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The role of the Amaravati school of sculpture in the development of Buddhist narrative representations is difficult to overestimate. This is well known with regard to later art, since Amaravati and the later centre of Nagarjunakonda substantially influenced the 5th-century CE Ajanta paintings. But it is also becoming apparent, albeit slowly, that the iconography from Andhra must have had an impact on the art of northern India in earlier times too (Zin forthcoming a and b). Comparisons with contemporary Gandhara demonstrate that the influences were from Andhra to Gandhara rather than vice versa. The relief art of Andhra is old, dating back to at least the beginning of the 1st century BCE, and the earliest specimens are in many ways comparable with Bharhut.

This long tradition is presumably why the Andhra artists, with the experience of generations, could create a better ‘visual language’ than can be observed in Gandhara. They could, for example, represent young girls differently (with tiny breasts, narrow face and childish wisps of hair) from the mature women in the same relief: a remarkable achievement. The territory of the so-called Andhra art is huge, greater than today’s Andhra Pradesh, and so far more than 50 developed Buddhist centres with stūpas and monasteries have been excavated. There is certainly plenty still unfound: the newest excavations at Kanaganahalli (Gulbarga District, Karnataka), with a stūpa decorated with 60 uniform relief slabs nearly 3m in height, and at Phanigiri (Nalgonda District, Telangana), with the most elegant toraṇa gate of the entire region, show that the soil of Andhra still holds potential for future revelations (Skilling 2008; Poonacha 2011). The diversity of artistic production in the Buddhist centres of this vast territory – certainly mirroring the communities supporting them – was wide: some of the reliefs are of a superior and sophisticated character, some are archaically unpretentious, others that seem archaic are rather rough and primitive, apparently being not old but somewhat provincial. Interestingly, in many centres no narrative representations have been discovered. Were the representations there on perishable materials, like paintings on wood? Or perhaps not every monastic community was interested in pictorial representations?

The place that we now call Amaravati was the biggest centre of artistic production and was certainly of great artistic impetus. The Buddhist area sacra was located on the outskirts of the city of Dhāñyakaṭaka, the capital of the kingdom. The kings, whether of the Sada or Sātavāhana dynasty, who were not Buddhist themselves, supported Buddhism and wanted to create a gorgeous Buddhist site in their metropolitan district, so that it would be an important destination for pilgrims and for wandering merchants, who were traditionally of the Buddhist faith.

What we encounter in the reliefs from Amaravati is a sort of ‘court art’, a sublime style, with well-designed forms and compositions and painstakingly elaborated details – surely expensive and unquestionably reflecting the luxurious life of the upper class, rich, and engaged in the vibrant trade with many parts of India and the wider world, including Rome.

The reliefs illustrate scenes from the life story of the Buddha, or his previous lives, the jātakas. The exact purpose of the representations is not quite apparent: at first sight the reliefs simply display aesthetically faultless pictures that
might evoke religious experience and the will to praise the glory of the Buddha. But after a second’s reflection they make clear, by the care with which the scenes were selected, arranged and ordered, that their intentions went further — perhaps to provide the basis for meditation. In any case, the reliefs, unlike the chronologically arranged reliefs in Gandhara, force the viewer not just to see the images but to become engaged in the thoughts that they provoke (Zim forthcoming a and c).

The art of Andhra had a venerable tradition on which it could rely, but this does not mean that Mediterranean influences are not to be found; as a matter of fact we see them quite often. Was it ‘fashionable’, perhaps, or indicative of high status to make use of western motifs? In Kanaganahalli, among the usual scenes from the life story of the Buddha and the jātakas, there are also representations of ‘historical’ kings. One, the founder of the dynasty, Chimukha Sātavāhana, is shown with an obviously Roman small chair (Fig. 52), an elegant and probably prestigious object with rampant lions as supporting legs and decoration which imitates acanthus leaves. The question of whether the images of Aśoka and the kings of the Sātavāhana dynasty were intended to be understood as ‘historical portraits’ rather than indications of auspicious ‘royal protection’ must, however, remain open for the time being.

Roman elements were incorporated in the narrative art not because Andhra lacked its own visual form (which often seems to have been the reason in Gandhara) but to refine the existing one. The reused motifs could take on religious meaning, like the ‘dharma wheels’ symbolizing the Buddha’s teaching, which are represented in Kanaganahalli (and nowhere else) with lion heads on the hub (Fig. 53). The form is certainly taken from the Roman ornamentation of the wagons, or rather from depictions of them, but the significance was fresh, since the Buddha, as everybody knew, preached with the lion-voice.

The iconography of the sleeping queen Māyā with the future Buddha becoming embodied as an elephant was invented in the 2nd century BCE and widely used, appearing also in Kanaganahalli. But in Amaravati, around 70 CE, a new pictorial model was applied that was apparently taken from Roman art. Māyā — one of the best examples can be seen in the British Museum (Fig. 54) — begins at this time to be depicted as lying asleep with her arms held above her head, on a very peculiar object no longer recognizable as a...
Behind the king we see a man with scales, checking the weights of the dove and the flesh. The person jumping in the right-hand section wearing a peculiar crown is the god Indra, going back to heaven: the story is that it was Indra who disguised himself as a dove as a test of the righteousness of King Śibi. The story of Śibi and the dove is well known, but this is not the story represented in the relief.

In the Śibi narrative it is the falcon who is chasing the dove and he demands it from the king as his own prey; this is how the narrative is often depicted, for example on the relief from Gandhara in the British Museum.\(^{10}\) In our Amaravati relief, however, the falcon is not depicted: a point recognized by Sivaramamurti.\(^{11}\) At Amaravati the reason for the king's cutting of his own flesh is not the demand of the falcon but rather that of the bird-catcher. The hunter, indicated by a long-handled net often held across the shoulder, appears in most of the Andhra representations of the narrative, but never the falcon; in Figure 56 he is shown kneeling at the side of the king. Only in better preserved examples (Fig. 57)\(^{12}\) does it become apparent how the net would have been understood at the time, but even in a small, unclear depiction its visual message should have been comprehensible for everyone who knew the story. The narrative is known from Andhra in at least 26 other examples, and – as a crucial demonstration of the continuity of the tradition – it also appears in a painting in Ajanta of the late 5th century.\(^{13}\) This story of the king and the bird-catcher is thus not the story of Śibi, but that of King Sarvaṃdana, of which the earliest literary version is known today only from Kashmir and the 11th century.\(^{14}\) The reliefs from Andhra demonstrate that the story was already widely known nearly a millennium earlier – but this literary basis has not survived. This is important as an illustration of a fact
that art historians would rather not believe but which is perfectly well known to Buddhologists: the scriptures of the Buddhism of Andhra are utterly lost. In some rare cases, as in the story of the king with the dove and the bird-catcher, the stories survived by chance, but in very many they did not. We can recognize several narratives, like the popular jātakas or events from the life story of the Buddha, because of their similarities with representations in other parts of India or in commonly known literary traditions: they are explained – confidently, if not reliably – in the publications of the British Museum (Barrett 1954a; Knox 1992). However, many representations are not recognizable because the stories are, in fact, missing. This is what makes the explanation of the Amaravati reliefs so difficult and it is connected with another fact – namely, that many of the reliefs have been incorrectly explained, mostly by means of sources in Pali, which, as is confirmed by recent research, were not the literary tradition of Andhra.

For the time being it appears that the most reliable information on which to base an explanation of the reliefs is offered by the reliefs themselves; the developed nature of their visual language can help. All the details must be taken seriously for this reason, in addition to the fact that the reliefs not only illustrate the Buddhist narratives but reveal the everyday lives of the elite at the time.

Let us look at one example, the representation on the middle part of an Amaravati rail pillar in the British Museum.
in form of a sandglass, has strings round the drumhead, held by a cord the loop of which the musician holds with the thumb of the left hand. By pulling the cord, the musician can change the tension of the skin and thus the sound of the instrument; it is possible that what we see here is the instrument called the 'little string-drum' (tantripatthika).19

The portrayal of such details in the reliefs, although they are part of a composition dominated by the narrative, is realistic: we can be sure that these are faithful representations delivering insights into daily life because we can compare them with images from other parts of India and with literary works. In our relief, for example, there is a figure of a small man, the only man apart from the king in the entire depiction. He is sitting on a round stool behind the dancer and lifting his right arm (Fig. 60), apparently giving the king his views on the dancing performance below or perhaps about the visitor who is being announced by the prāthārī.20 It is possible to recognize the appearance and characteristics of this man from other reliefs (Fig. 61):20 he is holding a bent stick in the middle and his hair falls in waves...
Figure 59 Courtly ladies (detail of Fig. 58)

Figure 60 Jester (detail of Fig. 58)

Figure 61 Jester, Nagarjunakonda, c. 3rd century CE, Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda, no. 36 (photograph: Wojtek Oczkowski)
to the front and to both sides of his head. This is none other than the court jester. His appearance corresponds closely with descriptions of the jester in theatrical performance, the vidūṣaka, given by the Nāṭyaśāstra, an early treatise on theatre and allied arts (Zin 1998; 2015b; 2015c). The vidūṣaka should carry the staff, called ‘the bent one’ (kuṭila or kuṭilaka), which is often likened to the snake, in his left hand. The three sets of waves of hair on his head in the relief correspond well with the description in the Nāṭyaśāstra which talks about the ‘crow’s foot’ (kāka-pada) on the top of vidūṣaka’s head. In the Ajanta paintings and in paintings in Kucha on the northern Silk Road (Arlt and Hiyama 2015), the kāka-pada takes the form of round tufts of hair often decorated with flowers or beads. The theatre character of the vidūṣaka was probably taken from life, and this is likely to have included his main characteristics: his position at the court, his close relationship with the king and his gluttony and ignorance of school knowledge, which in itself evokes jocularity since the vidūṣaka in theatre is a Brahmin who should practise abstinence and erudition. In narrative

Figure 62 (above left) Unidentified scene, drum slab (detail), Amaravati, c. 3rd century ce, British Museum, 1880,0709.72

Figure 63 (above right) Unidentified scene, rail coping (detail), Amaravati, late 1st to early 2nd century ce, Archaeological Museum Amaravati, no. 433, reserved collection (photograph: Wojtek Oczkowski)

Figure 64 (left) Unidentified scene, rail coping (detail), Amaravati, c. 1st–2nd century ce, Government Museum, Chennai, no. 58
representations the jester is often shown in stories about people joining the monasteries, a decision that he does not welcome kindly.21

All details of the representation must be taken seriously since they carry information important for understanding the narratives. Also noteworthy in terms of help in reading them are the methods used by the sculptors: the reliefs placed in the friezes, for instance, often have rows of running animals at the bottom (sometimes there are herdsmen among them or the animals are depicted inside tendrils); the direction in which the animals move indicates the succession of the scenes, right to left or left to right. The minute detail in the masterfully elaborated reliefs should also not make us forget that the narrative depictions in Amaravati are repetitions; they would need to be similar to others so that they would be recognizable at first glance. For the researcher these repetitions are a blessing because not only do they indicate which topics were popular but, more importantly, when one of the representations contains conclusive iconographical elements it facilitates identification of all repetitions. Unfortunately, as discussed above, the stories of Andhra Buddhism are gone, so identifications are not always possible, even when several representations of the same topic are preserved and the reliefs are of the highest artistic quality and provide excellent details.22

The comparisons are still of great importance, however, at least for avoiding false explanations in the case of less readable examples, such as the tiny scenes covering the stūpas on the slabs such as Figure 62. These are representations of the representations. Such miniature scenes, only a couple of centimetres high, when they are not illustrations of well-known topics, are readable only by comparison with the ‘full-size’ reliefs (Figs 62–4).23 A tiny representation on a stūpa slab in the British Museum, for example, can be identified as a scene of a king or prince whose court is being attacked by a group of armed soldiers (Fig. 65).24 This can be compared to a larger example in Chennai with a more detailed depiction (Fig. 66),25 such as the jester holding his ‘bent one’ stick above his head, the tufts of hair making the ‘crow’s foot’ visible, while one of the soldiers tries to strangle him and the terrified female musicians below. Unfortunately nothing can be said about the content of the scene.26 To assist future research, however, it is important to offer detailed observations on each scene, since such observations are crucial for the explanation of the Buddhist narratives at Amaravati.

The organization of the scenes, the order in which they are placed and the way in which the composition highlights the ‘key’ element are all very important, since the reliefs are not only precisely executed but also designed with masterful premeditation. The representations – even in horizontal succession – were apparently not intended to be looked at simply in passing; the compositions are too sophisticated for that. The middle scene often plays the role of the axial centre, and the scenes at the sides are placed symmetrically
to it; it is necessary to view the entire piece to recognize the nuance of such well-planned arrangements. A relief from Nagarjunakonda with seven scenes from the life of the Buddha [Fig. 67],17 for example, has the scenes arranged symmetrically with the scene of Bodhisatva’s departure from Kapilavastu, the turning point of his life, at the centre of the frieze. A standing woman at each end of the frieze (Māyā on the right end and the mother of Rāhula on the left) also shows a mirroring relationship to the woman of the other end.

Unfortunately, in many friezes, we do not see the entire composition of the scenes as they are damaged. In the case of the frieze in the British Museum [Fig. 68],18 however, it is possible to see the entire scene since its missing left portion has survived and is kept in Chennai [Fig. 69].19 The narrow frieze underneath the narrative scenes, above the lion heads, shows animals running to the left and displays makaras on both ends, at the right side facing the left, on the left facing the right (Figs 70–1), indicating the ends of the composition and thus confirming that nothing is missing. The break in the frieze splits the middle image, which represents the ascension of the turban to heaven. The episode takes place shortly after the future Buddha had left Kapilavastu: in an act of self-ordination he has cut off his hair together with the turban and thrown it away, but the gods were there at once, taking the hair with the turban to heaven.20 It is unfortunate that the splitting up of this portion of the frieze separates the two deities often represented in the ascension scenes, originally two arch-enemies but here united in their devotion to the Buddha: the cobra-deity (nāga) is in London, the winged Garuḍa in Chennai.

Therefore, the ascension of the turban constitutes the very centre of the composition. The frieze as it would be, if the pieces were reunited, consists of nine compartments separated by dividing elements in the shape of three lotus rosettes placed one above the other. From right to left, as it was seen by visitors walking round the stūpa, each scene can be described as follows.

1. The final scene from the Vidhuraapadīnājātaka in which the wise minister Vidhura is preaching to the cobra deities.
2. A couple dressed in ‘northern’ clothing (the man is wearing legwarmers and pointed cap and is holding a spear) (cf. Fig. 73).
3. The scene of Siddhārtha sending his horse and groom back home and exchanging princely clothes for the simple dress of the loner (the dwarves present in the scene must be those who were taking the horse out of the city).
4. A couple – a man holding a mirror in front of the lady who is fixing her earring.
5. The scene of the gods raising the prince’s turban to heaven.
6. The Buddha on a throne preaching to the cobra deities emerging from the ground.
7. An unidentified scene, showing a king or a prince attacked by armed men (cf. Fig. 66).
8. A couple – a man with a spear and a lady whose look, from her mode of dress and from the goblet she is holding, is reminiscent of western sculpture.
An unidentified scene, showing a royal figure who holds cords (one of which is horizontal) in front of his chest and is surrounded by an assembly of ladies, and a man leaving the palace.

The frieze thus consists of five broad narrative scenes, three narrow depictions of couples (typical scene-dividers at Amaravati) and instead of one such couple, a representation of the Buddha which, owing to the emerging nāgas (cobra deities), appears to be of a quasi-narrative character. In the narrative registers the jātakas or stories about contemporaries of the Buddha are mixed with scenes of the Buddha's life story. Out of five narrative scenes, only three can be explained given our present state of knowledge. The rest cannot. This frieze gives us the sort of insight typical in Amaravati research. We must accept that this evidence at least gives us the basis of future research and for this the credit must be given to the ancient artists. For further progress in Amaravati research, the visual language of ancient Andhran artists has to be fully studied, since we have to rely on the full range of pictorial messages that have survived from those times – these are the only primary source to identify the narratives in the sculpture.

Despite the difficulty of identifying some scenes, the axial symmetry of the composition of the middle scene apparently runs throughout the entire piece, as with the spears held by the men in both 'western'-looking couples, placed symmetrically to each other. The peculiar depiction of Vidhura at the right-hand end, facing outwards in three-quarter perspective (in other representations he is always shown full face), can also be explained by the left-hand end, where he faces left, that is, again, to the outside. A very intriguing scene is the one in which the Buddha replaces the
couple, which in such a meticulously designed piece cannot be called a mistake. The Buddha is preaching to the cobra deities, just as Vidhura does. Siddhārtha's leaving Kapilavastu carries the same message as the scene at the left-hand end which, although it is not explained, surely illustrates a decision to leave worldly life behind. There are good reasons to believe that the piece in toto had a particular significance and carried a message which we do not recognize because we have not yet identified the stories. One last important factor must be mentioned: the frieze once contained eight more narrative representations, one on each of the middle rosettes of the vertical scene-dividing elements. The miniature pictures on the rosettes are almost completely lost but their narrative character is still observable (Fig. 72).

In one case (Fig. 73) the possible connection with the following unit can be supposed: the rosette to the right of the farewell of the horse and the groom (i.e. the one before it) seems also to represent the horse, so it is apparently the abhinivānamana, the departure of the Bodhisatva from Kapilavastu.

If the miniature depictions are as significant in the narrative as the bigger ones, it means the bigger ones were selected for their importance for the composition as a whole, or perhaps for their relationship with its overall message (for example, the leaving of Kapilavastu is actually much more important than sending the horse back home), and not merely to represent the story. It is clear from the reliefs – consummately beautiful and loaded with significant details, such as the enigmatic object on the tray in Figure 70 – that the research is still very far from complete. The Amaravati reliefs tell stories in the most sublime way, their superb composition tantalizes the viewer with associative thinking whose meanings we often cannot read. But we need to hope that one day we will fully understand them.

Notes

1 See Kanaganahalli relief no. 56 showing the narrative of Vidhura (cf. Aramaki et al. 2011: 89; Poonacha 2011: pl. 79).
2 Fig. 52: illustrated in Aramaki et al. 2011: 90 (no. 58); Poonacha 2011: fig. 8A (drawing); pl. 60A; Zin 2012: fig. 10 (drawing). As for the inscription, see Nakanishi and von Hinüber 2014: 29 (I.4, pl. 1).
3 Fig. 53: illustrated in Aramaki et al. 2011: 65 (no. 1); Poonacha 2011: pl. 81; the inscription is not preserved; cf. Zin 2013a.
4 Aramaki et al. 2011: 64 (no. 3); Poonacha 2011: pl. 83B; Zin 2015a: fig. 10.
5 Fig. 54: BM no. 1880,0706.44; illustrated in Knox 1992: no. 61 (with references to earlier publications); Roy 1994: pl. 66–70.
6 Deheja 1997: fig. 41; Schlingloff 2000/2003: II: 36 (II) (drawing); Zin 2015a: fig. 11.
7 Fig. 55: Sleeping Ariadne, the 2-century BCE Roman replica of a Greek sculpture from the 2-century BCE, Vatican, Galleria delle Statue, no. 548, cf. LMIC. Ariadne no. 118 (with references); McNally 1985: fig. 13; Kohn 1996: fig. 23.
8 Kohn 1996: Roman representations of Ariadne have not been discovered in India, but one – a metal piece of ornamentation on a kālarī – was found under a ship's cargo at the bottom of the Arabian Sea. In southern India Roman items were discovered at many sites; the Brahmapuri in Karnataka or Karur in Tamilnadu, at least, deserve a mention here.
9 E.g. the hoard of Roman bronzes discovered in Kolhapur (see De Puma 1991), which contains statues whose western style of representation of the body could have inspired imitation.
10 BM, Asia, no. 1880,0709.39; illustrated in Zwalf 1996: pl. 3 and fig. 196 (with references).
11 Chennai Government Museum, no. 265; illustrated in Sivaramamurti 1942: 228–9 and pl. 81.
12 Fig. 57: Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Museum, no. 802 (depot).
15 Fig. 58: BM no. 1880,0709.66; illustrated in Knox 1992: no. 14 (with references to foregoing publications); Sugimoto 2001: fig. 3; Schlingloff 2000/2003: II: 52 (II) (drawing).
16 The medallion probably portrays a part of the narrative depicted on the pillar below, the story of the cobra deity Campaka, who was once captured by the snake catcher while he was meditating in his animal form. He wanted the privilege of being reborn as human and thus gaining the chance of entering nārāyana (right compartment), and he invited to his abode the human king who helped him from the captivity (left and central compartment). The representation of the narrative in Ajanta (cf. Schlingloff 2000/2003, I: 282 (no. 606) includes the scene in which the wife of Campaka comes to the court of the human king to ask for help for her captive husband; this was probably the scene represented in the medallion.
20 Fig. 61: Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Museum, no. 96; illustrated in Zin 2014: fig. 1, C1 and fig. 8 (with references).
21 The most beautiful of these representations is the painting on the veranda of cave XVII in Ajanta, showing a couple leaving their wealthy home to join the Buddhist order (cf. Schlingloff 2000/2003, I: 399–401 (no. 69)); the jester with his typical bent staff and hair tufts decorated with flowers (but also displaying some of the attributes of a Brahmin, the holy string yajñopavītta and the rosary) shows unmistakably by his gestures that he is protesting against his master and mistress's decision, while holding a bowl of sweets under his arm, apparently trying to protect them. A fragment of a painting from Ajanta has survived in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston – cut off apparently due to the interesting tufty hair style of the person depicted. See Begley 1968. It was discovered that the fragment belongs to the narrative of Nanda in cave XVI in Ajanta (cf. Schlingloff 2000/2003, I: 231–2; cf. Zin 2015a).
22 E.g. in the case of the reliefs representing the scene including the parable about ‘The man in the well’, cf. Zin 2011.
23 Fig. 62: BM no. 1880,0706.72; illustrated in Knox 1992: no. 70 and 70c (with references to previous publications). Fig. 63: Amaratari Archaeological Museum, no. 153 (deposit); illustrated in Parimoo 1995: fig. 12; Zin 2004b: fig. 12 (drawing); Gupta 2008: fig. 14 (III).
24 Fig. 64: Chennai Government Museum, no. 58 (not on display and today broken and in a very bad state of preservation); illustrated in Burgess 1887: pl. 242 (drawing); Bachhofer 1929: pl. 127; Sivaramamurti 1942: pl. 46.2; Stern and Bénisti 1961: pl. 248; Sivaramamurti 1979: fig. 17; Nagar 1993: C.P. 33; Parimoo 1995; fig. 11; Misra 2000: pl. 14v: Sugimoto 2001: fig. 12; Zin 2004b: fig. 11 (drawing).
25 Fig. 65: BM no. 1880,0709.63; illustrated in Knox 1992: no. 68 (with references to earlier publications).
26 Fig. 66: Chennai Government Museum, no. 105 (3rd register); illustrated in Burgess 1887: pl. 42.4; Sivaramamurti 1942: pl. 59.1; Stern and Bénisti 1961: pl. 45a; Parimoo 1982: fig. 110; Ramachandra Rao 1984: pl. 241; Stone 1994: fig. 70; Roy 1994: pl. 126; Zin 2004b: fig. 10 (drawing).
27 Sivaramamurti (1942: 251) explains the king as Siddhārtha and gives a caption (pl. 59,1c), ‘Siddhartha lives in three pleasant palaces carefully guarded from the ills of life’, whose nonsensical unhelpfulness can only be explained by his having had to rely on poor photography.
28 Fig. 67: Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Museum, no. 45. Unfortunately the relief was only seldom represented as an entire piece. Illustrated e.g. in Ramachandra Rao 1956: pl. 23 (Ist
The interpretations given hitherto of the scene, which is repeated several times in the reliefs in Andhra, do not, unfortunately, offer a solution; Longhurst (1938: 32) explained it as ‘Siddhārtha and the mighty bow’ and Sivaramamurti (1942: 251) as Siddhārta who ‘holds three threads fondly, and ponders over them … The three cords may also signify tanha, arati and rāga, the three lusts personified as Māra’s daughters, whom, as Buddha, the prince later overcame, but which now held him in their grasp’. We know these interpretations cannot be accepted simply because the person is not depicted with nimbus, i.e. it is not Siddhārtha.

It cannot be ruled out, though it is highly improbable, that it is one and the same man represented twice, since persons from the right scene are observing the man on the left; i.e. it appears to be one scene, not two successive ones.

Compare the representation with the same scene depicted on the Amaravati pillar in the BM (no. 1880,0709.46; illustrated in Knox 1992, no. 5). The scene was important and was often represented in art: perhaps it symbolized the beginning of the struggle for enlightenment on which everyone should embark. In Amaravati the ascension of the turban was often represented together with the ascension of the bowl which the Buddha received alongside last meal before the enlightenment; cf. Zin (forthcoming c).

The interpretations given hitherto of the scene, which is repeated several times in the reliefs in Andhra, do not, unfortunately, offer a solution; Longhurst (1938: 32) explained it as ‘Siddhārtha and the mighty bow’ and Sivaramamurti (1942: 251) as Siddhārta who ‘holds three threads fondly, and ponders over them … The three cords may also signify tanha, arati and rāga, the three lusts personified as Māra’s daughters, whom, as Buddha, the prince later overcame, but which now held him in their grasp’. We know these interpretations cannot be accepted simply because the person is not depicted with nimbus, i.e. it is not Siddhārtha.

It cannot be ruled out, though it is highly improbable, that it is one and the same man represented twice, since persons from the right scene are observing the man on the left; i.e. it appears to be one scene, not two successive ones.


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