āṅguttaranikāya* wherein *parivrājakas* are described as *tedaṇḍikas*, i.e. those who carry a triple staff (Pali *tidaṇḍa*, Sanskrit *tridaṇḍa*) with a pot at its end, and who cover their heads (Schlingloff 1994: 71–73).<sup>12</sup> Hence, the appearance of the ascetics labelled as *parivrājakas* in written sources is in Gandhara clearly related to the iconography. Therefore, it seems to be reasonable to identify the protagonists on the Karamar slab as *parivrājakas*.

## SUBTLE ICONOGRAPHY AS A SOURCE FOR NEW COMPOSITIONS

Before entering the discussion on the possible identification of the story on the Karamar slab, we should come back for a moment to the iconography of Subhādra within the *parinirvāṇa*. The representation of the *parinirvāṇa* can be described as a very dense iconic scene, conflating several

<sup>8</sup> For the contextualisation of wandering ascetics (*parivrājakas*) in Buddhist literature see Rhys Davids 1911: 141–143. A detailed polemic against heretics is reflected in the *Brahmajālasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* I, transl. Rhys Davids 1899–1921, vol. 1: 1–55.

<sup>9</sup> Already Taddei (1979: 411) recognized the skull-tapper as a *parivrājaka* but he did not establish any connection to written sources.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion on literary sources, see Waldschmidt 1944–48: 224–238 and Schlingloff 2000, vol. 1: 64.

<sup>11</sup> For pictorial traditions of the *parinirvāṇa*, see Ebert 1985: 83–87; Gupta and Zin 2016: 45–46; Zin 2018: 139–147; Zin 2020.

<sup>12</sup> For comparable descriptions in the Buddhist and Brahmanical literature, see Hinüber 1992: 53–65. A *parivrājaka* in a non-Buddhist story is depicted in a scene of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from Nachna, dated ca. 500–510 CE, see Williams 1982: 135, pl. 166. The complex connotation of the *tridaṇḍa* is discussed in Olivelle 2011: 234–239.





Fig. 3. The Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa*, Gandhara. British Museum, no. 1913,1108.17.  
After Zwalf 1996, I: pl. XI, cat.no. 231.

events of a narrative cycle, with the lying Buddha in its centre framed by several persons. All of them linked through events that take place before, after, and during the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa* or even at other places than his deathbed – a scheme well-known from Indic pictorial traditions, but at first glance not easy to approach for Western trained observers. The high theological value of the scene provides each detail in these compositions with significance. In this respect the iconography of Subhādra is no exception.<sup>13</sup>

This might be illustrated on a relief that is kept in the British Museum (Fig. 3). The Buddha lies between two trees, a flowering one on the right side and a tree featuring long leaves on the opposite side. According to all versions of the story, the Buddha gave instructions to install his deathbed oriented to the north between two *śala* trees (*shorea robusta*).<sup>14</sup> The trees blossom in the wrong season to venerate the Buddha, but the Exalted One motionless explains that he would be better adorned by following his teaching. In other versions of the story, the trees have just began to blossom at the time the Buddha enters the *nirvāṇa*, with no moral excursus.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the trees on the relief of the British Museum outline the moment between the Buddha's laying down and his departure. The Subhādra story adopts the same function. On the right, Ānanda rejects Subhādra's request to approach the Buddha by raising his right hand. Subhādra himself is depict-

<sup>13</sup> With reference to the *parinirvāṇa* discussed by Zin 2018: 137–141. The general topic concerning Indic composition principle is discussed in length by Schlingloff 1981.

<sup>14</sup> For discussion and references see Waldschmidt 1944–48: 189–191.

<sup>15</sup> According to the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*, the *Dīrghāgama* and Faxian's travel report, the trees blossom before the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa*. For discussion see Waldschmidt 1944–48: 191–192, 255; like Waldschmidt, Jean Przyluski (1920: 32–33) considered it to be a later version, as it makes sense to scatter flowers after the Buddha enters *nirvāṇa*, but not before.



ed like the ascetics on the Karamar slab, who likewise raise their hands and carry the *tridaṇḍa* over their left shoulders. In the same scene both protagonists are represented again beneath the deathbed in totally reversed roles. Ānanda lies on the ground, overwhelmed with grief, and raises his hand to a fellow monk standing at his side (most probably Aniruddha) while Subhādra sits in meditation. The message of the juxtaposition seems quite obvious: Ānanda, who has not yet reached the stage of an *arhat*, is unable to capture the teaching of the Buddha that would have freed him from sorrow, at the same time Subhādra has already been liberated from all worldly constraints. Here again the Indic composition becomes apparent with its conflating mode of representation, because Subhādra dies before the Buddha, so that both events contrast in one scene that take place at different times and places. This composition stresses the Subhādra episode in a remarkable way, which is not evident in all versions of the Gandhara *parinirvāṇa*.

In a second, much more popular template,<sup>16</sup> instead of the discussion between Subhādra and Ānanda, Mahākāśyapa is introduced, the monk who later conducts the first Buddhist council.<sup>17</sup> Both compositions are very close to each another. They show the Buddha between the *śāla* trees as well as the lamenting lords of the Mallas, and the gods surrounding the scenery, including the grief of Ānanda and the reverie of Subhādra, but the accent of each version is still remarkably different. It might be assumed that the Subhādra episode stresses the content of the Buddha's very last sermon directed to Subhādra, which emphasizes the superiority of his teaching over other doctrines. In our context this is of crucial importance, because the encounter of Ānanda and Subhādra strongly recalls the gestures of the ascetics and the reaction of the monk as seen on the Karamar slab (see a better preserved version Fig. 4). It is reasonable that such an interpolation was also recognized by the believers, who might therefore have drawn some relations between the Karamar scene and the well-known Subhādra plot within the *parinirvāṇa*.

As mentioned before, the Gandhara *parinirvāṇa* is composed after a well-known Indic composition principle. It shows how the content can be emphasized by shaping the understanding of a narrative with art historical principles by means of subtle references, with no reservations regarding continuous story telling that is dominant in classical Western traditions. Another means of Indic composition is to arrange a story according to geographical considerations. In this regard, the cardinal points of the *parinirvāṇa* are clear from the Buddha's instruction to direct his deathbed north. This detail provokes some difficulties because in the Indic tradition the head of the deceased is usually directed south (Caland 1896: 7–9). Waldschmidt (1944–48: 189–190)<sup>18</sup> proposed that the Buddha received the funeral of a god. In this sense, everything was performed in opposition to the world of the living — a strange idea in contrast to the instruction given by the Buddha. He explained that he should be buried by the laypeople according to the usual customs as a *cakravartin*, i.e. a world ruling monarch.<sup>19</sup>

Maybe it is possible to relate this detail to another connotation of the relief from the British Museum. The Buddha and Subhādra are both world renouncers. According to Brahmanical sources, a world renouncer is free to choose the time to pass away (Olivelle 2011: 207–229). Indeed, Subhādra reaches the stage of an *arhat* after entering the community and decides that

<sup>16</sup> Ebert 1985: nos. 13, 16–23, 28–31, 33, 36, 38–40, 42, 43.

<sup>17</sup> For references and discussion see Przyłuski 1926.

<sup>18</sup> The explanation in the *Dirghāgama* and the *Ekottarāgama* that the head should be directed to the north because the Buddha's teaching will spread into this direction seems to be a later interpolation. For discussion see Przyłuski 1920: 81; Waldschmidt 1944–48: 189–190.

<sup>19</sup> For references and analyses see Waldschmidt 1944–47: 210–216.







Fig. 4. The Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa*, Gandhara, inv.no. I 80. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst / Georg Niedermeister.

it is inappropriate to enter *nirvāṇa* after the Buddha, therefore he dies before him,<sup>20</sup> or to say it in other words, he committed suicide. In the Brahmanical tradition, the actual act of suicide (*mahāprasthāna*, lit. 'great departure') is connected with going in northerly or north-easterly direction, i.e. towards the Himalayan mountains (Olivelle 2011: 208–209, 223). In the British Museum relief Subhādra occupies a noticeable position. He sits absorbed in meditation and turns his back to the viewer to three-quarters, which could be transmitted in the coordinate system of the relief with a north-east orientation. Therefore, it might be possible to interpret his orientation as a hint that he has decided to enter *nirvāṇa*. At the same time the announced *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha would fit well into the same logic. Therefore, the order of the Buddha to direct his death-bed north would be another indication of his status as a world renouncer superior to the teachings of other ascetics, which is eventually also the content of the questions raised by Subhādra.<sup>21</sup> This would fit very well to the obvious emphasis of the Subhādra episode on the same relief.

Comparing both popular versions of the *parinirvāṇa* in Gandhara, i.e. those with Mahākāśyapa and those with stress on the Subhādra episode, it is peculiar that in all 'Subhādra versions' Subhādra turns either his back for three-quarter from the spectator or he is depicted completely from

<sup>20</sup> For discussion and parallel versions see Waldschmidt 1944–47: 234.

<sup>21</sup> In the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* Subhādra says to the Buddha that he has doubts about the teachings of the six religious leaders (*tīrthya*) named Purāṇa Kāśyapa, Māskarīn Gośālīputra, Sañjaya Vairūṭīputra, Ajita Keśakambala, Kakuda Kātyāyana, and Nirgrantha Jñātaputra, and that he would like to hear his opinion about them, see Waldschmidt 1944–47: 226–231.

behind.<sup>22</sup> In the coordinate system of the *parinirvāṇa*, he would be orientated to the north-east or the east, which, as seen from Gandhara, is the direction towards the Himalayas to which a renouncer would orient himself before ending one's life. In contrast to this observation, in the 'Kāśyapa versions' the position of Subhādra seems to be rather inconsequential.<sup>23</sup> In the same way, it is possible to read the oldest known representation of Subhādra, which is reportedly from Mathura (Fig. 5).<sup>24</sup> The slab is manufactured in the aniconic manner, avoiding portraying the Exalted One in human form, but also avoiding representations of monks and other attendants who resemble the appearance of the Buddha. Already here, in this early stage, the presence of Subhādra is indicated by means of his triple staff (*tridaṇḍa*), which is characteristic of representations from Gandhara. Subhādra himself is absent. In contrast to the later tradition, the *tridaṇḍa* is not depicted in front of the deathbed, but on the left side which is the north. Seen from Mathura, the Himalayas are in the north, which would fit again our theory. However, it is difficult to say whether this relationship is just a coincidence or rather part of the complex narrative conflated in Buddhist iconography.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 5. Part of the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa*, Mathura, National Museum, New Delhi.

After Asthana 1985-86: pl. 8.1.

<sup>22</sup> See two reliefs from Nathu: one in Calcutta no. A2323, illustrated in Ebert 1985: pl. 9, no. 15; and one in Chandigarh Museum, illustrated in Ebert 1985: pl. 9, no. 14; one relief from Sanghao, Subhādra in front of the closed sarcophagus, illustrated in Ebert 1985: pl. 15, no. 26b in Lahore Museum; one relief with no certain finding place in the British Museum (Fig. 3); three reliefs in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, inv.no. I 80 (Fig. 4); inv. no. I 209, illustrated in Ebert 1985: pl. 14, no. 25; inv.no. I 572, illustrated in Grünwedel 1900: 115 no. 58 (drawing); on relief in the Peshawar Museum, inv.no. PM 01957, illustrated in Ali and Qazi (eds.) 2008: 258; one relief in the Ashmolean Museum, inv.no. EAOS.10, illustrated in Barnes and Branfoot (eds.) 2006: 56, fig. 50a; and an unpublished slab in the Musée Guimet, Paris.

<sup>23</sup> The version with the face turned to the viewer seems to be dominant, see Ebert 1985: pl. 10, no. 17 and pl. 11, no. 20 (reliefs from the Indian Museum, Calcutta); pl. 16, no. 28 (relief kept in the Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.); pl. 16, no. 29 (relief kept in the British Museum). In these examples, a group in which Kāśyapa touches the feet of the Buddha seems to be the most influential. In Kucha Subhādra is proven at least 10 times always depicted with his back turned for three-quarter, see Zin 2018: 146, fn. 37; and Zin 2020: 60–62. Examples from Turfan are known from Bezeklik Caves 6 and 19; from Dunhuang Mogao ku 295 (Sui period), illustrated in Miyaji 2007: 31, fig. 8.

<sup>24</sup> The relief is kept in New Delhi, National Museum and illustrated in Asthana 1985–86: pl. 8.1; Gupta and Zin 2016: 55, fig. 2.

<sup>25</sup> For the possible ambiguities of the *tridaṇḍa* in this scene, see Fn. 27. There is also another aniconic Mathura relief showing the *tridaṇḍa* on the left side, see Schlingloff 2000, vol. 1.2: 6, no. 8 [4].



## THE CONVERSION OF ŚĀRIPUTRA AND MAUDGALYĀYANA

As we have seen narrative scenes, as shown on the British Museum relief, might have a deeper meaning than just illustrating a certain moment in the Buddha's life. The composition reflects the interdependence of the used textual template and its subtly implied content within the stone relief. To ensure the legibility for the respective believer, the content was expressed by using the known iconographic vocabulary. Accepting this view, we also have to agree that 'recycling' of elements taken from popular clichés includes the possibility that parts of the respective meaning were also interpolated into the new composition. As a working hypothesis this could also apply to the interpretation of our scene on the Karamar slab.

The *parivrājakas*, approaching from the right, direct their raised hands to the opposite side so that their palms are visible, while a monk on the left side of the relief responds with the back of his hand facing outwards (Fig. 6). This recalls the *parinirvāṇa* versions stressing the Subhādra episode (see Figs. 3 and 4). Here again a *parivrājaka* (Subhādra) addresses a monk (Ānanda) who is refusing his desire (i.e. to question the Buddha). We just know few stories where *parivrājakas* are in the centre of attention. The Mṛgaśiras version of the skull-tapper story is one of them, but there is no reference to Subhādra in the *parinirvāṇa* iconography in the text, nor does any protagonist refuse a request. Another *parivrājaka* with the name Mākandika appears in a story identified by Alfred Foucher (1922: 256–257, 251), but in contrast to the narratives mentioned above, none of the preserved versions of the story repeats any features of a *parivrājaka*. Thus, I rather doubt the interpretation of Foucher.<sup>26</sup>

We might add Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana to this list, two former *parivrājakas* who later became the foremost important monks of the community. According to the tradition both were inseparable friends gifted with high intellectual capabilities. Despite their importance in written sources, until now, no special iconography has been related to them. All certain representations are clarified with help of inscriptions added to indistinctive monks.<sup>27</sup> However, the story of their

<sup>26</sup> The only Gandhara reliefs identified with the Mākandika episode and recorded provenance are from Sahri Bahlol and Karamar (Foucher 1922: figs. 433, 434d). Further representations are kept in several private collections and in Peshawar with no published illustrations. For representations of the narrative in the murals of Kizil, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, China, see Zin 2005: 30–33. In an upcoming article I try to relate the story to the *great departure* of Siddhārtha, Schulz (in preparation).

<sup>27</sup> In Kizil 110, to be discussed later. In Kūmtura Cave 16, a scene is labelled with a Chinese inscription saying that Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana encounter a monk, see Grünwedel 1912: 18. In Bezeklik Grünwedel (1912: 234, 245) identified two depictions with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana flanking the Buddha, whether his identification is based on inscriptions or assumptions he leaves open. For further possible representations of Śāriputra in Kizil and Dunhuang see Migot 1954: 416–419; Li 2019: 409–410. In Tape Shotor (Afghanistan) a Brāhmi inscription attributes two indistinctive monks as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, see Tarzi 1976: 406, fig. 19 and 408, fig. 21. Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana also appear in the Buddha's descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three gods (*trāyastriṃśā*) after he has preached to his mother and the gods. The story is frequently depicted, always with a ladder in its centre. In Mathura, Gandhara and Ajanta a monastic person kneels in *añjali* at the ladder's feet. Foucher (1905: 2) and Migot (1954: 417) explained the figure either as Maudgalyāyana, who asked the Buddha to descent, or more likely, as Śāriputra who welcomed the Buddha as first monk. For discussion and further sources, Schlingloff 2000, vol. 1: 476–487 and Anālayo 2012. Schlingloff interpreted the kneeling figure as the nun Utpalavarnā who transformed herself into a *cakravartin* to be able to pass the crowd and venerate the Buddha in the front row; alike Zin 2003a, vol. 1: 369. In Ajanta and Kizil certainly a nun is depicted in the corresponding position venerating the Buddha. In Kizil Cave 184 Utpalavarnā appears within the Buddha's descent with an elephant and a horse, indicating two of the seven jewels attributed to a *cakravartin*, see Zin 2013: 7, fig. 1; also in Simsim Cave 48 (Zin 2013: 8–9, figs. 2–3). However, the problem is ambiguous. The aniconic relief from Mathura (Fig. 5) with the



conversion contains a narrative strand that recalls the general content of the Subhādra episode in the *parinirvāna* cycle.<sup>28</sup>

As recorded at length in the Chinese translation of the *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra* (T03n0190p0874–0875c),<sup>29</sup> Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana become so disgusted by observing a people's fair that they decide to choose the life of ascetics. They join the *parivrājaka* Sañjaya and his 500 pupils in Rājagṛha, but soon they become dissatisfied with Sañjaya's teaching. As Śāriputra sees Upasena, a pupil of the Buddha, collecting alms, he asks him to which religious system he belongs and if he accepts disciples. Upasena denies and recounts what he understood from the Buddha's teaching. Śāriputra is impressed so that he decides to find Maudgalyāyana and to join the order of the Buddha. However, before leaving, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana ask their master for permission. Out of desperation to be left behind, Sañjaya begins to spit blood and dies, whereupon his 500 pupils join Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana.

Similar to the Subhādra episode the conversion involves a talented *parivrājaka* (or rather two including Maudgalyāyana) who had doubts about the teaching he was following, though before entering the lore of the Buddha he met a monk of the community. In the Subhādra episode the encounter with Ānanda functions as a *moment retardé*, while the dramatic end of the former teacher Sañjaya fulfils the same function in the Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana story. The climax is reached when the Buddha at once accepts the *parivrājaka*(s) in the community. This moment is best illustrated in the Chinese version of the *Buddhacarita* (T04n0192p0033c12–19).<sup>30</sup>

‘The Buddha saw the two Venerable at a distance, then he said to the order: “The two who come to me are my pre-eminent disciples, one is best in wisdom and the other is best in *ṛddhi* (magic) power.” The Buddha then told them to come by, with his deep and clear voice. Here we have the doctrine of purification and the way to the enlightenment. Then they who hold the *tridaṇḍa* (the triple staff) and washing jug in hand while wearing the spiral hair, heard the Buddha's calling to come and turned into monks.’

*parinirvāna* representation, depicts at the left edge a ladder indicating the Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. The *tridaṇḍa* is placed in between both scenes so that it could be understood as cipher for the former *parivrājakas* Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and Subhādra in the same moment.

<sup>28</sup> In Xuanzang's travelogue (transl. Li 1996: 255 [T51n2087p0925a]) Śāriputra asks the Buddha at his deathbed for permission to enter *nirvāna* before him, as he could not bear to die after him. A strange detail since, according to all other versions, Śāriputra has died several months before the Buddha. It is possible that the two highly gifted *parivrājakas*, Śāriputra and Subhādra, are mixed here. See also the considerations on Fig. 5, in Fn. *supra*.

<sup>29</sup> Transl. Beal 1875: 324–331. The story is often recounted; for parallel versions see *Mahāvastu* vol. 3: 56–67, transl. Jones 1949–56, vol. 3: 56–70; the *Buddhacarita* Canto XII, transl. Johnston 1937: 45–50; the Chinese translation of the *Buddhacarita* (T04n0192p0033b), transl. Beal 1883: 192–201, IV.17; the *Catuspariṣatsūtra*, ed. with parallel versions in Waldschmidt 1962: Vorgang 28 (T23n1444p1022–1026); the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (T25n1509p0136a–0137a.) transl. Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 2: 621–636; and the *Mahāvagga* of the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, transl.: Burlingame 1921, vol. 1: 198–204. See also the travelogue of Xuanzang of the year 629, transl. Li 1996: 238, 253, 254–255 [T51n2087p0920c–0921a, 0924b–c, 0934c–0925a]. For further versions and discussion, see Lamotte 1944–80, vol. 2: 623, fn. 2; Migot 1954: 413–414; and Ray 1994: 131–136.

<sup>30</sup> «佛遙見二賢而告諸眾言：「彼來者二人，吾上首弟子，一智慧無雙，二神足第一。」以深淨梵音，即命汝善來，此有清涼法，出家究竟道。手執三倚杖，綦髮持澡瓶，聞佛善來聲，即變成沙門。». Translation by Wang Fang, *Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road*, Leipzig. I would like to thank Mrs. Wang for her kind help in dealing with the Chinese sources and for providing her translation.



I would like to propose that the Karamar slab (Fig. 6) shows the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana.<sup>31</sup> Both protagonists, approaching from the right side, are dressed like *parivrājakas* and, as described in the quoted scene, carry the most significant attributes of their sect, the *tridaṇḍa* with an attached pot. The monk on the left side either responds to the announcement of the Buddha – a detail not mentioned in the quoted sources – or he is meant to be Upasena, who explains what he has understood of the Buddha’s teaching. The last possibility would fit again into the Indic tradition of discontinuous storytelling.

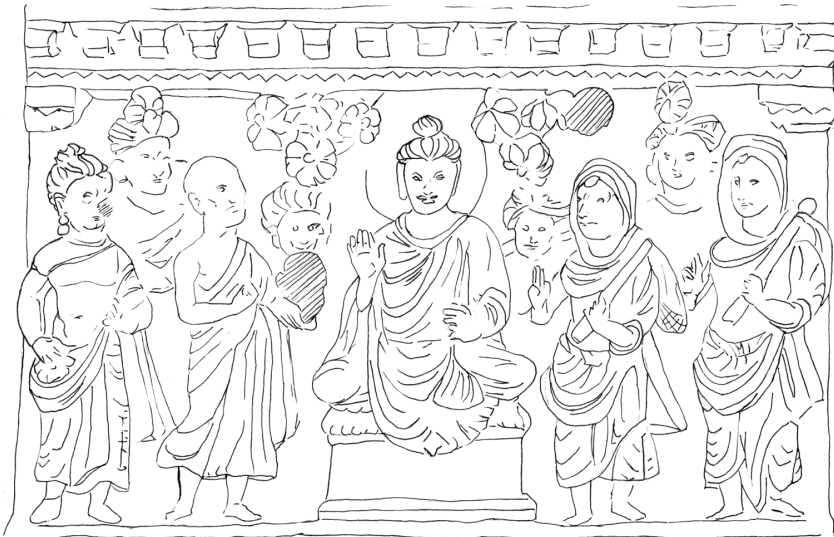


Fig. 6. Detail of Fig. 1 (middle scene). Drawing by the author.

Nevertheless, not all the figures have yet been explained. On the outermost left there is a figure of a man with a bare torso and a chain running over his left shoulder, his hair is tied in a topknot, so that we can easily recognize him as a Brahmin. He holds his garment as if he were carrying flowers in it to venerate the Exalted One, with his right hand grasping into the bundle. His presence absolutely makes sense for the composition. Together with the monk he represents a counterbalance to the heretics on the opposite side. For the same reason he is slightly taller than the monk like the *parivrājaka* on the outermost right side – hence the composition gains the impression of symmetry. In terms of content, however, this is not the case. Even in the *Buddhacarita*, which is the closest version to our relief, no Brahmin has any importance for the story.

The description of the general plot seems to be suitable for a theatre play and maybe this could be a useful starting point to solve the contradiction between the written sources and the relief’s composition. The *Buddhacarita* was written by the famous poet Aśvaghoṣa, whose hagiography

<sup>31</sup> Until now just Anderson (1883: 220–221) tried to identify a Gandharan scene with the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, however, the scene can be certainly identified as Indra’s visit to the Buddha in the Indraśaila cave (*indraśailaguhā*).

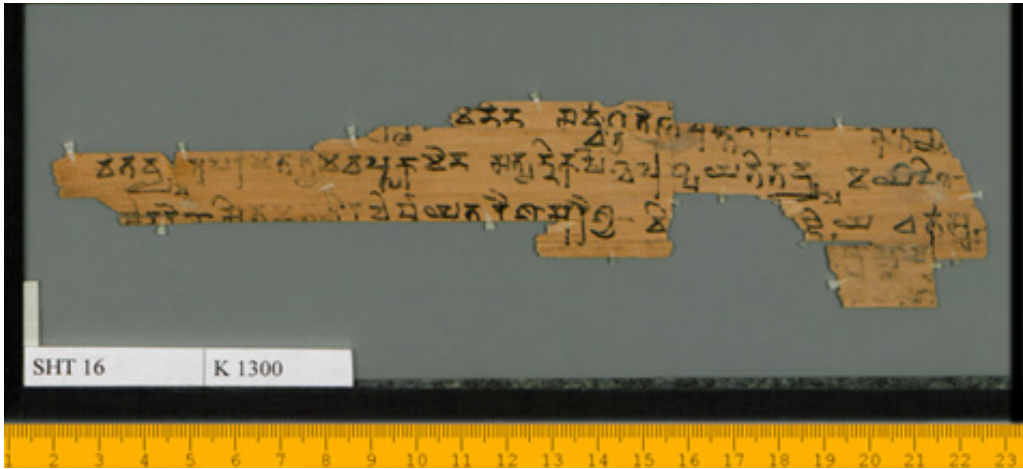


Fig. 7. Palm leaf fragment of the *Śāriputraprakarāṇa*, found in Kizil Cave 58 (?).  
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ascribes his life-time to the rule of the Kuṣāṇa Emperor Kanīṣka I (most likely 127–150 CE). And indeed, we know a second version of the story identified by Heinrich Lüders as *Śāriputraprakarāṇa* (Fig. 7), a theatre play, for which Lüders (1940: 201, 201, fn. 4) was able to prove the authorship of Aśvaghōṣa.<sup>32</sup> According to Albert von Le Coq (1926: 115) the manuscript of the *Śāriputraprakarāṇa*<sup>33</sup> was found during the Third Turfan Expedition (1905–07) in Kizil Cave 66 (Rotkuppelhöhle B).<sup>34</sup> The manuscript is just partially preserved, but in its final scene it is still possible to outline the protagonists. One of them is a Brahmin whose role it is to venerate the Buddha. A second person is a monk named Kauṇḍinya, for whom it is not clear whether or not he is involved with a speaking part. However, according the logic of the play, it is easy to imagine that he could recite some stanza to emphasize the words of the Buddha or to direct the attention to the approaching Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. Therefore, the gesture of the monk on the Karamar slab could be interpreted as a gesture of recitation. Even so the preserved parts certainly show that Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana direct their speech to the Buddha, as again indicated on the relief.<sup>35</sup> Following this argumentation the Karamar slab shows all protagonists of the plot very close to the final act of the *Śāriputraprakarāṇa*. The only persons not mentioned explicitly are in the background, whereby we most likely can explain them as devout observers, such as divine beings, members of the Buddha's order (*samgha*), or local people relevant in the course of the

<sup>32</sup> For further arguments see Johnston 1935–36, vol. 1: xx–xxi; an extensive bibliography on Aśvaghōṣa was published by Eltschinger and Yamabe 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Lüders 1911a; Lüders 1911b (= Lüders 1940); Waldschmidt 1965: 10, 37–38, K1300 and K1301, pls. 1, 23, cat. no. 57; Sander 1968: 51–52.

<sup>34</sup> However, Grünwedel (1912: 86) stated that the texts were found in a cave above the *Rotkuppelhöhle*. Dieter Schlingloff (1964: 9) and Lore Sander (1968: 10–12) drew attention to furthermore contradictions in the expedition records. It could therefore be a different cave. Chao-Jung Ching (2015) suggested instead of Cave 66 the nearby Cave 58.

<sup>35</sup> Martha Carter (1987) interprets the gesture as blessing which is in most contexts rather unlikely, because it is not appropriate for secondary figures to bless the Buddha. Domenico Faccenna and Anna Filigenzi (2007: 170, pl. 129, no. 3) consider it as a gesture of conversation and question, which seems to be the most likely explanation.



narration. Therefore, the interpretation of the scene on the Karamar slab as *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* seems to be likely.<sup>36</sup>

In the following I render the reading by Lüders (1940: 192-194); squared brackets indicate a poor stage of preservation; parts in rounded brackets are supplemented;<sup>37</sup> each dot indicates the proposed space a single character supposedly would have occupied. As the text is far from being complete, Lüders (1940: 198-200) only provided a partial translation, including his reconstructions incorporated in his analyses. For the sake of a better visual approach I transferred his wording in a continuous text; the brackets indicate words or entire passages either no more traceable or heavily fragmented.

### C1. Verso

<sup>2</sup> [...] (*ñ=ca vāyoḥ ātmeśvaraddh*)*yānabalena kuryyur=na yoginā[m]*  
<sup>3</sup> *duṣkaram=asti (k)i(ñcit) – [Ś]āri – tasmād=ātmasaṃ(s)ā(ra)sya ka . . . . . (Buddhaḥ) [||*  
*U](paṭiṣ)y(a) . . . . . [ry]yam=utta(mav)āryyaṃ municaryyam=avinivāryyavī-*  
<sup>4</sup> *ryyam=āryam [v]iḡa[ta] . . . . . bhayadaṃ śaraṇam=a . . . . . [ma]*  
*ti – Buddha – svāga[ta]ṃ . . . . . nauhhkaṃ[n]adhārāya bhaviṣyate dharmasenapata[ye]*

### C1. Recto

<sup>1</sup> *Maudga || mohāndhasya . . . . . [r]śanakaram naṣṭasya sa . . . . . [s]ya*  
*saṃvi[t]karam mṛ . . . . . kṣ . . . . . (j)ñ(ā)n(ap)pr(a)t(i)ṣṭh(ā)k(a)r(aṃ) v(a)nd(e) . .*  
*. . . [rī] –*  
<sup>2</sup> *[ka]bodhanakaram ś[r]eya . . . . . (ka)ram – Buddha – svāgataṃ[bha] . . . . .*  
*. . . . . [r]d[dh]ivikalpeśvarāya . . . . . ṣa – tr[bh]iś = śiṣyaiḥ = parivṛtaḥ śobhate*  
*municandramāḥ*  
<sup>3</sup> . . . . . [n] . tr[i] . . . . . [y]ukta iva candramāḥ Bu(d)[dh]a – Upati[s](ya)  
 [...]

‘Maudgalyāyana (?) (...) und des Windes (...) dürfen sie wohl durch die Kraft des Nachdenkens über den Ātman und den Ísvara machen; es gibt nichts, was einem Yogin schwer fiele.

Śāriputra (...) )

Buddha (...) den von den Besten zu wählenden Wandel eines Weisen, den edlen, unwiderstehlich-gewaltigen, zu wandeln.

Maudgalyāyana Ich verehere ihn, der die wahnverblendete Menschheit sehen machte, der die verlorene (.....), der (...) Bewußtsein verlieh, der den Tod (.....), (.....) der das Fundament des Wissens legte, der (...) erweckte, der das Heil (...) wirkte.

Buddha Willkommen (...) dem Herrn über die mannigfachen Arten der *rddhis* (...)

Śramaṇa (?) Von den drei Schülern umgeben glänzt der mondgleiche Weise wie der Mond umgeben (.....)

Upatiṣya (...)’

<sup>36</sup> With good reasons a possible relation between the performance of theatre and narrative scenes in Gandhara were already proposed by Brancaccio and Liu (2009), however the authors were not able to propose a concrete template depicted in Gandhara.

<sup>37</sup> In the original text reconstructions are either included in footnotes or in the discussion part.



## THE WRITING OF ĀSVAGHOṢA AS NARRATIVE SOURCE

On the basis of palaeographical evidence and the fact that the manuscript is written on palm leaf, Lüders (1911a: 7–15) was able to trace the origin of the *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* in Northern India in the period between the rule of Kaniṣka I and Huiṣka,<sup>38</sup> i.e. within the presumed lifetime of Āsvaghoṣa, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century or shortly thereafter. At the same time Lüders also proved an intensive revision of the text, which must have happened in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, traceable by later characters written in place of blurred parts.<sup>39</sup> This detail is remarkable because it shows how much the play was valued even 400 years after it was written, and secondly it conjuncts our relief with Kucha. The conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana is rarely represented,<sup>40</sup> apparently one of the few exceptions is coming from Kizil Cave 110 (Treppenhöhle) just a few hundred metres from the cave where the manuscript has been discovered. The painting itself is unfortunately not preserved, but we owe its content to a Tokharian inscription. The transcription and a German translation have been provided by Klaus Schmidt (2010: 856).

(ta)ne [ś]āriputre mau(dga)lyāyane os[t]ameṃ l(n)a[sk]e[m] //<sup>41</sup>  
 (tane āna)nde [po]y[śi](m)ś [ostam]eṃ lnaaṃ  
 «(Hie)r gehen Śāriputra [und] Maudgalyāyana aus dem Hause //  
 (Hier) geht (Āna)nda zum Alleswissenden aus dem Hause»

That shows that the lost scene illustrated two conversions. According to Schmidt (2010: 856) the first line seems to refer, to the *Catuṣpariṣatsūtra* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* (ed. Waldschmidt 1962: Vorgang 28d.3, 7, 8),<sup>42</sup> while the second line of the reading appears to be problematic. The conversion of Ānanda received no special attention in Buddhist literature; the Buddha went to the father of Ānanda, and when Ānanda saw the Buddha he was immediately converted and followed him, but he is not ‘going to the Omniscient’ as the German translation indicates.<sup>43</sup> However, the reading of the first part of the name of Ānanda is marked with brackets as tentative. It would be easily possible to complement (Na)nda instead of (Āna)nda. Nanda is the half-brother of the Buddha to whom Āsvaghoṣa devoted his famous *Saundarananda* – a poetical version of Nanda’s conversion, which is also known from manuscripts discovered in Kucha.<sup>44</sup> In course

<sup>38</sup> What is in more detail discussed by Sander (1968: 69–77). On the origin and contextualization, see Sander 1991. For other early writings attributed to Āsvaghoṣa found in Xinjiang, see Hartmann 1988. An additional early theatre play was discovered in Afghanistan, Franco and Schlingloff 2011–12.

<sup>39</sup> Lüders 1911a: 16–19; dating according to Lore Sander’s *Early Turkistan Brāhmī* (see Sander 1968: 181–182; Sander 1991: 147).

<sup>40</sup> As mentioned before, in Kumtura Cave 16, a scene is labelled with a Chinese inscription saying that Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana encounter a monk, see Grünwedel 1912: 18. In Bezeklik Grünwedel (1912: 234, 245) identified two depictions with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana flanking the Buddha, whether his identification is based on inscriptions or assumptions he leaves open. For further possible representations of Śāriputra in Kizil and Dunhuang see Migot 1954: 416–419; Li 2019: 409–410.

<sup>41</sup> Pinault (2000: 163) reads just the first part ‘tane śāriputre mau(d)[g]alyāyane ostameṃ lna[skem]’ (‘Ici Śāriputra [et] Maudgalyāyana partent de la maison (= deviennent moines mendiants)’).

<sup>42</sup> For discussion on the possible sources see the upcoming Ph.D. thesis on Kizil Cave 110 of Wang Fang (forthcoming).

<sup>43</sup> See the Tibetan version of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, transl. Rockhill 1884: 57–58.

<sup>44</sup> Parts of canto 16.21–32 were identified by Hartmann 1988: 66–73; fragments of a Tokharian translation were found in Shorchuk near Karashahr, see Sieg and Siegling 1921: 51, nos. 89–143.





of the story Nanda is jesting with his beautiful wife Sundarī, so that he did not notice the visit of the Buddha who therefore failed to obtain alms in his house. It was only when a servant noticed that the Buddha is leaving that Nanda tried to catch up with him, but before leaving Nanda promises Sundarī that he will return before the paint in her face is dry. Thereupon the Buddha lures Nanda in the monastery and ordains him by force. In the course of the story Nanda cannot give up thinking of his wife, he tries several times to escape the monastery until the Buddha flies with him to the heaven of Indra to show him the beauty of the heavenly maidens (*apsaras*). Thereafter his only desire becomes to be reborn in the realm of Indra. Just when Ānanda directs his attention to the absurdity of his aim and the ephemerality of existence he gave up his desire. To the best of my knowledge no depiction of this story has been identified in Kucha,<sup>45</sup> but we know at least 23 representations from Gandhara. In the majority, these scenes are reduced to the moment when Nanda leaves the house to follow the Buddha,<sup>46</sup> therefore the proposed reading of picture no. 41 in Kizil Cave 110 as «(Here) goes (Na)nda to the Omniscient from the house» appears to be more likely.

It is impossible to say whether or not the *Saundarananda* served as a template for the inscription in Kizil Cave 110, since in all northern versions the Buddha lures Nanda out of his house. However, the *Saundarananda* certainly served as a source in Ajanta Cave XVI, as Dieter Schlingloff (1988: 53–56) was able to show (Fig. 8).<sup>47</sup> The wall-painting repeats the narrative strand of the *Saundarananda* in almost every detail, beginning with the initial sermon for the inhabitants of Kapilavastu, the emphasis on the delighted joking between Sundarī and Nanda, the moment Nanda receives the begging-bowl in the streets of Kapilavastu and not in his house like in all the



Fig. 8. The conversion of Nanda, Ajanta Cave XVI, left aisle of the main hall, above the left cell door of the right portion. After Schlingloff 2000, vol. 1.1: 418 (detail).

<sup>45</sup> Albert Grünwedel tried to identify in Kucha some scenes with the Conversion of Nanda but none of them was later on confirmed, see Zin 2006: 176, fn. 49.

<sup>46</sup> See Zin 2006: 185–188. The story is also attested in Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Goli: for general discussion see Zin 2006: 167–190.

<sup>47</sup> Schlingloff 2000: no 73(6), Cave XVI left aisle of the main hall, side wall above and beside the first two cell doors of the right portion. See also Zin 2006: 181.



other versions, up to the various steps conducted for the final conversion of Nanda. The interpretation is certain.

Another very dense representation, most probably going back to the same piece (Zin 2006: 178), is a relief made of limestone discovered in Hadda (near Jalalabad, East Afghanistan) during the 2<sup>nd</sup> British Afghan War (1878–80); today it is kept in the British Museum (Fig. 9a).<sup>48</sup> On the right part of the scene Sundarī is depicted seated in front of a mirror and surrounded by three servants. As Zin (2006: 178) states, she is depicted with a moustache that she has painted herself while kidding with Nanda — a detail appearing only in the *Saundarananda*. In the present state of preservation this detail is no longer visible, but we can still guess it on photographs from 1893.<sup>49</sup> Even if the shadows on the old recording are deceiving, the interpretation as a scene taken from the *Saundarananda* remains the most likely. To the left of Sundarī is Nanda, richly adorned with a pearl necklace in his hair and with his ears hanging heavily under the weight of the jewellery. He holds the Buddha's alms-bowl while looking back to Sundarī. This can be related to the moment when the Buddha handed his bowl to his brother in the streets of Kapilavastu. The *Saundarananda* (V.11–13, transl. Johnston 1932) states:

‘Then he made obeisance to the Sage and decided to go home but the Blessed One, Whose eye was like a lotus petal, honoured him by handing to him His begging bowl. Then piously with lotuslike hands which were better suited to holding a bow he took the vessel of the Incomparable Vessel, Who gave it (not for alms but) for the fruit to be obtained in the world. But Nanda turned away, suddenly conscious that the Blessed One was attentive to something else and not interested in him, and stepped from the road to go home, though he had the bowl in his hand, ...’



Fig. 9a. The conversion of Nanda, Hadda, British Museum, no. 1900,0522.1. After Zwalf 1996, I: cat.no. 205.



Fig. 9b. Unidentified, main stūpa of Tapa Kalan, Hadda. After Barthoux 1930–33, vol. 3, pl. 40b

<sup>48</sup> Simpson 1893: 107; first identified in Foucher 1905: 464–473, fig. 234; for further references see Zwalf 1996, vol. 1: 186–187, pl. VIII.205 and Zin 2006: 187, no. 24 (drawing).

<sup>49</sup> Simpson 1893: 93; Foucher 1905: 465, fig. 234.



Nanda is thereafter induced to follow the Buddha to give him his bowl back. On the left edge Nanda is depicted once again (Fig. 12). This time kneeling, in front of the Buddha, who turns around to leave while his gaze is still on Nanda. The scene is framed by a city gate, illustrating that the general plot was set into the streets of Kapilavastu. Here the encounter with the Buddha is divided in two scenes: The first, on the right, stresses the affection to his wife, while the second emphasizes his religious sense of duty to the Exalted One.

As a close relative, Nanda shares 30 of the 32 *lakṣaṇas*, i.e. the signs of a great man (*māhapuruṣa*), with the Buddha, as recorded in the *vinayas* of the Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin schools (Zin 2003b: 113). In the relief their resemblance is expressed by depicting both brothers with *uṣṇīṣa*, a kind of a protuberance on top of the head, and even with a nimbus. The only significant difference is that Nanda is represented smaller and wearing jewellery. Coming back to the Karamar slab, on the last panel (Fig. 10) we encounter the seated Buddha in combination with a similar person on the left side of the composition, who is also depicted with *uṣṇīṣa*, jewellery



Fig. 10. Detail of Fig. 1 (bottom scene). Drawing by the author.

and a nimbus, thus resembling the Buddha. Again he turns away from the Buddha to a richly adorned woman holding a lotus bud. The man holds no bowl, but points with his right hand into his face. In case we want to interpret this scene as the conversion of Nanda, the *Saundarananda* would serve as the only possible written source, as this is the only version according to which the Buddha gives the bowl to Nanda not in his house, but later in the streets of Kapilavastu. A second scene, also elaborated in the *Saundarananda*, narrates how Nanda promises Sundarī to come back before the paint in her face is dry, which could easily be indicated by the man's gesture. The lotus bud in the woman's hand could eventually be translated as cipher which the *Saundarananda* (transl. Johnston 1932: IV.4) uses to emphasize the beauty of Sundarī. If this interpretation is correct, the Karamar record shows at least two stories that can be attributed to Aśvaghoṣa.



## ATTEMPT OF A CONTEXTUALIZATION

Such interpretations evoke very general questions: First, what was the significance of these stories, or more specifically, how are they related to each other? And following on this, is there anything of these assumptions we can apply to the conversion scenes represented in Kizil Cave 110?<sup>50</sup> At the present state it is difficult to propose any definite answer on that. One possible approach could be provided by the records of Chinese pilgrims, travelling to northern India. Faxian reported in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century of festivals celebrated annually in Mathura (transl. Beal 1869: 51, fn. 2 [T51n2085p0021]) at towers (*stūpas*?) which were erected in honour of Śāriputra,<sup>51</sup> Maudgalyāyana, Ānanda, and others. After reciting the *vinaya* and offering donations such as flowers and incense to the tower, lamps were kept burning the whole night to emphasize that Śāriputra was previously a Brahmin (transl. Beal 1869: 56–59). In the same lines Faxian mentions that female devotees preferred to worship the *stūpas* of Ānanda, because he requested the Buddha to permit women to become nuns.

These observations are certainly skewed through the perspective of a non-local person, who made his own ideas on what he observed, as interested tourists would do also. However, in the context of our discussion, it seems plausible that certain groups of believers were more attracted to monks who could relate them to their own needs or perhaps even their own descent. It is easy to imagine that plays of Aśvaghōṣa were performed in honour of important monks. The *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* is an extract composed to be performed on the stage. It should therefore come as no surprise that the Karamar relief refers to the play and not to a prose version – it was better known to the spectator. The second scene connected to the writing of Aśvaghōṣa might be explained in a comparable vein, since the elegance of the *Saundarananda* certainly attracted the attention of the elites, as we might assume for the most elaborated version of the story in Ajanta Cave XVI. The same possibilities could certainly be considered for Kucha,<sup>52</sup> since, as shown, the pieces of Aśvaghōṣa have been cherished for a long time.

Coming back to Faxian. His observation that Śāriputra's Brahmanic origin was significant is also reflected in all versions of his conversion. This point gains perhaps even more importance if we assume an environment where other Indic sects were active, i.e. the different doctrines competed for the same believers. Seen from this perspective the *parinirvāṇa* relief that puts the episode with the conversion of Subhādra in the centre gains a special emphasis. As already discussed before with help of the relief in the British Museum (Fig. 3), the sermon to Subhādra stresses the superiority of Buddhist teaching over other schools. The same general plot appears also in the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana from Karamar, the template of which was most probably taken from the Subhādra version of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. Under such circumstances it is very likely that every viewer had an idea of how non-Buddhist ascetics, like *parivrājakas*, looked like, and most probably they also had some basic ideas on the different doctrines related to them. This is certainly also true for Gandhara. Perhaps one could even go further and point

<sup>50</sup> See also the previous section 'The writing of Aśvaghōṣa as narrative source' in the present article.

<sup>51</sup> Xuanzang describes in his travel report of the year 629 a *stūpa*, that was erected at the place where Śāriputra was born and died, transl. Li 1996: 255 [T51n2087p0925a].

<sup>52</sup> Lore Sander (1991: 147) proposed this idea in relation with the conversion of the Kuchean nobility.



out that *Aśvaghōṣa* himself was of Brahmanical origin, who therefore paid much more attention to a precise description of their appearance.<sup>53</sup>

For Kucha most probably the opposite is true. In none of the scenes Subhādra is depicted with the triple staff (*tridaṇḍa*), which is his most significant attribute in Gandhara. Maybe these scenes are going back to the famous *parinirvāṇa* Buddha worshipped in Kuśinagara or comparable scenes like those coming from Ajanta and Taxila, all of them dating to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century. Especially for Kuśinagara the *tridaṇḍa* is placed to the left of Subhādra in a way that it can easily be overlooked by a viewer who attaches little importance to it.<sup>54</sup> The only element in Kucha connecting his depiction with a *parivrājaka* is the white robe which is pulled up to cover the back of his head. This iconography, however, indicates certainly his status, because Buddhist monks were never depicted with covered heads (Zin 2020: 61) which would be easily understandable even if the observer never would have seen a real *parivrājaka*. The same would apply for the scene identified by Santoro (2010) as the skull-tapper. It merely depicts a monk holding a skull, with no hints for the presence of a Brahmin, which should be expected for a certain identification. However, the only exception known to me is a long-haired Brahmin holding a small *tridaṇḍa* at the side of the Ambāṣṭha story (identif. Zin 2009: 80–81) in Kizil Cave 207, with no other characteristics of a *parivrājaka* (Fig. 11). It is rather unlikely that the inhabitants of Kucha could seriously



Fig. 11. Kizil Cave 207 (Malerhöhle), left wall of the cella. Drawing by Albert Grünwedel, inv.no. TA 6570 © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst / Jürgen Liepe.

<sup>53</sup> His legendary biography, translated between 384–417 by Kumārajīva (T50n2046p0183a22–0184a; transl. Li 2002: 9–13), recalls the conversion of Śāriputra and Subhādra who are described as talented Brahmins accepting the superiority of the Buddhist teaching. Maybe the same relationship was also apparent to later authors.

<sup>54</sup> For Kuśinagara see Vogel 1908: 45–46; very similar compositions are known from the Bhamala monastery, Taxila (late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> century), Marshall 1951, vol. 1: 392, 111, pl. 118a; from Ajanta (5<sup>th</sup> century) Zin 2020: 362, fig. 26; from Bamiyan, Cave K3, illustrated in Tarzi 1983: 22, fig. 6; Cave E and F, illustrated in Miyaji 2007, figs. 9, 11.



distinguish between the various sects and religions of India appearing in Buddhist literature. As a result, their representation in iconography was mostly the stereotype of a Brahmin. In this sense the iconography of Subhādra seems to be a simplified adaptation of later models taken from the Gupta period (ca. 320–550) in India or Gandhara, which most probably goes back to models like those adapted for the template used to create the Karamar panel showing the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana.

At the end of these considerations a final point should be addressed. We know just one more certain representation of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, coming from Gandhara. The scene is depicted in a mural, found in a cave under the monastery of Tape Shotor (Hadda). Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana sit on both sides of an open grave with an exposed skeleton. At the side walls eight more monks were depicted, representing together with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana the 10 major disciples of the Buddha. Their identification is ascertained by Brāhmī inscriptions datable by palaeographical reasons between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century. According to the excavators the cave belongs to a constructing phase of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Tarzi 1976: 383, 405–408). This again corresponds with the travel records of Faxian from approximately the same period, in which the special veneration for important monks is mentioned. This, however, seems to be an older tradition. Cunningham (1854: 297–308, pl. XII) discovered in Stūpa III in Sanchi and the nearby Stūpa II of Satdhara (Cunningham 1854: 324–325, pl. XXV) two steatite reliquaries, each dedicated to the remains of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana as indicated by the respective Brāhmī inscriptions, both dated to the late Śuṅga period between 40–45 BCE (Willis 2000: 61; Willis 2001: 225).<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to the importance and early veneration of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana it is particularly surprising not to find any specific iconography, but perhaps there is an error in reasoning within this assumption? Maybe it is better to state that there was a need to express certain narratives, clearly legible for the believer and therefore a distinct iconography was needed. A consistent iconography which helps to identify single monks independent of the narrative context was subsequently developed in Kucha (Zin 2020: 42, 75), this, however, seems mostly not the case for Gandhara. In this sense, the scene on the Karamar slab should be seen as an attempt to illustrate the conversion of the Buddha's premier disciples by referring to established narrative clichés that enable every believer to recognise the intended content.

## CONSIDERATIONS ON DATING

Understanding narrative art always depends on its historical context and its dating, which is in our case ambitious. From an art historical perspective I have argued the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana was most likely derived from the 'Subhādra version' of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, so it should date approximately the same. This is, however, challenging as none of the

<sup>55</sup> The *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mulasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, preserved in Tibetan, states that the *stūpa* of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana should be erected next to the *stūpa* of the Buddha in such a way that their seat reproduces the position they occupied during the Master's lifetime. For references and discussion, see Willis 2001: 225. In this context it is remarkable that in Tape Shotor right in this position prominent *stūpas* were erected, which belongs according to Tarzi (1976: 384) to the same construction phase like the main *stūpa* (M). The same applies to Jaulian in Taxila: Marshall 1951, vol. 3: pl. 101. For the common construction plans of these monasteries, see discussion in the section 'Considerations on dating' in this article.



pieces is dated with certainty.<sup>56</sup> Wladimir Zwalf (1996, vol. 1: 70–71, fn. 60) counted the relief in the British Museum (Fig. 3), which is the best executed of the group, to the ‘mature works’ of Gandharan art. Being aware of the various problems of dating Gandharan art he just indicated a possible belonging to the time span between the middle of the Kuṣāna period and the end of the flourishing of monastic life in Gandhara, i.e. the 2<sup>nd</sup> until the late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> century. This opens a wide range of speculations which make it hard to establish any contextualisation.

Related to the content, a *terminus post quem* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century can be assumed as two stories on the Karamar slab are attributed to Aśvagoṣa, who was most probably living in this period. However, until now the only certain proof for the influence of Aśvagoṣa on Gandharan art comes from the piece showing the conversion of Nanda (Fig. 9a). The relief is reportedly from Hadda, with no further information related to the circumstances in which it was found (Simpson 1893: 107). Later excavations revealed several monasteries around Hadda. In this context one site named Tapa Kalan deserves our attention. Jules Barthoux (1930–33, vol. 3: pl. 94a) unearthed a small head of a Buddha at the main *stūpa* (TK68), and a fragment of a narrative scene (Fig. 9b). Alike the Hadda relief in the British Museum, both were carved in limestone, a seldom used material in Gandharan contexts. Beside the material, both pieces are also in other aspects so similar to the relief in the British Museum, that the head of the Buddha literally could be replaced with the one in the British Museum without being noticed. Similarly, the larger fragment could be added to the one in the British Museum, with which it shares its architectural frame, proportions, rarely achieved quality and several minor details. The only conclusion that can be drawn is: they were originally part of the same work attached to the main *stūpa* of Tapa Kalan. A general plan of the site (see Hackin 1929: 69, Plan 2) reveals a well-known layout appearing also in other sites of Hadda<sup>57</sup> as well as in the latest monastery of the Dharmarajika Complex, the nearby Jaulian (both Taxila) and other sites.<sup>58</sup> The foundation of these monasteries is usually dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century,<sup>59</sup> which again could be taken as a probable dating for the main *stūpa* of Tapa Kalan, although the embellishment could have been added in later construction phases.

Going back to the slab from Hadda some details may prove more helpful to gain further chronological arguments. Remarkable is a rinceau gracing the oblong city gate on the relief’s left side (Fig. 12). The rinceau is composed of a sinusoid filled with leaves that are folded in the middle so that the straight side is always turned outwards, and which is interspersed with tendrils. A rapport made of folded up leaves is not part of the classical canon, but is frequently attested in Hadda and in connection with better datable ornaments, starting in the late 3<sup>rd</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>56</sup> Two samples are coming from 19<sup>th</sup> century excavations in Nathu, a site no longer extant (Ebert 1985: pl. 9, nos. 14 and 15). According to published photos with the arranged finds and a plan of the site Behrendt (2004: 116–118) assumed that they belong to the *harmikās* of two *stūpas*. As we have no idea of the *stūpas*’ original embellishment it is difficult to speculate on their date as Behrendt does. Jorinde Ebert (1985: 116–127) placed the group at two early stages of development within her typology, without being able to fix it with datable material, and without knowing the relief in the British Museum (Fig. 3), which was published later.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Tapa-i-Kafariha, see Behrendt 2004: fig 117; and Tape Shotor, see Tarzi 1976: 383, fig. 1.

<sup>58</sup> See Marshall 1951, vol. 3: pls. 45; 101; for Khader Mohra and Pippala both also Taxila: Marshall 1951, vol. 3: pls. 68a, 98a; for Takht-i Bahi: Behrendt 2004: fig. 2; Jamal Garhi, northern monastery Behrendt 2004: fig. 61; etc.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall (1951, vol. 1: 261) dates the foundation of the monasteries to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century; Behrendt (2004: 262–264) relates the architectural strata of these monasteries to coin deposits from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century, in particular *stūpa* A16 of Jaulian, which is contemporaneous with the main *stūpa*, contained coins issued by Vāsudeva (184–220 CE); Tarzi (1976: 382–384) considers the same date for Tape Shotor main *stūpa*.





Fig. 12. Detail of Fig. 9a. Drawing by the author.

until the early Middle Ages.<sup>60</sup> A second striking observation related to the rinceau is its absence in Gandhara door frames. In contrast, comparable means were frequently used in Gupta doorways to elaborate entrances with stepped frames, quite close to those in the Hadda relief.<sup>61</sup>

Another detail appearing in both reliefs illustrating the *Saundarananda*, i.e. the one from Hadda (Fig. 9a) and the one from Karamar (Fig. 10), is the use of *lakṣaṇas* to emphasise family ties to the Buddha. In this context it is important to note that the best executed version of the same story from Ajanta Cave XVI also shows Nanda (the Buddha's half-brother) and Ānanda (the Buddha's cousin) with *uṣṇīṣa* (i.e. one of the *lakṣaṇas*), the latter even confusingly similar to the

<sup>60</sup> For examples of rinceau decorations from Hadda, see Barthoux 1930–33, vol. 1: 53, 40a, d. from Shortorak, see Meunié 1942: nos. 43, 68, 32, 127, 128. The oldest datable examples appear on ivory carvings from Begram (Hackin and Hackin 1937–39, vol. 2: pl. XLVII, fig. 112 and pl. LXXVIII, fig. 238 and Hackin *et al.* 1954, vol. 2: figs. 16, 67, 68). The finds are best comparable to the art of late Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda according to Rosen Stone (1975) dating to the latter part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> / early part of 4<sup>th</sup> century. Another example is on a heavily worn false gable found in a stratigraphic context in Butkara I (Swat) together with coins, the latest of which were issued by Kidarit rulers (last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century), see Faccenna 1980–81, III.1: 181–182, pl. CDIII no.1550. The rinceau pattern is also depicted on a silver bowl from Swat, which is kept in the British Museum and can be dated around the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (von Mitterwallner 1987). For a discussion of Sasanian rinceaux made of stucco from Umm az-Za'atir, Ma'arid IV (Iraq) and Nizamabad (Iran) dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the early Islamic period, with further references, see Kröger 1982: 233, 259–261, figs. 31, 54, pl. 62.1.

<sup>61</sup> Door jamb in Mathura, dated 375 see Plaeschke 1986: 49, fig. 7; Doorway in Ghatotkaca Plaeschke 1986: 55, fig. 21 last quarter 5<sup>th</sup> century; Doorway in Tumain ca. 435/6 Williams 1982: pls. 121–122; door jambs in Sarnath ca. 460–480 Williams 1982: pl. 99; Ajanta XVII, entrance to the cave: Zin 2003a, vol. 2: pl. 27, second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, etc.



Buddha (see Zin 2003b: 109–110, drawings 2–5). Apart from the Buddha, *lakṣaṇas* are a rarely used iconographic means. The best attested samples using it belong to murals from Ajanta and Kucha (Zin 2003b: 112–113),<sup>62</sup> which should not come as a surprise as it is much easier to express subtle details in large-sized colour paintings than within comparatively small reliefs. However, even in Ajanta the representation of *lakṣaṇas* is an exception.<sup>63</sup> This makes it even more remarkable that the conversion of Nanda is also in Gandhara the only scene showing frequently a family member of the Buddha with *uṣṇīṣa*.<sup>64</sup>

Developing this point further the Hadda relief and the Karamar version recall the Ajanta painting also in other details. Comparable are the scenes in the upper right half (Fig. 8). They show two core moments side by side, namely: how the Buddha gives his begging bowl to Nanda and the forced admission into the monastic community. The first scene shows Nanda kneeling before the Buddha with the city gate in his back. The proportions of the much taller Buddha and the smaller Nanda, having the same posture with one knee on the ground while the second is turned to the spectator, correspond to those on the Hadda relief. They differ mainly in that the Hadda version indicates the Buddha's movement to return into the monastery and that Nanda is already holding the bowl in his hands. Within a dense composition both details make the moment better comprehensible for the viewer.

In contrast, the Karamar scene shows the Buddha in an observing pose, which can be explained in turn with the Ajanta scene. During the forced ordination the Buddha is depicted unorthodoxly in the second row significantly smaller than usual, which gives him an unusual role as observer (see Fig. 8, central portion). Without knowledge of a more complex pattern, the pose on the Karamar slab would remain incomprehensible.

It is presumptuous to claim that both reliefs go back directly to the Ajanta painting, but we can assume that similar complex patterns (most probably also paintings) were common, of which the Ajanta version is the only one known to us. The Ajanta mural dates to the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Its comparison with the Hadda relief reveals the closest relation in terms of proportions and posture as well as the use of *lakṣaṇas*. It can be assumed that the relief from Hadda is somewhat older, but this time frame should not be narrowed down too far, otherwise the 'Gupta gate' with the rinceau could not be explained. Despite all uncertainties, the relief from Hadda seems to date best to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Dating the Karamar panel is more speculative. In Gandhara most scenes representing the conversion of Nanda reveal a developed iconography linking either Nanda's life in the palace with the moment he approaches the standing Buddha, or his forced

<sup>62</sup> According to Satomi Hiyama (2014: 156–157) in Kucha expressing family ties to the Buddha with help of an *uṣṇīṣa* is restricted to the Second Indo-Iranian Stil, in earlier paintings this means was not used.

<sup>63</sup> In all other occasions Ānanda is the only family member depicted with *uṣṇīṣa*. A badly preserved painting in Ajanta cave XVII shows the assault on the Buddha's life by the drunken elephant Dhanapāla; in a second scene of Nanda's conversion (?) in cave XIX, depicted on a pillar within a small framed panel; an unfinished sketch above the large Parinirvāna sculpture in cave XXVI, at the same sculpture Ānanda appears again with *uṣṇīṣa* for references and discussen Zin 2003b: 108–111.

<sup>64</sup> In Gandhara the *uṣṇīṣa* is easy to confuse with hair tied into a bun. Certain representations showing Nanda with *uṣṇīṣa* appear on a relief in Karachi, see Kurita 1988–90, I: 165, fig. 318; also in Peshawar found in Sahri Bahlol: Ingholt 1957: fig. 94; Kurita 1988–90, I: 167, fig. 324; for a relief from Jamalgarhi, today in Calcutta: Foucher 1905: 466, fig. 235; Kurita 1988–90, I: 168, fig. 326 and in New Delhi: Foucher 1905: 469, fig. 237, etc. Aside, also few cases showing Ānanda or Devadatta with *uṣṇīṣa* are attested (Zin 2003b: 111), one of them belongs to a second slab from Karamar most probably made in the same workshop (Zin 2003b: 128, fig. 4), another crude executed relief is in Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin Acc.No. I 183 (Zin 2003b: 128, fig. 5).



ordination in the monastery (Zin 2006: 177). In Karamar both versions seem to be lumped together, with an unusual observing Buddha. This might be understood as an early iconography when a fixed pattern for small-sized reliefs was not yet established, however this assumption remains far from being certain.

## IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS

Beyond speculative attempts to date the reliefs, more important is the proposed reference to large-scale paintings serving probably as a connecting link between narrative reliefs and popular literature. Such an assessment is only possible when we accept the existing of a rich painting tradition, almost not preserved to the present. In this regard the template for the *Saundarananda* was most likely not made for Ajanta, otherwise the use of *lakṣaṇas*, to stress family ties with the Buddha, would have been present more frequently at the same site. This, however, could be taken as an argument for the earlier existence of complex painted versions that were influential in Gandhara as well.

It is easily imaginable that the performance of theatre plays on stage could have fulfilled the same function. The composition of the *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* on the Karamar slab reflects the interdependence of the used textual template and established iconography, which should not come as a surprise. Staging a play is connected to a certain choreography, arranging every detail in the right place to achieve a certain effect, legible for the spectator. Such means can be comparatively easy translated into iconographic language. Someone who is used to follow a performance is also likely to be able to understand a transmission of the central scene into a relief, even when its iconography is not yet established. The presence of the works of Aśvaghōṣa on the Karamar slab is a good argument for both assessments — the influence of large-scale paintings and a tradition of performing theatre — putting flesh on the bones of Gandharan art, otherwise no more traceable.

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