The Parable of ‘The Man in the Well’
Its Travels and its Pictorial Traditions from Amaravati to Today

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Dedicated
to HRH Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
Princess of Thailand,
in memento of Her visit to Munich
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Among the Buddhist reliefs found in Nagarjunakonda (Nāgārjunakoṇḍa—Eds.), the ancient Vijayapurī of the Ikṣvāku in the 3rd century CE, there are still many whose meaning has not been satisfactorily explained. Nagarjunakonda was discovered in the 1920s and excavated some years later.¹ The most extensive excavations were made in the 1950s, before the dam was built and the water of the river Krishna submerged the entire valley which became the Nagarjunasagar, covering the archaeological site for ever (SOUNDARARAJAN (2006)).

The Ikṣvāku were a local dynasty who tried to imitate the great Sātavāhanas from Dharaṇikoṭa, the place ca. 125 km downstream which is known today as Amaravati (Amarāvatī—Eds.). Like the Sātavāhanas, the Ikṣvāku were not Buddhist, but their wives, sisters and many of their subjects were (ROSEN STONE (1980)). Buddhism must have been very important and must have had the support of the rulers, since there were many Buddhist sites with stūpas, temples and monasteries in the close vicinity of the capital Vijayapurī. The reliefs from those sites are today held in the museum on Nagarjuna Island as well as in museums in India and all over the world. Explanations of the subjects of the reliefs are principally found in VOGEL (1929, 1932, 1933), LONGHURST (1938) and RAO (1956).

¹ For discovery of the site and excavations cf. ROSEN STONE (1994: 1–3).
The reliefs from Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati include many subjects which have no parallels in any other Buddhist schools; however, because their motifs are repeatedly depicted, we are lead to believe that their themes must have been popular, whether or not their meanings have been explained.

One such theme was a story which is represented in a relief kept on Nagarjuna Island [fig. 1]. The scene is a part of a long frieze and shows two consecutive scenes of the narrative in one register. The story is clearly set outdoors because there are some trees in the background. On the right-hand side there is a man who is characterised by a princely head-dress and an ornament above his left ear. The man is holding a spear in his left hand and his right hand is lifted so that the tip is pointing upwards. The man seems to be stepping forwards while three women try to stop him. The next scene, further to the left, depicts the same man sitting by the throne of a preaching monk (it is a monk, not the Buddha, since the usṇīṣa, the āryā and the long earlobes are lacking). The man clasps his hands together in a gesture of worshipping with respect to the monk, as does a woman who is at the side of the throne;

Fig. 1. Nagarjunakonda, Site 9, Nagarjunakonda Museum, No. 24, frieze, ill.: Vogel (1937: pl. 34a); Longhurst (1938: pl. 31b); Rao (1956); Rosen Stone (1994: fig. 64, pl. 81); Zin (2004: fig. 15 / drawing). ©Monika Zin. [For a colour print, see the Appendix]
the man is no longer in an aggressive position as if due to the sermon he is listening to. On the other side of the monk, on the left-hand edge of the register, something very peculiar is represented [fig. 2 a–b]. The tiny figure of a man can easily be recognised: he seems to be naked, his arms are held high and his legs are bent at the knees, which implies that he is hanging. Below his feet there is a huge, coiled snake with open jaws, ready to catch him. On the sides there is a sort of a frame, out of which four cobras emerge. In the upper part there is a tree and to the left the most prominent feature: an elephant which is shown as if falling down. It is possible to recognise a little animal to the left of the man’s hands and there may be another one to the right.

The same narrative can be recognised on another relief in the Nagarjunakonda Museum [fig. 3]. Here as well there is an aggressive, princely looking man with a spear in his left hand and a lifted right index finger; in this relief he is coming out of a building where some women try to stop him. To the left there is the scene with the preaching monk and to the side of the monk there is again an additional scene, here depicted diminutively, which contains the same elements [fig. 4 a–b]: the hanging man with drawn up legs, the giant snake with opened jaws below and four cobras to the sides. Above the upper part of the frame there is the tree, the elephant and a small animal (or again perhaps two animals). The frame in this relief is more easily decipherable since there are regular blocks of stones on its outer wall: the frame must be a well.

There is another example of the same narrative which is now kept in Paris [fig. 5]. The relief is more elaborate—the woman’s attempt to stop the man is depicted in dramatic scenes—but it also more mutilated; however, the same elements are recognisable. The diminutive scene on the side of the preaching monk [fig. 6] is certainly the same; an umbrella lying on the side can be explained as having been dropped by the man.
In addition to the depictions discussed above, there are three more examples of the same narrative but these are not from Nagarjunakonda but from Amaravati. The representations are very small; they are shown in the decoration of the stūpas depicted on slabs, so they are only a few centimetres high. It is only our knowledge of the bigger examples which allow us to recognise the contents of these tiny versions. One of these miniature scenes is to be found in the Archaeological Site Museum at Amaravati [figs. 7 a–b], another one in the British Museum [fig. 8], recognised by ROSEN STONE (1994: 38), and perhaps also one more on a slab in the Amaravati Museum [fig. 9]; on this last however, the part with the seated monk has not survived. The importance of these diminutive depictions is that they provide us with evidence that the story must have been known before they were created, since there must have been bigger, more elaborate depictions to enable the viewer to understand the miniature ones.

Fig. 3. Nagarjunakonda, Site 2, Nagarjunakonda Museum, No. 18, stūpa slab, ill.: LONGHURST (1938: pl. 49b); EINHORN (1972: fig. 117); ROSEN STONE (1994: fig. 222, 223); ZIN (2004: fig. 17 / drawing); SUGITA (2007: fig. 4). © Monika Zin [For a colour print, see the Appendix]
The representations from Amaravati shift the dating of the motif back, since the slabs can be dated to the beginning of the 3rd or even the end of the 2nd century CE.

The reliefs in Nagarjunakonda Museum [figs. 1, 3] are labelled as the ‘Subjugation of Æṣavika’, however, this identification can be refuted because the Yakṣa Æṣavika was converted by the Buddha himself, not by a monk; moreover, Hastaka, a boy who played a crucial role in this conversion is not represented in any of our reliefs.³

This identification of the scene as a depiction of the Æṣavika narrative has become established in spite of the fact that VOGEL had already recognised the crucial element of the relief in 1937, when he identified the diminutive scene of the preaching monk as the parable of ‘The Man in the Well’. VOGEL (1937: 113–15) explained the rest of the relief with reference to an unknown version of a narrative about King Udayana, which still remains unknown (cf. infra, p. 78). Even so it is certain that this is the parable of ‘The Man in the Well’, and it is to the great credit of Jean Philippe VOGEL that he recognised it.

VOGEL renders the story of the parable as follows (1937: 112–13):

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² The identification was first made by LONGHURST (1938: 45–46), repeated by RAO (1956) and (1984), and in the popular guide by SARKAR–MISRA (1966).

³ For the literary and pictorial tradition of the narrative cf. ZIN (2006: Ch. 1).
'Once on a time a man, while traversing a desert, saw himself pursued by a furious elephant. He was seized with fright and knew not where to find a refuge when he perceived a dry well near which grew the long roots of a tree. He seized those roots and let himself glide down into the well. But two rats, one black and the other white, gnawed together the roots of that tree. At the four sides of the tree there were four venomous snakes which endeavoured to bite him, and beneath there was a dragon gorged with poison. In the depth of his hearth he equally feared the dragon’s poison, the serpents and the breaking of the roots. There dwelled on that tree a swarm of bees which made five drops of honey trickle down into his mouth.'

Fig. 5. Nagarjunakonda, Site 6 ?, Musée Guimet, No. 17067, stūpa slab, ill.: VOGEL (1937, pl. 33b); HACKIN (1931, pl. 5–7); DENECK (1970, pl. 82–85); ROSEN STONE (1994, fig. 113); ZIN (2004, fig. 16, drawing); SUGITA (2007, fig. 5, detail). Here after HACKIN.

The parable of ‘The Man in the Well’ was the object of Indological research long before VOGEL, as part of the 19th century vogue for comparative studies of literary motifs, and the story was therefore known in Europe. Friedrich Rückert, the pioneer of Oriental Studies and also a popular German poet, published the translation of the
The parable in 1823⁴ based on the poem of the 13th century Persian Sufi mystic, Rûmî (cf. infra, p. 54). Rückert’s poem made the parable commonly known in Germany and shortly afterwards other versions began to circulate, including versions from India. In 1859 Theodor Benfey, followed in 1860 by Felix Liebrecht and in 1888 by Ernst Kuhn, was able to deliver the first summing up about the spreading of the parable.⁵ Kuhn (1888: 70) demonstrated beyond any doubt that the parable originally came from India since its elements were known from earlier Indian sources: the chase by an elephant and the fall into a pit were already referred to as similes in the Brhad-âranyâ-kôpanîsad.⁶

Today, our knowledge about the parable is more extensive: we know that it is rendered in the Mahâ-bhârata⁷, in four Jaina sources, namely in the Vasudevâ-hîndi of Saîghadâsî⁸, in the

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⁵ The comparative research of the 19th century connected the parable with far-flung stories from European storytelling, in which the similarities of the story are not recognisable at first glance (German mythology of Iggdrasil, ‘May-tree’), by seeing in it an archetypal understanding of human life; cf. Vasil’kov (1995), references to the earlier research.

⁶ For newer research about the subject cf. e.g. Hara (1985); von Simson (2010).

⁷ MBh₁ 11.5–6, pp. 19–24; MBh₂ 37–38.


Fig. 7. Archaeological Site Museum of ASI, No. 22. © Monika Zin

⁹ SK₁ 110–14; SK₂ 225–28.
¹⁰ PP, 68–69; PP2, 64–68.
¹¹ DhPar 2.5–21, analys. (1903: 39–40).
¹⁴ T 1690, P’in t’êou lou t’ou lo chô wei yeou t’o yen wang chouo fa king, ed. Vol. 32, p. 787.
Fig. 8. British Museum, No. 69, ill.: Ferguson (1868: pl. 81.1); Stern–Bénisti (1952: pl. 43); Knox (1992: no. 68, p. 130); Rosen Stone (1994: figs. 67–68); Zin (2004: fig. 18/drawing). © Trustees of the British Museum
compiled by Sañ-min, 516 CE\textsuperscript{15}, T 2122 (Nj. 1482: ‘Pearl-grove of the garden of the law’, compiled by Tao shi, 668 CE\textsuperscript{16} and T 2131 (Nj. 1640: ‘A collection of the meanings of the [Sanskrit] names translated [into Chinese]’ of Fa-yun, 1151 CE\textsuperscript{17}). There is also one Tibetan version, but it is very different from the Indian one\textsuperscript{18}.

The sources differ from one another in the presence or absence of particular elements of the parable and through the explanation of the allegory. The Buddhist version quoted above (it is the Chinese text, T 217) continues (after Vogel (1937: 113)):

\begin{quote}
‘The tree and the desert figure the long night of ignorance; that man figures the heretics; the elephant figures the impermanence of things; the well figures the brink of life and death; the roots of the tree figure human existence; the two rats, white and black, figure day and night; the roots of the tree gnawed by those two animals figure the obliviousness of ourselves and the extinction of all thought; the four venomous serpents figure the four great things \[, i.e. the four elements (Skt. mahā-bhūtāni)\]; the bees figure the vicious thoughts: the honey figures old age and illness; the venomous dragon figures death.’
\end{quote}

One can see at first glance that the explanations of the allegory are far from logical: if the roots of the tree from which the man is hanging stand for human existence, why should the man himself stand for heretics and not for everyone? Why is honey, whose main characteristic is its sweetness, explained as the ills of life, old age and illness? It looks as if, when the Chinese translation was made, the explanation of the parable was not true to its original meaning.

Another Chinese text (T 208) appears more logical. Let us quote it here in the German translation from Juli en (cf. supra, n. 12):

\begin{quote}
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\textsuperscript{17} T 2131, Fan yi ming yi tsi, ed. Vol. 54, p. 1141c.

\textsuperscript{18} Dpe-chos rin-chen spungs-pa by Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal (1027/31–1105), Ch. 3, example 6, cf. Roessler (2011: Teil I, Kap. 3.2 und Teil II, Beispiel 3.5+).

Der heilige Mann (Buddha) schöpfte aus dieser Begebenheit verschiedene Gleichnisse. Das Gefängnis bedeutet die drei Welten, der Gefangene die gesamte Menschheit, der wütende Elephant den Tod, der Brunnen den Wohnsitz der Sterblichen; der giftige Drache auf dem Grunde des Brunnen bedeutet die Hölle; die vier giftigen Schlangen bedeuten die vier grossen Dinge (Erde, Wasser, Feuer und Wind); die Wurzel der Pflanze die Wurzel des menschlichen Lebens; die weissen Ratten Sonne und Mond, die nach und nach das Leben des Menschen aufzehren, die es untergraben und jeden Tag vermindern, ohne einen einzigen Augenblick inne zu halten …’

In this version the man stands for mankind, the well for the abode of mortals, the root on which the man is hanging for life, the elephant for death and the dragon for hell. However, it is not clear why the venomous snakes should symbolise Earth, Water, Fire and Wind, moreover, both rats are here white, whereas as we will see, it is important that one rat (mouse) is white and the other black.

There is no surviving Buddhist version which would correspond with our depictions; T 2121 (cf. supra, n. 15) speaks about three snakes and does not mentioned the dragon, T 1690 talks in addition about the bush-fire that razes the tree to the ground (the same thing is also found in T 217) and the explanation of the allegory in those texts is incomprehensible in many points.

It seems that of all the sources known today it is the Jaina texts which have preserved the version which corresponds best with our reliefs. At the same time it is a very logical retelling. Let us quote here the parable from the oldest preserved version, the Vasudeva-hindi, in the new translation by METTE (2010: 68–69):

‘Ein Mann, der sich auf einer weiten Reise befand, hatte sich einer Karawane angeschlossen und war mit ihr in eine wilde Gegend gezogen. Räuber zerschlugen jedoch die Karawane, der Mann wurde abge-
sprengt und irrte umher, ohne die Richtungen zu kennen. Von einem wilden Elefanten überfallen, dessen Haupt von Brunftsaft feucht war wie ein Regentag, flüchtete er und erblickte einen alten, von Gras und Binsen ringsum bedeckten Brunnen. An dessen Rand stand ein gewaltiger Nyagrodha-Baum, von dem ein Ast in den Brunnen hineinragte. Von Furcht überwältigt, hängte sich der Mann an den Ast, hielt sich mitten im Brunnen schwebend und schaute um sich: Oh weh! Da war eine riesige Boa mit aufgerissenen Augen, bereit, ihn zu fressen! Die erblickte der Mann unten. Seitlich aber, in jeder der vier Himmelsrichtungen, waren grausige Schlangen, die ihn beißen wollten. An dem Ast über ihm nagten zwei Mäuse, eine schwarze und eine weiße. Der Elefant berührte mit dem Rüssel seine Haarspitzen. Auf dem Baum aber befand sich ein sehr bevölkertes Bienennest. Als nun der Baum von dem Elefanten geschüttelt wurde, sprühte der Wind einige Honigtropfen in den Mund des Mannes, und die kostete er. Die Bienen aber flogen von allen Seiten her um ihn herum und wollten stechen. Sag, was war wohl das Glück des Mannes in dieser Lage? Die Honigtropfen, die er begehrte, waren sein Glück, denke ich, alles übrige war Unglück.—So war es. Nun aber die Bedeutung des Gleichnisses: Wie im Gleichnis jener Mann, so ist die Seele, die im Strom der Wiedergeburten, im Samsāra, kreist; wie jene wilde Gegend, so—vielfältig durch Geburt, Alter, Krankheit und Tod—ist die Wildnis des Samsāra; wie der wilde Elefant, so der Tod; wie der Brunnen, so eine Wiedergeburt als Gott oder Mensch; wie die Riesenschlange, so eine Wiedergeburt in der Hölle oder Tierwelt; wie die anderen Schlangen, so Zorn, Stolz, Trug, Gier, die vier bösen Leidenschaften, die zu schlechten Wiedergeburten führen; wie der Ast, so die Lebenszeit; wie die beiden Mäuse, so die hellen und dunklen Monatshälften, die mit dem Zubiß von Nächten und Tagen das Leben kürzen; wie der Baum, so die Gründe für die Bindung von Karman, nämlich Unwissenheit (ajñānam), Haften an den Sinnesfreuden (avirati) und Irrgläube (micchattā / mithyātvam); wie der Honig, so die Sinnesobjekte: der Ton, der Gegenstand der Berührung, der Geschmack, die Form und der Duft; wie die Bienen, so die Krankheiten, die den Körper anfallen und in ihm ausbrechen. Woher bezieht einer, der sich so in Angst und Not befindet, sein Glück?—Einzig aus der Süße des Honigtropfens entsteht seine Vorstellung von Glück!'

The Jaina version must have preserved the oldest source which is no longer available in any of the Buddhist versions but which is shown in the Nagarjunakonda reliefs. All the depicted elements are there (and also the honey and the bees, which
are not depicted probably because of the difficulties of representation). The explanations of the elements of the simile are also not only logical but also affect the reader deeply: in this version the elephant symbolises death, the giant snake hell, honey the delusion of the senses, the branch of the tree life, and the white and black mice stand for the days and nights which make life shorter.

Compared with this, the version in the Mahā-bhārata (cf. supra, n. 7) is quite different and does not fit the Nagarjunakonda depictions at all. In this version, the man is hanging with his head down and there is no mention of the four venomous snakes. The elephant is not a normal one but is six-faced and twelve-legged, which according to the text represents the six seasons and twelve months—evidently an extension of the earlier ‘days and nights’. The version in the Mahā-bhārata can by no means be treated as the oldest and original one, on the contrary, its details prove that it was taken from Buddhist sources; it even looks as if the Buddhist pictorial representations of the Samsāra-cakra (‘the Wheel of Rebirth’) could play a role in its
imagery (cf. ZIN–SCHLINGLOFF (2007: 99, 144–45)). As von SIMSON (2010) observes, the description includes a terrible woman embracing wildness (saṃsāra) which brings to mind the (female) monster anityatā embracing the Wheel of Rebirths.

Excluding the Tibetan version (cf. supra, n. 18), which includes only the white and black mice, there are 11 versions from India (five in Indian languages and six in Chinese translations). Although this would seem to be a lot, in fact, the Jain versions are actually quotations renderings of one and the same content and the Chinese sources are collections of parables or compilations. From the Brahmanical sources we have only the Mahā-bhārata (cf. supra, n. 7), where Vidura tells the parable to Dhṛtarāṣṭra as a simile of the impermanence of the world using a metaphor related to Buddhism. The parable has not found its way into popular literature: it was not incorporated into any story-collections such as the Pañca-tantra or the Brhat-kathā (the parable does not appear in the Brhat-kathā-śloka-saṅgraha, the Kathā-sarit-sāgara or the Brhat-kathā-mañjari, and in the Vasudeva-hinḍī it is a part of the introduction, not the main story), thus it seems that in India the parable was not very popular. As for pictorial representations, these are only found in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The representations from Amaravati, which can be dated to the 2nd c. CE, are the earliest of all known, pictorial or literary, sources.

Even if it was not very popular in India, the parable managed to leave India and become part of the imagery of mankind. It did not travel by itself, rather it was carried on the back of two very popular narratives: one was a collection of animal fables of Brahmanical origin and the other one was a Buddhist romance.

The collection of fables was the Pañca-tantra, one of the most widespread and oft-translated narratives in the world.19 As its translations relate, the Persian king Khostrou Anoširvān (531–579) sent his physician Borzōē to India to bring him the famous book. Borzōē brought the book and translated it into middle Persian (Pahlavi), and so the Karīrak ud Damanak came into existence (the name comes from Karaṭa and Damanaka, the Sanskrit names of two jackals from the frame story of the Pañca-tantra). Now, Borzōē included the parable of ‘The Man in the Well’ in his text, placing it into his own biography, not into the collection of fables itself. Since the Indian Pañca-tantra does not incorporate the parable, Borzōē’s source is unknown (DE BLOIS (1991a, esp. 34–37)); but according to the examination of the paper in hand, the version must have been close to the version as it is preserved in the Vasudeva-hinḍī (cf. supra, p. 43 f.).

Borzōē’s translation of the Pañca-tantra has not survived the times, but there are two further translations which are based directly on his. One of them, the Kalīlav-Damnuḡ, a translation into Syrian written about 570 by the Persian Christian named

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Bûdh (it is preserved in only one manuscript from the 16th century, cf. Wright (1884)), did not play an important role in spreading of the narrative. The second one, the *Kalîla wa-Dimna* (known mostly as *The Fables of Bidpai*) was the translation into Arabic by Abdallâh ibn al-Muqaffâ20; this translation was not only of importance in itself but it also because it became the basis for translations into further languages, including nearly all the European ones.21

Al-Muqaffâ was Manichaean and he was executed in 757, so the Arabic translation must have been written around the middle of the 8th century.

The version by al-Muqaffâ is as follows (after (Wolff 1839: XXXVI–XXXVIII)):

‘Man kann dasselbe (…) mit nichts besser vergleichen, als mit einem Menschen, welcher, vor einem wütenden Elephanten fliehend, in einen Brunnen hinabsteigt; er hält sich fest an zwei Ästen, die über den Brunnen herhängen, er steht auf einem hervorstehenden Stein des Gemäuers. Vier Schlangen strecken ihre Köpfe heraus aus ihren Löchern in der Mauer; auf dem Boden des Brunnenens gewahrt er einen Drachen, welcher, mit offenem Rachen, nur den Augenblick seines Falls erwartet, um ihn zu verschlingen. Seine Blicke richten sich auf die zwei Äste, an denen er sich festhält, aber er sieht da zwei Ratten entstehen, eine schwarze und eine weiße, die ohne Aufhören an den Ästen nagen. Indeß bietet sich seinem Blick ein anderer Gegenstand dar, ein Bienenstock. Er macht sich an den Honig desselben und vergißt, ob solchem Genuß, der Schlangen, auf welchen seine Füße ruhen, der Ratten, welche die Äste abnagen, an denen er sich festhält, und der drohenden Gefahr, eine Beute des Drachens zu werden, der auf den Augenblick seines Falles paßt. Seine Unbesonnenheit und seine Selbsttäuschung hören erst mit seinem Leben auf.

Der Brunnen aber, das ist die Welt, voll von Gefahren und Elend. Die vier Schlangen, das sind die vier Säfte, deren Mischung unsern Körper bildet, die aber, wenn ihr Gleichgewicht gestört wird, eben so viel tödendes Gift werden. Die zwei Ratten, die schwarze und die weiße, das sind der Tag und die Nacht, deren stete Folge die Dauer unseres Lebens verzehrt. Der Drache, das ist das unausweichbare Ziel, das uns alle erwartet. Der Honig endlich, das sind die sinnlichen Vergnügen-

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21 Silvestre de Sacy (1816: 1–556); El Vol. 4: 503–06 (C. Brockelmann); the genealogical tables of the spreading of the translations are very impressive, as found in the frontispieces of Tawney’s translation of the *Kathâ-sarit-sâgara* (see Tawney–Penzer (1924 V: 232 ff.) or Grube (1991a).
gen, deren falsche Süßigkeit uns verführt und uns von dem Wege abgeleitet, den wir gehen sollten.

The tree from the Indian version, with branches which hang down inside the well (one immediately thinks of the Indian Banyan tree with its aerial-roots), has disappeared from the story; here the man is holding two branches which are hanging above the well. The text states at first that he is standing on a protruding stone, but then that he is standing on the snakes. The dangerous elephant is mentioned at the beginning as the reason for the man’s flight but it is not explained at the end as one of the elements of the simile. For the symbol of death there is the dragon at the bottom of the well, while the snakes stand for troubles and illnesses (literary the four humours which, when their balance is destroyed, change into deadly poison), the well stands for the world and the branches for life: these are being shortened by the white and black rats which are again the days and nights which make life shorter (the branches are not explained). The honey is the false sweetness of the senses.

Fig. 10. Syria, ca. 1200–1220 CE, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Ar. 3465, fol. 43v; ill.: GRUBE (1991b: fig. 61); O’KANE 2003, fig. 7; SUGITA 2007, fig. 1; here after O’KANE.
The *Kalîla wa-Dimna* was one of the first books of the Islamic world to have been illustrated and there is an unbroken tradition of illustrating the manuscripts.

The oldest preserved manuscripts come from the Arabic ‘classical tradition’ (Grube (1990–91: 36)). The books from the 13th [fig. 10] and 14th centuries [fig. 11] include the illustrations of our parable. What the pictures show corresponds quite well with the text by al-Muqaffa when we bear in mind that 500 years of the

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Grube (1991a: 4) proceeds from the assumption that the *Kalîla wa-Dimna* of al-Muqaffa was already illustrated. Raby (1991: 22 ff. with notes) is more tentative and he debates if the earliest Pahlavi, Arabic and Persian translations were illustrated.

Cf. Raby (1991: 17 ff.), a study about earlier depictions of the stories from the *Pañca-tantra* from India and Panjikent.
pictorial tradition (and a millennium since the creation of the depiction in Amara-vati) are lost to us. The man is represented inside the well, he is holding himself up by two plants (or trees) growing by the edge of it, the two mice gnawing on the plants are white and black, but they are as big as dogs. The dripping honey is alluded to through the man’s open mouth, and in one case (O’KANE 2003: fig. 10) the artist painted an object in the branches of the tree which probably represents a nest of bees or a bee-hive. The biggest problem for the painters was the representation of the inside of the well: they made it transparent so as to be able to show the dragon at the bottom and the snakes, the man is standing on. The well is therefore depicted either as a circle around the man or it is not represented at all [fig. 11] in which case the man looks as if he is standing above a hollow. The elephant is not depicted in any of the illustrations.

The Kalîla wa-Dimna of al-Muqaffà was translated into Neo-Persian. There were several translations, the one from the 10th century by Rōdakī is lost (GRUBE (1990–91: 320)), another one Dastānhâ-ye Bidpai by Moḥammad ibn Abdallāh al-Bokhari was not very popular, while the translation from the 12th century, the Kalîle va Demne by Abū’l-Maʿālî Naṣrallâh Monśi, known as Naṣrollâh, is popular in Iran even today.25

The version by Naṣrollâh kept some of the details from the Kalîla wa-Dimna but changed them partly: the cause of the man’s flight is not an elephant but a camel. The man escapes not into the well but into a hollow. That can perhaps be explained not as a change made by al-Muqaffà but as the adaptation into the written text of the imagery from pictorial representations [fig. 11].

The Persian translations were also illustrated from the beginning. The Šâhnâmeh, from the middle of 10th century, relates how the Samanid ruler Naṣr ibn Aḥmad (913–42 CE) ordered Chinese artists to make pictures to accompany the translation by Rōdakī. ‘The Chinese’ should be understood here as the Manichaean Uyghurs (DE BLOIS (1991b: 14) and (1991a: 28, n. 2)).

The version by Naṣrollâh provides the basis for various illustrations of the parable in the Persian paintings; the Kalîle va Demne have been extremely popular through the centuries and were illustrated,26 many manuscripts include depictions of our parable.27

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24 The illustrations are often referred to as ‘the Perils of Life’; cf. also O’KANE (2003: 58–60); SUGITA (2007: figs. 1–3).
In the beginning the pictorial pattern of the Persian illustrations does not differ much from their forerunners except that the camel appears to one side [fig. 12]. In later paintings the camel gets bigger so that the entire composition is changed sometimes into an asymmetrical one [fig. 13]. The painters face the same difficulties about depicting the inside of the hollow as their predecessors. They show the man
inside the opening in the ground but an additional hole can be seen below this—as if the earth were transparent here. Through this hole, the inside of the ditch is visible with the dragon on the bottom and the snakes on which the man is standing. Further details remain unchanged, the man holds on to two plants which are being gnawed by the white and the black mouse and his mouth is open, allowing the dripping honey to fall into it from the round bees’ nest on the tree.

The parable of ‘The Man in the Pit’ was popular in Persia as part of the collection of stories, but it was also known independently of it. Such independent literary work

Fig. 13. Bagdad or Tabriz, AH 744 / 1343–44 CE, Cairo, National Library, MS Adab Farsi 61, fol. 16v, ill.: GRUBE (1991b: fig. 62); O’KANE 2003, fig. 16; SUGITA 2007, fig. 9; here after O’KANE.
Fig. 14. Moghul Court School, late 16th century, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, W. 692, ill.: GRUBE (1991b: fig. 65); SUGITA (2007: fig. 13). © The Walters Art Museum
must have been the prototype of the poem by Friedrich Rückert, *Es ging ein Mann im Syrerland, Führt’ ein Kamel am Halfterband...* (cf. supra, n. 4); it is said that Rückert translated the poem of a Sufi mystic Gelâllodin Rûmî (1207–1273). This version is peculiar: the man is able to escape from the well and it is not honey which he desires but manna (Rückert changes it into blackberries). Interestingly the well and the manna, depicted as small white balls on a bush the man is trying to grasp, is represented in one very beautiful painting from Moghul India [fig. 14].

The old collection of animal fables finds its way back to India (De Blois (1991b: 14), Khandalavala–Desai (1991)) in the book *Eyâr-e dâneš* written 1587 for Akbar by Abû’l-Fazl Ibn Mobârak. Perhaps the manna, as an alternative to honey, appears in translations known in India, it is possible, however, that the painter took the imagery from Rûmî’s version. The miniature has been preserved on its own, not in a collection of the fables.

Apart from this one exception from India the pictorial depictions of the parable in the Persian-speaking world remained without change till modern times (von Simson (2010)) and show the man inside the hollow reaching for the honey-comb.

As stated above, the Arabic *Kalîla wa-Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffâ was of importance not only for the Islamic world but also for Europe. In the 11th century came the Greek translation by Symeon Seth, *Stephanitês kai Ichnêlatês* (SJöberg (1962)), in which the elephant which chases the man is replaced by a unicorn (cf. infra, p. 64), and in the 12th century there was a Hebrew translation probably by Rabbi Joel, who, however, is mentioned only by Doni in 16th century, so that his authorship is not entirely certain.

In this version the man flees from a lion. The 13th century saw the translation into Latin by the converted Jew, John of Capua (Johannes da Capua), the *Directorium humanae vitae alias Parabole antiquorum sapientum* (34.1–35, also with the lion).

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28 Rûmî’s poem is given by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1818: 183) as beginning with a verse prelude: *Messelâê chob u nik bad amed.*

29 Rückert’s direct source was the German translation by von Hammer-Purgstall (cf. n. 28) ‘... hast du gehört, daß man im Syrerland Einst führte ein Kameel am Halfterband...’

30 Cf. EI Vol. I: 117–18 (Nurul Hasan); according to Grube (1991a: 6, n. 19) the book of Abû’l-Fazl Ibn Mobârak was translated in 1818 by A. I. Silvestre de Sacy as *The Fables of Pilpay*; I, however, have not seen a copy.


32 Cf. illustration to the Našrollâh version from 1865, in Marzolphi (2001: fig. 49); information about the picture is taken from von Simson (2010) where the picture is also reproduced.


34 For other Hebrew versions cf. Schwarzbaum (1979); De Blois (1991: 13).

which was to become the source for translations into national languages in the whole of Europe. The popularity of the book was enormous (cf. supra, n. 21) and the extent of the various pathways it took as it spread can hardly be revealed. It is worth mentioning one very popular version, *The Moral Philosophy of Doni*, a 16th century English translation by North (2003), in which the jackals from the original were changed into a mule and an ass while the man escapes into the well from four lions [fig. 15]. The small animals do not look like mice; the text calls them ‘two beasts, of colour white and black’. The text also talks about a terrible dragon inside the well and about ‘a little hole behind him [the man] wherein there was a pot full of honey, laid there by chance by some shepherd passing by the way’ (North (2003: 241–43)) though these are not depicted. According to this version the man reaches for the honey, falls into the well and dies.

Fig. 15. ‘An Allegory of Life’s Brevity”; here after North (2003: 242).
Fig. 16. Die Inkunabeln des Directorium vitae humanae, Ulm 1483; the same woodcut is repeated in several old German prints from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Buch der Beispiele der alten Weisen by Anton Pforr; here after Schramm (1923 Vol. VII: No. 47).
Fig. 17. Heidelberg, University Library, Cod. Pal. germ. 466, Buch der Beispiele, p. 25. © Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg. [For a colour print, see the Appendix]

Illustrations based on the German rendering by Anton von Pforr\textsuperscript{36} show the man inside the well around which different terrible animals are standing [fig. 16] (the

texts talk about *quattour animalia*); he holds on to two boughs of a tree which are being gnawed by two mice. The well can be replaced by the hollow [fig. 17] at the bottom of which the open mouth of the terrible dragon is depicted.

The collection of animal fables from the old Indian *Pañca-tantra* was not the only bearer of the parable of ‘The Man in the Well’ to the West. Another, perhaps even more important one, was the *Balavaar and Josaphat*, the best-selling romance of mediaeval Europe.\(^{37}\)

The Indian original is unknown; it probably never existed and the narrative was just a rendering of a commonly known tale about the life of the Buddha. The story finds its way to the Manichaean region in Central Asia. The whole of the Manichaean version has not survived, but there are still manuscript fragments from the 8th century found in Khocho (Xočo, pinyin: Gâochâng), written in the Uyghur language. The version was translated into Arabic and from *bodhisatva*, via Manichaean *bâdysdf*, the Arabic *būḍāṡf* was created. The Arabic translation has survived, it is the *Kitâb Bilawhar wa-Būḍâṡf*, ‘The book of Bilawhar and Būḍâṡf’. In process of time the initial *b* was misread as *y* and so *Būḍâṡf* was changed into Yosaph.

The Arabic version can not have been very popular because it belonged to the Ismaili (Shi’a) tradition (Gimaret (1971)), however, its further translations were important because it was translated into Old-Georgian, and from there found a passage into the Christian world. There are two Old-Georgian translations in existence: the *Sibrdzne Balahvarisi*, which was known much earlier to western scholars, but which is only the condensed version of the longer account, and the *Balavariani*, preserved in only one manuscript, which is of much greater importance. It was this version which was translated into Greek (early research regarded this translation as the work of St. John of Damascus (8th century) and the source of the Georgian version (cf. Dölger (1953); Peri (1957) or John of St. Saba (cf. Zotenberg (1886)). From the Greek version, the *Barlaam cai Iosaph*, it was only a short step to Latin and from then the narrative starts its march through the literature of mediaeval Europe. It comes into the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine (chap. 180, *De sanctis Barlaam et Josaphat*); its numerous renderings and translations into national...
languages can hardly be followed today.\textsuperscript{44} The story was also repeated in innumerable versions in the theatre, from the \textit{Sacra representationi} and stage production of the Jesuits to the pieces of high literary value, such as the \textit{Barlaam y Josafat} by Lope de Vega\textsuperscript{45}. The attractiveness of the story for literature and the theatre is mirrored by the importance of its religious aspect: the Catholic and the Orthodox churches (the Old-Russian \textit{Poviest’ o Varlaame i Ioasafe} (see LEBEDEVA (1985)) was no less popular than its western counterpart) both incorporated the saints, Barlaam and Josaphat, into their calendars; there was—and still is today—a San Giosafato church in Palermo, and there are even relics of the Saint kept in St. Andreas church in Antwerp. Nevertheless Josaphat is nobody else than the Bodhisatva.

It is perhaps worth while at this point briefly recapping what the story in the \textit{Barlaam and Josaphat} is about. The narrative is about King Abenner (Avenir) from India, who is a cruel persecutor of Christian monks. When a son, Josaphat (Ioasaph), is born to him and the fortune-tellers prophecy that he will become a Christian monk, the king builds a palace for the prince, where he lives shielded from real life. When he grows up the prince wishes to see the world outside and makes excursions during which he meets an old man, a sick man and a disabled man. It is not difficult to recognise that the story repeats the life-story of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{46} In Buddhism, however, after the sight of the three suffering men comes the vision of a Buddhist monk, and this becomes the direct cause of the Bodhisatva leaving the palace and searching for enlightenment. The Christian version, however (and perhaps its Manichaean predecessor) changes the original so that the monk comes not in a vision but in person and it is he who brings the prince to the enlightenment. Enlightenment can come not from within a person but can only be given by a teacher: after seeing the three suffering men prince Josaphat enters a state of mental crisis; by divine revelation Barlaam (Balahvar), a banished Christian minister of King Abenner, gets to know about it, he comes to the palace and by means of parables prepares Josaphat for baptism. The king tries to discredit Barlaam and organises a philosophical dispute.

\textsuperscript{44} Out of the extensive secondary literature about the spreading of the romance only a few books can be named here: JACOBS (1896), SONET (1949–52); PERI (1959); VOLK (2009).

\textsuperscript{45} The drama by Calderon dela Barca, \textit{A vida a sueño} (1635), where the prince Sigismund is being kept in the palace shielded from the real world, must have its roots in the \textit{Balavaar} narrative.

\textsuperscript{46} In the old Arabic \textit{Kitāb Bilawhar wa-Būdāśf} there are still more reminders of the Buddha legend, such as that the future mother of the prince sees a white elephant in a dream (cf. GIMARET (1971: 66)) or in the name of the city ‘Šawilābaṭṭ’, which still sounds like ‘Kapilavastu’.
between him and a magician named Theodas (apparently a surrogate of the name of
the Buddha’s adversary Devadatta) who changes himself into the form of Barlaam
to make him ludicrous in the eyes of the prince, but the Christian minister wins the
debate despite all difficulties. In the end not only does Josaphat become a Christian
monk, but Abenner is converted and stops his cruel persecution of Christianity.

Among the parables which Barlaam tells to Josaphat appears our story of ‘The
Man in the well’. The earliest preserved version, in the Arabic Kitâb Bilawhar wa-
Bûdâsf, differs very little from the version in the Kalîla wa-Dimna by Ibn al-Mu-
quaffa (cf. supra, p. 47), from the Indian original (GIMARET (1971: 88)):

‘Bilawhar—On raconte qu’un homme était parti dans un désert. Et comme il allait, voi-là qu’un éléphant en rut se précipita sur lui. Alors,
l’home prit la fruite, tournant le dos à l’éléphant qui le poursuivait. La
nuit le surprit, et le contraignit à se jeter dans un puits, où il demeura
suspendu, accroché à deux rameaux qui poussaient sur son bord, et les
pieds posés pour les appuyer sur quelque chose qui était sur la paroi du
puits.
Le matin venu, il regarda les deux rameaux, et il vit à leur pied deux
rats, l’un blanc, l’autre noir, qui rongeaient les deux rameaux sans
cesse. Puis il regarda ce qui était sous ses pieds: c’étaient quatre
vipères qui sortaient la tête de leurs trous. Puis il regarda au fond du
puits: il y vit un dragon, la gueule béante, qui attendait de le dévorer.
Puis il leva la tête vers la base des rameaux: ils portaient au haut en
peu de miel. Alors, il approcha les rameaux de sa bouche, et goûta
quelque peu de la douceur de ce miel. Et la douceur qu’il trouva à ce
qu’il en avait goûté le retint dans ses jouissances immédiates, et le
détourna de songer et de penser aux deux rameaux auxquels il était
accroché, alors qu’il voyait bien la hâte des deux rats à les dévorer,
aux quatre serpents sur lesquels il s’appuyait, sans savoir quand l’un
d’entre eux s’élancerait sur lui, au dragon à la gueule béante, sans
savoir ce qu’il deviendrait quand il tomberait au fond de son gosier.
En bien, le puits, c’est ce monde, plein de malheurs et d’épreuves. Les
deu r rameaux, c’est cette vie blâmable. Les deux rats, blanc et noir,
c’est le jour et la nuit. Leur hâte à dévorer les rameaux, c’est la hâte

47 The translations of the parable into German (BLAU (1853: 401–02)) and English
(REHATSEK (1890: 135–36)) do not follow the Kitâb Bilawhar wa-Bûdâsf directly but
rather the Arabic text known as Book of the King’s Son and the Ascetic, cf. ZOTENBERG
(1886: 79–81).
des jours et des nuits à dévorer la durée des existences. Les quatre vipères, ce sont les humeurs du corps, qui sont des poisons mortels. Le dragon à la gueule béante, prêt à dévorer, c’est la mort qui guette. L’éléphant, c’est la durée de l’existence qui tend vers elle. Et le miel, c’est l’aveuglement des hommes égarés par le peu de plaisir de la vie qu’ils obtiennent dans ce monde.’

The version is a little bit more logical than the one in the Kalîla wa-Dimna; there the man just did not see at first that he was standing on snakes, here we receive the information that he could not see them because it was dark and he noticed them in the morning.

Notwithstanding such minute changes, the versions in the Kalîla wa-Dimna and in the Kitâb Bilawhar wa-Bûdâsîf are so similar that it looks as if one of them is taken from the other: they must have been written at exactly the same time, so which of the versions is the original is a point of controversy. 48

The earliest Christian version, the Old-Georgian Balavariani (LANG 1966: 77–78), repeats the situation with all the details:

‘Balahvar said to him: “This transitory life and all that cherish it resemble a man pursued by a raging elephant, which cornered him inside a fearsome abyss. As he fell down inside it he found two branches growing out over the precipice, so he hung on to them, and then managed to establish some sort of foothold. When he looked around him, he descried two mice, one white and the other black, which never ceased to gnaw at the roots of those trees on which he hung. Then he looked down into the chasm and noticed a dragon, which had parted its jaws and was intent on swallowing him up. And on the ledge on which his feet rested he discerned four heads of asps projecting from the cliff. Then he lifted up his eyes and saw that a little honey was dripping from the branches of the tree, and he began to eat it. And its flavour and sweetness so entranced him that he no longer worried about the perils which beset him and the fact that he might be bitten to death at any moment. As for the branches on which he was suspended, he saw

48 DE BLOIS (1991a: 34–35) puts together different theories about the dependence of one text on another, he means that it was Burzûh, the translator of the Pañca-tantra, who took the Indian parable abroad, from his popular book it was taken into the Kitâb Bilawhar wa-Bûdâsîf. Some scholars e.g. ALMOND (1987: 403), VOLK (2009: 109) assume that the Arabic Kitâb Bilawhar wa-Bûdâsîf and the Kalîla wa-Dimna are the work of one and the same author, al-Muqaffa. French translations of parables from both texts are put in synoptic columns in VOLK (2006: 173–74).
the tree’s roots being gnawed away by the mice and—most dangerous of all—the dragon lying in wait to swallow him up, but all this failed to trouble him in the slightest.

Now that elephant is the harbinger of death, which pursues the sons of Adam, and the abyss is the world, full of all manner of evil and pernicious snares. The two branches are a man’s life span and the two mice—one white and the other black—are the days and nights that fret at it incessantly, and suddenly sever the thread of a man’s life. The four asps signify the four elements from which a man’s body is constructed, and when a single one of them is destroyed, life comes to an end. The dragon which opened its jaws and longed to swallow him up, is the image of hell, into which the lovers of this world enter after their death. And those few drops of honey are the brief delights of this world, by which it deceives those who are astray by the sweetness of corruption.”

A big modification comes with the Greek translation, even though many details remain unchanged. The version changes the elephant into the unicorn (μονόκερως), here in translation from Neo-Greek by KANTIOTES (1997: 156–59):

‘… these I consider to be like a man flying before the face of a rampant unicorn, who, unable to endure the sound of the beast’s cry, and its terrible bellowing, to avoid being devoured, ran away at full speed. But while he ran hastily, he fell into a great pit; and as he fell, he stretched forth his hands and laid hold on a tree to which he held tightly. There he established some sort of foothold and thought himself from that moment in piece and safety. But he looked and discovered two mice, the one white, the other black that never ceased to gnaw the root of the tree wherein he hung and were all but on the point of severing it. Then he looked down to the bottom of the pit and espied below a dragon, breathing fire fearful for eye to see, exceedingly fierce and grim with terrible wide jaws, all agape to swallow him. Again looking closely at the ledge whereon his feet rested, he discerned four heads of asps projecting from the wall wherein he was perched. Then he lifted up his eyes and saw that from the branches of the tree there dropped a little honey. And at that he ceased to think of the troubles whereby he was surrounded; how outside the unicorn was madly raging to devour him; how below the fierce dragon was yawning to swallow him: how the tree which he had clutched was all but severed; and how his feet rested on slippery, treacherous ground. Yes, he forgot
without care all those sights of awe and terror and his whole mind hung on the sweetness of the tiny drop of honey. This is the likeness of those who cleave to the deceitfulness of this present life,—the interpretation whereof I will declare to you immediately. The unicorn is the type of death ever in eager pursuit to overtake the race of Adam. The pit is the world, full of all manner of ills and deadly snares. The tree, which was being continually frayed by the two mice, to which the man clung, is the course of every man’s life that is spent and consumes itself hour by hour, day and night, and gradually draws near its severance. The fourfold asps signify the structure of man’s body upon four treacherous and unstable elements which, being disordered and disturbed, bring that body to destruction. Further more, the fiery cruel dragon presages the jaws of hell that is hungry to receive those who choose present pleasures rather than future blessings. The dropping of honey denotes the sweetness of the delights of the world, whereby it deceives its own friends nor suffers them to take timely thought for their salvation."

The unicorn settles in the story and all successive Latin versions and their translations into European languages feature it. It will also be represented in art.49 The sudden emergence of the unicorn in the story is not explained, despite the exemplary study of this theme by EINHORN (1972). Further investigations by the same author (EINHORN (1978)), despite exhaustive research which produced the best ever collection of textual and pictorial references of the motif, did not provide answers as to why the unicorn which is normally a good beast in Christian iconography (symbolising Jesus, the resurrection and the overcoming of disease)50 in our parable started to symbolise death, μονόκερως θάνατος, unicornis id est mors51. The unicorn as a symbol of death started to be so appropriate that it even passed into the Greek translation of the animal fables, the Kalīla wa-Dimna, by Symeon Seth (cf. supra, p. 54).

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49 Cf. e.g. W. STAMMLER, in: RDK Vol. 1: cols. 1452–57; DER NERSESSIAN (1936); REAÚ (1958: 177 ff.); STAMMLER (1962); LChI (1969: 244–45); EINHORN (1972).

50 For meanings of the unicorn and the wandering of the motif since their Indian sources cf. RDK Vol. 4: cols. 1504–44 (L. WEHRHAHN-STAUCH); EINHORN (1978: esp. 32 ff.), HATHAWAY (1980); for the newest research cf. TAGLIATESTA (2007).

51 Cf. EINHORN (1972: 387, 390); the unicorn starts to symbolise death in other contexts as well, cf. EINHORN (1972: 407–09); meaningful is a saying quoted there after EISELEIN (1840: 141): ‘Daß dich der Einhurn in diesem Jar nit stoß’ und in vilen Jaren nit!’
A comparison of the pictorial depictions accompanying this article leads to the conclusion that the unicorn could have been introduced into the parable through the simple misunderstanding of an illustration. For a European artist, who had never seen
Fig. 20. According to EINHORN 1972: 412, No. A, X.A: ‘Rom, Bibl. Vat. cod. vat. arabs 692 (Assemani 88), fol. 42. Arabisch-christliche Handschrift, 15. Jh. Mann in gemauerten Brunnenschacht hinabgleitend und sich an beiderseits baumstäm- men festhaltend; Einhorn r.o.’, fig. 100; LEROY (1955); here after EINHORN.
an elephant, such confusion seems highly probable. Let us take as example an illustration of the parable from a German woodcut of the fifteenth century [fig. 18]. Barlaam is shown here explaining the parable to Josaphat; he sits on the side and points at a representation of it with a finger: the man is hanging inside a hollow, holding himself up on two plants, by which the white and the black mouse are standing. Inside the hollow there is the open jaw of the monster and three snakes which are emerging from holes. But the snakes have ears and they are not under the feet of the man (as the text narrates) but on the sides of the hollow, like in Indian depictions. It looks as if the artist (or most probably his predecessor, generations earlier) did not understand that he was supposed to be representing snakes. The woodcut is thus following the pictorial rather than the literary tradition. The unicorn is coming from the woods, to the side of the hollow: this one-horned animal might also be traced back to an animal with a trunk which a European artist did not understand. The quattour animalia in the European renderings of the Kalîla wa-Dimna (cf. supra, p. 58 and figs. 16, 17) may have come from a misunderstanding of the snakes and of one pictorial version which gave them ears.

In fig. 18, on the side, there is the entrance to hell represented as the open jaw of a monster, very similar to the monster at the bottom of the hollow. Inside the jaw is an amorous couple. This additional depiction which should certainly demonstrate the abjection of sensualism which is being criticised in the parable; the artist has found no way to depict the dripping honey.

The Christian illustrations of the parable follow several patterns that clearly demonstrate different pictorial traditions and do not allow a conclusion to be drawn about the chronological development of the depictions.

The early pictures, from 11th–12th century show [fig. 19] the unicorn standing above the pit with the man, inside the pit is a huge snake. By the legs of the unicorn two tiny animals are visible—these must be the mice whose presence signifies that

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52 Volk (2006: 175–76) gives convincing evidence that the confusion of the elephant with the unicorn in the texts was improbable because descriptions of both animals were quite frequent and their characteristics well known; it seems all the more probable that the confusion took place not because of a misunderstanding of textual descriptions but because of a misapprehension of visual depictions.

53 The textual tradition of the depiction is known, it is a Middle High German translation from the Latin so called ‘Vulgat’ translation from the 12th century, which is based on the Greek version—cf. Einhorn (1972: 384) with references to Peri (1959); in Einhorn (1972: 384–85) quotation of the text.

54 EINHORN (1972: 386 ff.), references in the catalogue on pp. 41–17; many illustrations depicted, figs. 1–3, Pls. 97–122, and further bibliographical references.
Fig. 21. Hugo von Trimberg, Der Renner, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cgm 7375, fol. 111v; according to EINHORN (1972: 416, No. B, 11.E): ‘Der Vorlage B an-nähernnd gleich, doch seitverkehrt, um 1450. Mann an den Stamm angeklemmt’. The parable is rendered in Der Renner in verses 23527–86; ill. EINHORN (1972: fig. 114). For further examples cf. EINHORN (1972: figs. 110–11); in fig. 111 the man is kneeling inside the pit on the side of the tree whose trunk is being gnawed by the mice. © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. [For a colour print, see the Appendix]
Fig. 22. Kraków, Czartoryskis’ Library Sygn. 2097 IV, p. 78, (Nowak (1999: 157–58)); according to Einhorn (1972: 412, No. A, VIII): ‘Mann am Baumstamm angeklammert; l. Barlaam sitzend mit Kapuze und T-förmigem Stab, r. Einhorn mit Krallenfüßen; keine Schlangen’ (Slavonic Evangeliary from Ławryszew; end of 14th century. Former Orthodox monastery in Ławryszew (now Laurishava) near Novogródek (now Novahrudok), former Grand Duchy of Lithuania (now Belarus)); Naumow–Kaszelej (2004): 13th century. © Fundacja Czartoryskich. [For a colour print, see the Appendix]
the man was holding a branch; unfortunately the picture in fig. 19 is too badly damaged to ascertain if the four snakes were also depicted. Another pattern, from the Christian Arabic illustrations, follows precisely the Islamic tradition of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (like our fig. 10) but adds a unicorn on the side [fig. 20], also another pattern of illustrations (like our fig. 11) with the man standing above the hollow, is represented in illustrations of *Barlaam and Josaphat* 55.

The most widespread pattern shows the man sitting on a tree, which in these versions is the pan-European Tree of Life 56, the dripping honey is also sometimes replaced by the fruits of the tree. Sometimes the unicorn is on a high cliff (like in fig. 19), the man is holding himself on the bough, as if he would hang, and there is a pit

55 Cf. SMINÉ (1993: fig. 5), the manuscript from 13th c. Syria, kept in Dayr al-Balmand Monastery (No. 147) in Lebanon. The unicorn is named in the description but not depicted in the illustration. In the Arabic Christian tradition our parable is depicted in later times as well, LEROY (1955, pl. 7.2) brings a miniature from a manuscript from 17th century. The picture shows the man above the well, which is opened from one side so that the bottom with the huge head of the monster can be seen. There are four snakes on the outside of the well and mice (white and black) gnawing branches of two trees the man is hanging on. The man is clad in the typical dress of Turkey of the 17th century, slippers and a very big turban.

with snakes or dragon below [fig. 21], but in most of the cases the depictions show the man inside the crown of the tree and the unicorn, dragon and mice on the sides and below.\(^5\) Only rarely is Barlaam depicted on the side [fig. 22]. As a rule the parable is depicted without an overt connection to Barlaam and Josaphat. The most famous of these depictions are the sculptures above the portal on the southern façade of the baptistery in Parma, built between 1196 and 1220 [fig. 23] and the relief in the pulpit in Ferrara from the 14th century [fig. 24]. In Parma the man sits on the tree and stretches to grasp a bee-hive, below, by the tree trunk, there is a fire-spitting, winged dragon and two animals (not resembling mice at all). The unicorn is not represented. The highly symbolical representation of Everyman is enhanced by means of the double depiction of the personifications of the Sun and the Moon. Also in Parma the animals biting the trunks of two trees, on which the man is standing, are not mice, but look rather like wolves. The head of the fire-spitting dragon shown in profile allows recognition of the earlier tradition. Also the bow-shaped band, on which the unicorn is standing, and which carries the inscription *unicornis iste insequitur animas hominum*, seems to repeat the rim of the well—the meaning of which was probably no longer understandable for the artist.

Such depictions of the parable in art, independent from the Barlaam and Josaphat narrative, correspond with the development in literature: the parable parts company from the story and starts to live an autonomous life\(^5\); it will become the epitome of the *conditio humana*. Only a few examples can be named here, such as the *Gesta Romanorum* (chap. 168: *De eterna damnnatione*) or two popular versions in Middle High German, *Ein paispel von ainem mensch, der gejagt wart* by Michael Beheim\(^5\) or *Ein Bild des menschen elenden, gefährlichen Lebens* by Hans Sachs\(^6\).

The reliance on the Barlaam and Josaphat narrative can be recognised, in literature and in art, by the presence of the unicorn. After Barlaam the unicorn stays and represents the danger from which the man escapes, as it does in the copper engraving by Boetius Bolsvert (1580–1633) [fig. 25]. The depiction confirms a continuation of the old pictorial tradition which has not been forgotten: apart from the unicorn, which might be a misconceived elephant (cf. *supra* p. 67), all the other elements which

\(^{5}\) Cf. EINHORN (1972: figs. 101–02, 104–07, 109, 112, 113, 115); VOLK (2003: n. 4) connects early depictions of the Coptic textiles (earliest from the 6th century), showing the man inside a tree, with our parable, this, however, does not seems to be proven.

\(^{5}\) For the overview of the versions cf. EINHORN (1972: 395–404).


\(^{6}\) Hans Sachs (1557), ed. Nürnberg 1816: 336–39; for further versions from the mediaeval German literature cf. WEIZSÄCKER (1899).
Fig. 25. According to EINHORN (1972: 417, No. B 16): ‘Boetius Bolsvert (1580–1633). Kupferstich: in gemauerten Brunnenschacht auf einem Absatz stehend ein Mann, mit der Linken sich an einen Zweig anklammernd, die Rechte zum Munde führend; seitlich je zwei Schlangen, unterhalb feuerspeiender Drache; Einhorn o. am Brunnenrand’, ill.: KNIPPING (1939 Vol. 1: fig. 5); WEHRHAIN-STAUCH / RDK, Vol. 4: col. 1527, fig. 16; HATHAWAY (1980: 73); SUGITA (2007: fig. 14); here after KNIPPING.
have been known since the earliest, Indian versions are still represented here: the man is again inside the well and holds onto a branch which is being gnawed by two mice—a black and a white one, four snakes are coming from the sides of the well and there is a terrible monster at the bottom, while honey is dripping from the tree.

One might assume that as the parable was so popular in the West it must have been frequently represented in the East, and yet this is not the case. In India, the parable is unknown apart from the reliefs in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda [figs. 1–9] and the Moghul tradition [fig. 14]. The same can be said, to the best of my knowledge, about representations in regions such as Central and South-East Asia which copy the Indian pictorial tradition.

An illustration of the parable from Song dynasty China can be found in the city of Quanzhou (泉州, known in the European sources as Zaitan) on one of the reliefs in the Kaiyuan Temple. It is among the reliefs on the base of the eastern of the so called Twin Pagodas, and dates from the year 1238 [fig. 26]. The relief shows the man hanging inside the well, holding on to the tree standing on its side. He is not, however, holding on to a branch of the tree but is apparently grasping a liana that is observable on the trunk. There are two mice above the man, one on the liana and another one on the branch, and two bees can be seen in the air. The mouth of the man seems to be open so that the viewer would imagine the honey dripping in. The sculptor did not manage to show the bottom of the well, but there are four snakes

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61 Similar in the literary tradition: the renderings of the parable from the Indian folk-storytelling (cf. Dubois (1906: 433–34); Tauschner (1959, No. 58, ‘Der törichte Jäger’) are reminiscent of western versions, cf. Speculum Morale des Vincent de Beauvais (analys. in Schwarzbau (1979: 348)); to my mind they can not be taken as the development of the old Indian tradition but should be treated as due to the influence of the Christian mission, cf. below p. 79 f.
(one has broken off) coming from the lining of the well. An elephant is coming from the right-hand side of the relief and an inscription on its side pronounces ‘the elephant and the empty well’.

![Fig. 27. Painting roll, Kamakura Period, 14th c. ill.: Kamakura no Emaki (1987: 34); Sugita (2007: fig. 6); here after Kamakura no Emaki.]

The elephant brings us back to the earliest texts and depictions, nevertheless it is impossible to state that this relief is a continuation of the old tradition because there is no proof that the imagery was transferred. Moreover, the seaport Quanzhou contained such a fusion of Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Christian and Manichaean traditions (Schottenhammer (1998)) that even if the artist has depicted the parable in the way in which it is rendered in the Buddhist scripture, he could have take his inspiration from another faith.

One very interesting illustration of our parable comes from the Kamakura period in Japan (14th c.).62 The picture is a part of a scroll several meters long which depicts the life stories of the legendary monks. The illustration shows the parable in two successive scenes63, on the right-hand side the man is running away, on the

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62 I would like to state my gratitude to Prof. Seishi Karashima (Hochioji) and Mrs. Satomi Hiyama (Tokyo) for bringing my attention to this painting and providing me with references and copies.

63 The parable is in two successive scenes, first the man running for his life and then the man hanging above the pit, this is also depicted in the early illustrations from the Barlaam and Josaphat, cf. Ehriorn (1972: 410–11, Nos. A III, A IV, V A; Pls. 97–99); cf. also fig. 15.
left-hand side he is hanging above the pit [fig. 27]. He is running from a tiger, but on the other side of the man there is also a dark cloud with thunderbolts from which the head of a dragon is emerging. Clearly, this must symbolise a storm, but, as we will see, in later depictions the storm clouds will be placed underneath the hanging man—where the monster/dragon is normally represented. Perhaps the cloud with the
dragon emerging from it was adopted from an older tradition which has not survived in which a cloud was represented above the well. The man is running with stretched out arms between those two dangers in the direction of a river which flows between high banks. In the next scene we see him hanging above the river, holding on to a liana which is growing along a very steep river-bank. Two mice, one black and one white, are shown next to the liana. Bees are flying around the body of the man.

Given that the scroll represents the life of Shendao Dashi, the only possible connection between the parable and the famous monk would seem to be the belief that he taught the parable to somebody and probably converted him by means of it. The parable was known in Japan, not only through knowledge of the Chinese sūtras, but also in through commonly used imagery. In the famous collections of poems Man’yō-shū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, Nara time) the passage about two mice and four snakes is taken to illustrate poem No. 793, (the passage is however in prose, so not as early as the main part of the collection).

![Fig. 29. Sakaki-Eiju from Nara, Mujo-no-Tora from 20th c.: www.family-art.co.jp/regular02.html [accessed: Spring, 2008]](image)

The imagery of the parable seems to have been passed down through the ages in the Far East, even though the surviving depictions are few. A cheap print from 19th century China contains an illustration of the parable [fig. 28]. Its features—a hexagonal
well with snakes on its lining, a tree covered with a liana, bees and (three) dragons emerging from the cloud which is above the well in this picture—together show a fusion of earlier pictorial traditions. On the right-hand side of the sheet the Buddha is represented and below him are three people, two laymen and a monk. The text identifies them as King Udayana (depicted with an attendant) and the monk Piñḍola Bharadvāja. The depiction corresponds with the Sūtra on the cause (Nidāna) of the preaching of the law by Piñḍola Bharadvāja to King Udayana, i.e. T 1690 (cf. supra, n. 14). The fact that out of all the parables cited in T 1690, it is the ‘Man in the Well’ that is depicted shows that there was knowledge of the parable in 19th century China.

Fig. 30. Amaravati, British Museum, 11, FERGUSSON (1868: pl. 59.2); BARRETT (1954: pl. 29); STERN–BÉNISTI (1961: pl. 57a); SIVARAMAMURTI (1975: fig. 366); KNOX (1992: no. 12, p. 61); RAO (1984: pl. 174); ROSEN STONE (1994: figs. 67–68); ZIN (2004: fig. 19 / drawing); here after KNOX.

The same can be said about modern Japan, even though the continuation of the pictorial tradition can not be proved. Products of contemporary art (of doubtful ar-
The parable of ‘The Man in the Well’

The parable, and also the Buddha’s life story, as told in *Barlaam and Josaphat*, came to Asia a long time ago from the West. Towards the end of the 16th century in Portuguese Goa, a Dominican friar Diogo do Couto (1542–1616) found out that the story of St. Josaphat and the life story of the Buddha were one and the same narrative. Diogo interpreted his finding in the only way which was thinkable for him (or perhaps in the only way which made him safe from the Great Inquisition), and that was, that the Indian pagans took the story about the Christian saint and transformed it into the Buddhist legend. The scholarly, and ingenious, Society of Jesus applied the discovery of the pious Dominican for their own ends: In 1591 *Barlaam and Josaphat* was translated into Japanese and used for missionary work in Japan. So the Jesuits evangelised in Japan and also China and the Philippines by explaining to people that the Buddha was in reality St. Josaphat.

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64 Mutsuo YANASE (1987) and Hideki SUGITA (2007) give the name of the painter as Sakaki-Eiju from Nara. YANASE writes also that the subject is known especially in the Jodoshund sect in Kansai district.


66 Cf. VOLK (2006: 159) for bibliographical references on the original text of Diogo de Couto and the secondary literature.


68 VOLK (2006: 160, n. 69) mentions two Chinese translations, one which existed before the year 1610 and another one *Shêng Jo-sa-fa shih-mo* (the life of St. Josaphat) by Niccolò Longobardi (1557–1654).

Let us return to the earliest version of our parable, the reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda [figs. 1–9] and the narrative that is depicted there, the story of the man who goes armed to attack a monk and then worships this monk; his aggression doubtless changed by the parable the monk tells him. It might be that the echo of this story still sounds in the Christian narrative about the cruel king Abenner who killed monks before he was converted by Barlaam, or perhaps in the Japanese narrative about Shendao Dashi who used the narrative to convert somebody. The narrative
as such has not survived. Vogel (1937: 113–15) tried to explain the depiction in the reliefs from Nagarjunakonda with narratives of King Udayana. He did this because in Pāli there is a story (Jātaka No. 497) about the aggressive Udayana (Udena) who martyrs the monk Piṇḍola Bharadvāja, while his wives try to protect him. The explanation sounds plausible (especially since there are also narratives in ‘northern’ Buddhism, and in the Chinese translation about the conflict between the two) and matches the depictions well. The Pāli tradition, however, does not include even a small allusion to the parable, and the Chinese version of the parable, T 1690 (cf. supra, n. 14, fig. 28), which Vogel (1937) supposed to be the literary basis for the Nagarjunakonda reliefs, knows nothing about the aggressive mood of Udayana.

The parable about a man who forgets to struggle for liberation from the ills of existence because of sensual pleasures would in fact be very appropriate to the character of Udayana. Udayana is famous for being keen on music and hunting and most of all for being a handsome philanderer. The sermon condemning sensual pleasures would therefore sit very well in his narrative. However, such narrative is unknown and the textual tradition of our reliefs remains unidentified. It might have been a story about Udayana and Piṇḍola but equally might have been about any aggressive king.

The reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda should be connected with the textual sources preserved today in ‘northern’ Buddhism, not in the Pāli tradition (Zin (2004)). As mentioned in the beginning, many of these reliefs remain unexplained and their textual basis seems to be lost.

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70 KŚ 6.1.6, pp. 22–24.
What is very peculiar about the reliefs of ‘The Man in the well’ is that the representation of the parable, that is the content of the sermon, and the person who is telling the sermon appear in one and the same picture. This type of ‘story within a story’ or rather ‘depiction within a depiction’, the *mise en abyme*, is unknown in older Indian art. Interestingly this pattern was adopted by the European depictions [figs. 18, 22].

In the reliefs from Amaravati we can find examples of apparently the same narrative but without the parable. Two such depictions are preserved in the British Museum [figs. 30, 31], three further are lost today but known from old drawings: [figs. 32, 33, 34]. The reliefs can contribute to the explanation of the depicted story: it seems that in the depiction on the pillar in British Museum [fig. 30] the beginning of the story is represented: in the left register the king is shown on the throne, accompanied by his ministers sitting below. He talks to two Brahmins, one of them characterised by the typically thrice bent stick (*kuśila*). The same Brahmins are then depicted in the middle register, as if fighting the women who are trying to stop the king. The meaning of this first scene seems to be that the Brahmins inform the king about the monk and cause the king’s aggressive mood. The reliefs remain, however, also with this detail not explained, i.e. the frame-story of the earliest representations of the parable ‘Man in the Well’ is unidentified. What we can say is that the narra-
The parable about ‘The Man in the Well’ originated in India, in all probability in Buddhist bearing. The oldest references are the frequent depictions in Buddhist reliefs from the Amaravati School, which connect the parable with the frame-story (probably the story about King Udayana and the monk Piṇḍola Bharadvāja) which is lost. Judging from their coherence, the surviving Buddhist texts of the parable, preserved in Chinese, do not include the original version. The only version from orthodox India, in the Mahā-bhārata, is late and does not correspond with the depiction and other literary versions at all. The coherent version survived in the later Jaina texts, even when those texts themselves must be dated much later.

It was the coherent Indian version, like those which survived in the Jaina texts, which left India and was carried to the West with the romance of Barlaam and Josaphat and the animal fables Kalîla and Dimna.

Apart from the transition of the parable in literary, and presumably also oral sources, it must have been transmitted through pictorial models. In some cases, and in these can be counted the changing of the elephant into a unicorn, the deviation in the visual tradition can be explained as a misunderstanding of the visual patterns.

Also, the ‘depiction within a depiction’, the way in which the parable is represented together with the person who is explaining it, in what for India is a very uncharacteristic fashion, also appears in the non-Indian representations [figs. 18, 22, 28]. Was it a method of depiction which just presented itself as natural for the iconography of parables or is it the luminous creation of the Amaravati artists who produced a mode of representation which, however, disappeared from India?
The parable forges its real career outside India. It is saying much that in the 19th century the parable was worked on by scholars who knew the Islamic and Christian versions; their research on the Indian sources was only carried out in order to ascertain the beginning of the motif, their real interest was in the later texts. This is the case, for example, with a researcher like Benfey (1859: 80)—in the book about the Indian Pañca-tantra where the parable does not appear—or Bishop Moule of Hanchow (1884) who brings together the Chinese version with the Greek text of the parable by John of Damascus. Winternitz (1909: 351, Engl.: 1927: 48) starts the passage about the parable with a reference to Rückert.

Thus the Indian original was always understood merely as the beginning of a tradition which only subsequently started to be of immense importance. It might be that this perspective is proper. The parable obtains greatest significance in Islam and in Christianity—as if these religions, in which death is understood as a final exit from this world, could obtain most significance from the imagery of the person hanging in the well and forgetting about all dangers for a drop of honey—as the embodiment of the conditio humana.

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Art, Myths and Visual Culture of South Asia

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