

CHAPTER IV

DHARMA: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM AT AJAṆṬĀ

Early in this century Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger drew up a concordance of all the uses of "Dharma" within the Pāli canon. They listed four principal and sixteen secondary meanings for *Dharma*, which they called the most polyvalent and central of Buddhist terms.¹ Although the Geigers' project was quickly criticized by Th. Stcherbatsky, who felt it substituted philological comprehensiveness for analysis,² Stcherbatsky's agreement with their assessment of Dharma's import is witnessed in the title of his own book on the meaning of "Dharma," *The Central Conception of Buddhism*. Stcherbatsky's methodological criticisms notwithstanding, lexicographical listings parallel to that of the Geigers are found within the Buddhist tradition itself. For instance, Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti* lists ten meanings for the word Dharma: "1) an element of existence (in general), 2) the Path, 3) Nirvāṇa, 4) a non-sensuous element, 5) virtue, 6) life, 7) the Doctrine, 8) (the quality of) constant becoming, 9) religious vow, and 10) worldly law."³ And just as the Geigers had a redactor for their work in Stcherbatsky -- who proposed that out of the many meanings they listed, Dharma's significance as the keystone of Buddhist

¹ Magdalene Geiger and Wilhelm Geiger. *Pāli Dhamma, vornehmlich in der kanonische Literatur*. Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse XXXI, Band 1. (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1920): 1.

² Th. Stcherbatsky. *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma."* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1970): 1.

³ Bu ston. *The Jewelry of Scripture by Bu ston*. Trans. by E. E. Obermiller. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987): 18.

philosophy was the most salient -- so the fourteenth century Tibetan Bu-ston redacts Vasubandhu's list, proposing that "Dharma" in the sense of "doctrine" is the most salient meaning when it comes to reconstructing Indian Buddhist history. Bu-ston further analyzes this term's significance, claiming "it is necessary to distinguish, -- the Doctrine as the practice, and the Doctrine as the theory, the word of Scripture."⁴ The theory and practice of Buddhism at Ajañṭā, such will be the general subject matter of the present chapter.

The potential myriad of beliefs members of Ajañṭā's community could have held and practices they could have performed requires that I limit this over-broad subject matter. To do so, I will turn to a matter that has puzzled me since the time I first began working on the Ajañṭā caves. That is to say, attempting to relate evidence at the site to Buddhism's native categories, I was struck first by my expectation that Ajañṭā belonged exclusively to one of the two *yānas*, and second by my inability to establish which *yāna* it was.

In this dissertation's first chapter, I reviewed the prior scholarship on Ajañṭā, noting that the study of this site took a giant leap forward when James Fergusson's relative chronology of western Indian Buddhist cave sites based upon "critical surveys" and "careful comparisons" was set within a discursive context that took its descriptive categories from Buddhist literature. Thus Fergusson and Burgess' opus, *The Cave Temples of India*, periodizes the more than one thousand Buddhist caves scattered across Western India into two neat phases: the Hīnayāna, stretching from approximately the second century B.C.E. until the third C.E., and then the Mahāyāna, commencing in the fifth century at Ajañṭā. These scholars also present a clear morphological screen through which caves belonging to the two can be distinguished: Hīnayāna caves "are generally plain in style,

⁴ Bu ston. *The Jewelry of Scripture*, 21.

and are devoid of images of Buddha for worship,"⁵ whereas those of the Mahāyāna have as their principle characteristic the "multiplications of images of Buddha."⁶ Nor is this periodization based upon *yānic* associations a nineteenth century relic. It has continued in the major textbooks of Indian art history: Benjamin Rowland discusses Ajaṅṭa's Cave 19 as a "Mahāyāna Buddhist sanctuary;"⁷ Susan Huntington typologizes Cave 17 as "a standard Mahāyāna *vibhāra*."⁸ That the history of western Indian cave excavations can be differentiated into two general periods based upon morphological variations stands beyond doubt. But how accurate was these scholars' use of institutional categories derived from Buddhist literature to qualify these intervals?

Indeed, this problem is not unique to the study of Buddhist cave sites. Introductory courses and textbooks have long adopted this pair of native Indian terms for their presentation of Buddhism. When students retain one fact about Indian Buddhism, it is probably this distinction. And even at more advanced stages of scholarship, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna remain valued concepts, like elder children who keep the younger in line. Tracing the margins of difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna has long been a popular concern in the study of Indian Buddhism. Typically the two are represented in stark opposition: the Hīnayāna champions the arhat-ideal, the Mahāyāna, the bodhisattva-ideal; the Hīnayāna is centered on the saṅgha, the Mahāyāna, on the Buddha; the Hīnayāna is rationalist in its metaphysics, the Mahāyāna, mystical; Hīnayāna is ethical, Mahāyāna devotional; the Hīnayāna has closed its canon, the Mahāyāna allows for

⁵ James Fergusson and James Burgess. *The Cave Temples of India*. (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 1969): 170.

⁶ Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 297.

⁷ Benjamin Rowland. *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971): 130.

⁸ Susan L. Huntington. *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*. (New York: Weatherhill, 1985): 254.

continuing 'revelation.' These distinctions streamline Buddhism's complex history, emplotting the religion's development around a clearly articulated transition.

The implications of such simplification are at least twofold. First, exaggeration of the differences between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna for the sake of easy comparison suggests a thoroughgoing divorce between them on every level, in terms of institution, doctrine, practice. Second, the sequential nature of teaching one *yāna* and then the other implies the Mahāyāna was a historical *fait accompli* that more or less superseded Hīnayāna in India. Nevertheless, simplification of material is a necessary evil in any discipline, not just Buddhist studies. And these remarkably clear characterizations of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna do not derive from modern scholars alone. The Mahāyāna's own rhetoric warrants such dualist constructions, fostering an expectation that historically the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna *were* completely separate. One of the clearest statements thereof is found in Ārya Asaṅga's fourth century *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (verse 1.10), a formative classic of Mahāyāna doctrine: "the Śrāvakayāna [i.e., Hīnayāna] and Mahāyāna are mutually opposed."⁹ For Asaṅga this fundamental incommensurability is ideological and practical in nature: the two *yānas* diverge in their aspirations (*āśaya*), teachings (*upadēśa*), practices (*prayoga*), supports (*upastambha*),¹⁰ and times (*kāla*).¹¹ This brief analysis ends with Asaṅga's assessment that "as a result of [the two *yānas*'] mutual opposition, the Hīnayāna is truly inferior; it is not capable of becoming the Mahāyāna."¹²

⁹ *viruddham eva cānyonyam śrāvakayānaṃ mahāyānaṃ ca*. Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharatī, 1985): 4.

¹⁰ According to Mahāyāna doctrine, spiritual transformation takes place over a more or less prolonged span, during which an adherent accumulates spiritual merit (*puṇya*) and develops spiritual insight (*jñāna*). These two are envisioned as "supports."

¹¹ See the previous note. Because the Mahāyāna purports to require more and greater "supports," the period of time necessary for the realization of its highest goal also surpasses that of the Śrāvakayāna.

¹² *tasmād anyonyavirodbād yad yānaṃ hīnaṃ hīnam eva tat | na tan mahāyānaṃ bhavitum arhati* | Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 4.

Asaṅga's polemic is seductive, suggesting that the distinction between Great and Little Vehicles is thoroughgoing, and thus that a comprehensive set of criteria can be formulated through which to distinguish them. Indeed, the indices of differentiation Asaṅga cites -- aspirations, teachings, etc. -- are precisely those that modern analyses of Buddhism use for reconstructing Buddhism's history along *yānic* lines. Nevertheless, although Mahāyāna polemic literature fosters the treatment of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna as ideal types, the historian's task is "to complicate not to clarify," in J. Z. Smith's phrase.¹³ So, how historically accurate are these characterizations? How useful is the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction for defining the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's community?

Bu-ston claimed that Dharma understood as doctrine has a praxical component and a theoretical, the latter involving the careful study of Buddhism's sūtras and śāstras. Despite the more wide-ranging set of criteria Asaṅga presents for distinguishing the *yānas* vis-à-vis Dharma, Bu-ston's may be more useful. Bu-ston's presentation is seconded by I-Tsing, who observes quite matter-of-factly that in seventh century India "those who worship the Bodhisattvas and read the Mahāyāna Sūtras are called the Mahāyānists, while those who do not perform these are called the Hīnayānists."¹⁴ These seem an ideal set of criteria for the archaeologist of Buddhism, allowing a strictly material, even digital, means for determining the presence or absence of the Mahāyāna at a particular site. Unfortunately, however, no specific sūtras, Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna, are documented as known by Ajaṅṭā's community. And, although we can surely say that bodhisattvas were worshipped at Ajaṅṭā, we cannot always be certain of their identities. Fa-Hien observes that Prajñāpāramitā, Mañjuśrī, and Avalokiteśvara were the three principle bodhisattvas

¹³ Jonathan Z. Smith. *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 290.

¹⁴ I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*. Trans. by J. Takakusu. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982): 14-15.

worshipped by Mahāyānists in fifth century Mathurā.¹⁵ Yet, at Ajaṅṭā there is but a single, very minor, female bodhisattva figure; no images at the site can be definitively identified as Mañjuśrī; and, as art historians have long noted, images of Avalokiteśvara are often difficult to distinguish from those of Maitreya, a 'Hīnayāna' bodhisattva.¹⁶ Mitterwallner suggests that, in Mathurā at least, artists distinguished between these bodhisattvas by giving Avalokiteśvara "the hair-do of an ascetic in the form of straight hair-strands and to Maitreya long curly locks."¹⁷ Based upon this morphology, we can say that icons of both bodhisattvas were likely donated at the site (Figs. 54, 55). This is all by way of claiming that although I-Tsing's material criteria for distinguishing the *yānas* are quite attractive, one cannot apply them to Ajaṅṭā's remains without further mediation and interpretation.

There being no certain and straightforward means for settling this issue save individuals' own affirmations of membership, let us look at what Ajaṅṭā's patrons say about themselves. As I have noted on several occasions based upon Rappaport's work, liturgical performances encode two types of information: indexical and canonical. The former provides personal information about the performer of a ritual; the latter has to do with the 'Dharma' a performer accepts through his performance. The former is found in the variant aspects of a liturgy, the most important of which is a performer's very participation therein; the latter is encoded in the invariant aspects of the liturgy. Above I also noted that Buddhist donative inscriptions are constructed with a mixture of variant and (relatively) invariant elements. One will usually find a donor's name, though, of course, the

¹⁵ Fa Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 47.

¹⁶ Cf. Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann. *Introduction a l'étude d'Avalokiteśvara*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967); Yu-min Lee. *The Maitreya Cult and its Art in Early China*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1983); John C. Huntington. "The Iconography and Iconology of Maitreya Images in Gandhara," *Journal of Central Asia*. 7 (1984): 133-178; M. Bussagli. "Due statuette di Maitreya," *Annali Lateranensi*. 13 (1949): 355-90; Gritli von Mitterwallner. *Kuṣāṇa Coins and Kuṣāṇa Sculptures from Mathurā*. (Mathura: The Government Museum, 1986).

¹⁷ Mitterwallner. *Kuṣāṇa Coins and Kuṣāṇa Sculptures*, 118.

individual's name changes from record to record. Similarly, a donor will usually identify himself as a monk or lay Buddhist -- an indexical matter -- but the actual terms through which he does so carry information vis-à-vis the canons an individual patron accepted. As Fig. 53 shows, patrons had a restricted universe of epithets through which to identify themselves, their status and affiliations within the Buddhist community -- *bhadanta*, *ācārya*, *śākyabhikṣu*, *aṇḍāśāila*, and so on -- sometimes using more than one of these indices. Similarly, one finds that Ajaṇṭā's patrons also utilized one of a number of formulae for transferring the merit created by their donations: these formulae ranged from no dedication at all, to one that gave the merit to the donor's parents, to a dedication that expressed a hope that the donor's parents, teachers, and all sentient beings would attain Buddhahood through the merit he created.

These epigraphic pericopes encode some of the various canons Ajaṇṭā's donors accepted. To understand how they have bearing for this present investigation of Dharma at Ajaṇṭā in *yānic* terms, we must turn briefly at the work of Gregory Schopen, who has attempted to document the Mahāyāna's emergence as a self-conscious institutional presence in India, defining and declaring itself publicly as a distinct entity through the unique epithets and formulae by which its members identified themselves epigraphically.¹⁸ Schopen's historical conclusions are not our concern at present. Instead, his analysis is salient for it attempts to prove that epigraphs can be associated with the Mahāyāna even if they do not use this term explicitly.

*deyadharmo 'yaṃ śākyabhikṣu x. yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatu
sarvasatvānām anuttarajñānāvāptaye*

This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu X. Whatever merit there is in

¹⁸ Cf. Gregory Schopen. "The Phrase '*sa pṛthivīpradeśāś caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 17 (1975): 147-181. Gregory Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 21 (1979): 1-19; Gregory Schopen. "The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. 10 (1987): 99-137.

it may that be for all beings' attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge.

Schopen holds that this may be treated as the Mahāyāna dedicatory formula in its most basic form, because, 1) "the term *śākyabhikṣu* . . . must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community who was also a member of a monastic community,"¹⁹ and 2) this formula for dedicating spiritual merit is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."²⁰ Although no inscription with precisely this wording or orthography is found at Ajaṅṭā, of Ajaṅṭā's 59 donative inscriptions dated to the fifth century, 23 use *Śākyabhikṣu* (or the lay equivalent, *Śākya-upāsaka*);²¹ approximately 14 use a variation of this particular formula for transferring merit to foster others' attainment of Buddhahood; and 8 have both the epithet and this merit-formula. Because of the sorry state of many inscriptions at Ajaṅṭā, these numbers can by no means be taken as final. I have calculated them in order to demonstrate the large number of donors at Ajaṅṭā that could potentially be identified with the Mahāyāna based upon Schopen's epigraphic criteria.

In the semiotic terminology I have been using, Schopen is claiming that these two epigraphic pericopes index a donor's acceptance of Mahāyānist canons and, assumedly, that donor's membership in Mahāyāna. Whether Schopen's conclusions are correct, and whether Rappaportian "acceptance" is equivalent to membership, the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* and this formula for dedicating merit were important for these donors. These two items encode canons which, if decoded, will enable us to recover a significant constituent of the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's community. Only after we decipher those canons will it be meaningful to ask about their *yānic* status. The remainder of this chapter will focus upon these two epigraphic elements, inquiring first, what it meant for a Buddhist at Ajaṅṭā to be a *Śākya-*

¹⁹ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

²⁰ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 12.

²¹ For the remainder of the dissertation, I will use *Śākyabhikṣu* generically for the lay and monastic, male and female formulations of this title.

bbikṣu, and second what it meant for a *Śākyabbikṣu* to dedicate merit with the aspiration that all beings would attain of Unexcelled Knowledge.

Who Were India's Śākyabbikṣus?

As I observed at the end of the chapter on Ajaṅṭā's Saṅgha, identifications of the narratives painted on the walls of Caves 1, 16, and 17 point to a close association of this site's monastic community with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. Yet, because so many inscriptions dated to Ajaṅṭā's intrusive period -- indicative of people who would have remained at Ajaṅṭā at a time of uncertain patronage and looming war, i.e., people with a stake in the site -- include the epithet *Śākyabbikṣu* before the donor's name, we might speak of Ajaṅṭā's community as one of *Śākyabbikṣus*. However, neither this title, nor the lay *Śākyā-upāsaka*, has an immediate institutional or ideological significance within Buddhism. A division of the saṅgha in terms of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna is recognizable to most people with a passing knowledge of Buddhism; the division into 18 groupings, called *nikāyas*, based upon distinctions in doctrine and monastic rules, is familiar to scholars with a more specialized knowledge of the Buddhist sociology. But the title *Śākyabbikṣu*, whether it is an honorific or an institutional designation, is extremely rare in Indian Buddhist literary sources. Nevertheless, nearly 4 out of 5 of the dedications dated to Ajaṅṭā's intrusive period employ this term.

Nor is *Śākyabbikṣu* unique to Ajaṅṭā. To the contrary, it was used continuously in Indian Buddhist inscriptions beginning in the later fourth century at Devnī Morī in Gujarat,²² until Buddhism's finale in India. The *Śākyabbikṣus* are like a community of golem, borne of and bound to the stone bearing their names, haunting. All scholars love a

²² See Schopen ("Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 19 n. 35) for a discussion of this inscription's dating and the debate that has surrounded it.

good ghost story, and the *Śākyabhikṣus* have not been left at peace. This epithet has inspired three rather different interpretations. We have already encountered that of Gregory Schopen who, along with Masao Shizutani,²³ believes this was a title Mahāyānist monks adopted for themselves. By contrast, D. C. Sircar suggests that this epithet has no special significance, and is merely an alternate for *bbikṣu*, monk;²⁴ this interpretation is also found in the common Sanskrit dictionaries. H. Sarkar stands firm but alone in his opinion that the *Śākyabhikṣus* were an organization of peripatetic monks concerned with the dissemination of Buddha images, and the exaltation of Śākyamuni Buddha.²⁵ However, upon a reexamination of these authors' evidence and arguments, I found the interpretations of all three to be wanting. The following discussion of Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* will have four stages: I will assess Sircar's and Sarkar's interpretations, then present my own decoding of the canons implicit in the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* based upon evidence from Ajaṅṭā, and finally return to Schopen's identification of this epithet as a *yānic* index.

Sircar on Śākyabhikṣu

In his *Epigraphical Glossary*, D. C. Sircar defines "*Śākyabhikṣu*" as an "epithet of a Buddhist monk; same as *Śākyā*" and the parallel "*Śākyā-opāsikā*" as "a female member of the Buddhist laity."²⁶ He does not elucidate further the basis for these definitions, except to say that inscriptions which use these epithets can be found in epigraphic lists compiled by

²³ Masao Shizutani. "On the Śākyabhikṣu as Found in Indian Buddhist Inscriptions," *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū*. 2 (1952): 104-5; Masao Shizutani. "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū*. 19 (1962): 358-355.

²⁴ Dinesh Chandra Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966): 287.

²⁵ H. Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966).

²⁶ Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, 287.

D. Bhandarkar²⁷ and H. Lüders.²⁸ Beyond these references, Sircar provides no documentation to support his interpretation. One must assume that Sircar defined this term by considering its discursive significance within the context of the inscriptions in Bhandarkar's and Lüders' lists. And thus his definitions add nothing to what we may determine regarding the *Śākyabhikṣu* epithet from Ajaṅṭā's own inscriptions. When it comes to identifying Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*, reasoning based upon Sircar's *Glossary* will provide mere tautology.

Concurring in D. C. Sircar's identification, however, the *Sanskrit Wörterbuch* of Böhtlingk and Roth defines *Śākyabhikṣu* as "a Buddhist mendicant-friar;"²⁹ Monier-Williams agrees with this masterwork,³⁰ as does Apte's dictionary for students.³¹ Yet, whereas the evidence Sircar cites to justify his definition little benefits our investigation, these dictionaries take us beyond the restricted world of epigraphic formulae, for they cite examples of it to be found in classical Indian literature.

Temporally and geographically, the example that comes closest to Ajaṅṭā is Varāhamihira's *Brhatsamhitā*. This treatise on astrology and its relation to the affairs of human social life is considered to have been written in the sixth century in the city of Ujjain. The physical and historical proximity of this text to Ajaṅṭā cannot be taken too seriously,

²⁷ D. R. Bhandarkar. "A List of Inscriptions of Northern India in Brāhmī and its Derivative Scripts from about 200 A.C." *Appendix to Epigraphia Indica, volumes xix-xxiii*. (Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1983).

²⁸ Heinrich Lüders. "A List of Brāhmī Inscriptions, From the Earliest Times to about A.D. 400 with the Exception of those of Aśoka," *Appendix to Epigraphia Indica volume X*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1912).

²⁹ Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolf Roth. *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. (St. Petersburg, Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1875): vol. 7, 131a.

³⁰ Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 1062b.

³¹ Vaman Shivram Apte. *The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970): 551b.

however, since Varāhamihira himself allows that his text is compiled from previous treatises on the subject. Be this as it may, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* root-text uses the term *Śākyabbikṣu* on two occasions, and once uses the shorter "*Śākya*," though clearly for a follower of Buddha and not for the Buddha himself. In this text's first use of *Śākyabbikṣu* (verse 16.15), these Buddhists are included in a list with a long list of countries, peoples, and social-groups that are presided over by the planet Mars.³² The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*'s second use of *Śākyabbikṣu* also comes in the midst of a list of items associated with the planet Mars, in this case Varāhamihira indicates that association with *Śākyabbikṣus* on a day governed by this planet will be fruitful (verse 104.61).³³ In a third instance, Varāhamihira's root text says that "*Śākyas*" are responsible for installing Buddha images (verse 60.19).³⁴ In none of these instances do we find any reason to determine that *Śākyabbikṣu* is being used in a meaning other for generic Buddhist-monks. This identification is made even stronger in Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary on verse 16.15 noted above. For Varāhamihira's "*Śākyabbikṣu*," Bhaṭṭotpala glosses: "a *śākya* is one who wears red-robles; a *bhikṣu* is an ascetic" (*śākya raktapaṭikāḥ | bhikṣur yatih |*). In the second instance, the commentator glosses *Śākyabbikṣu* as "a kind of ascetic" (*śramaṇaka*). Elsewhere (verse 87.69) Bhaṭṭotpala interprets the root-text's "*śramaṇa*" (alternately "*śravaṇa*")³⁵ as "*Śākyabbikṣu*."³⁶ Still

³² Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with the commentary of Bhaṭṭotpala*. (Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1968): 279-80; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. Ed. and trans. by M. Ramakrishna Bhat. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): 195.

³³ Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary*, 1108; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 928.

³⁴ Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary*, 705; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 571.

³⁵ There is a problem in drawing further conclusions from this evidence vis-a-vis the generic use of *śramaṇa* for "Buddhist." The two editions I cite differ in that in some instances the "*śramaṇa*" of Bhat's edition is "*śravaṇa*" in the edition which includes Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary. These two terms have very different resonances in Buddhist discourse, which must be left aside because I do not reexamine the actual manuscripts from which my two editions derive.

³⁶ Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary*, 932; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 792.

elsewhere (verse 87.9), *śramaṇa/śravaṇa* is glossed as "Buddhist" (*bauddha*).³⁷ Putting all these equivalences together, between Varāhamihira and his commentator we get the following list of synonyms: *bauddha* = *śākyabbikṣu* = *śākya* = *raktapaṭika* = *śramaṇa* = *śravaṇa* (Buddhist = śākya-monk = śākya = wearer of red-robles = ascetic = auditor). It would seem that for Varāhamihira and his commentator Bhaṭṭotpala, India's *Śākyabbikṣus* were indistinguishable from India's Buddhist monks.

Varāhamihira's shortening of *Śākyabbikṣu* to *Śākya* in verse 60.19 finds a complement in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (verse 2.3.14.38), where the "Śākyas" are said to have been created by the Asuras along with other heretical groups "like Vṛddhaśrāvakī, Nirgranthas, Śākyas, Jīvaskas and Kārpaṭas."³⁸ Similarly, in Kauṭīliya's *Arthaśāstra*, the "Śākyas" are named as a heretic sect whose monks may not be fed at rites for gods and ancestors; violation of this rule carries a 100 *paṇa* fine (verse 3.20.16).³⁹ And again, the "Śākyabbikṣuka" are identified as one of a number of heretics in the commentary supplied by Kullūka's *Manvarthamuktāvali* on verse 4.30 of the *Manusmṛti*.⁴⁰

Another literary text in which *Śākyabbikṣu* is found is Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita*. Here it is used to describe a Buddhist nun: "Then I won over Dharmarakṣitā, a Buddhist female mendicant (*Śākyabbikṣukī*), the chief agent of Kāmamañjarī, with gifts of old garments, food, and the like."⁴¹ Again, little in this description suggests that Dharm-

³⁷ Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary*, 925; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 786.

³⁸ Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare (trans). *The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa; part II*. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology series vol. 23. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 541.

³⁹ Kauṭīliya. *The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*. Ed. by R. P. Kangle. (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1969) vol. 1, 127.

⁴⁰ Manu. *Manu-Smṛtiḥ, with nine commentaries by Medhātīthi, Sarvajñanārāyaṇa, Kullūka, Rāghavānanda, Nandana, Rāmacandra, Mañirāma, Govindarāja, Bhāruci*. Ed. by Jayantakrishna Harikrishna Dave. (Bombay: Bharat Vidya Bhavan, 1975), vol. 2, 316.

⁴¹ *tataś ca kāṃcit kāmamañjaryāḥ pradhānadūtīm dharmarakṣitām nāma śākyabbikṣukīm cīvarapiṇḍadānādinopasaṃgrhya*. Daṇḍin. *The Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin*. Ed. by M. R. Kale. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986): 60, 85.

rakṣitā is being described as a member of a Buddhist sub-sect through Daṇḍin's use of Śākyabhikṣukī. The commentary Kale publishes along with the *Daśakumāracarita*'s root text provides an interesting gloss, which seems to sew up Sircar, et. al.'s position: "A Śākyabhikṣukī is a female ascetic [who espouses] Buddhist tenets. But a 'śākya,' [can be] any Buddhist."⁴² Unfortunately, Kale gives no information whatsoever concerning the provenance, dating, or authorship of this commentary. It could come from the eighth century or the eighteenth, and so cannot be treated as a definitive statement in regard to Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist monks.

Still another example from classical Indian literature is found in the *Mattavilāsa Prabasanam*.⁴³ This dramatic work was authored in the first quarter of the seventh century by the Pallava King Mahendravarman I, who ruled much of southern India from his capital at Kāñcī. A farce, the *Mattavilāsa* depicts an encounter between Satyasoma, a *Kapālin* -- a type of Śaivite renunciate whose practice involves drinking alcohol from a *kapāla*, a human skull -- and a Buddhist monk named Nāgasena. In brief, Satyasoma, intoxicated, is unable to find his *kapāla*, and so returns to a liquor shop he had patronized earlier in the day. At the moment Satyasoma returns, enter Nāgasena, holding his begging-bowl full of food from a patron's feast under his robe. Satyasoma accuses the Buddhist monk of having stolen his *kapāla*; Nāgasena decries his innocence, but will not show his bowl, claiming that the Buddha ordered monks to keep their bowls concealed when full. A Pāsupata and madman soon appear and attempt to mediate between the Kapālin and Buddhist. I won't give away the conclusion of this farce in one act. For the purpose of recovering cliches by which Buddhism was known to contemporary communities, the *Mattavilāsa* is of great

⁴² śākyabhikṣukīṃ bauddbasiddhāntatapasvinīm | śākyas tu bauddbeṣv anyatamaḥ iti Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita*, 85.

⁴³ Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprabasana*. Ed. and trans. by N. P. Unni. (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1974).

interest: the two truths, the Three Jewels, the six perfections, and the many restrictions on monastic behavior all come in for ridicule. For the present purpose, however, what is most crucial is that in identification of the characters, the Buddhist monk Nāgasena is referred to as a *Śākyabhikṣu*.

As in the previous two examples there is no internal basis upon which to make a determination concerning whether the *Mattavilāsa Prabhasanam's* use of *śākyabhikṣu* has any significance beyond 'Buddhist monk.' Unlike the other two works, however, we have slightly more evidence. Hsüan-Tsang himself travelled as far south as Kāñcī, and spent considerable time there in approximately 640 C.E. hoping to gain passage to Sri Lanka. Mahendravarman I's son was ruling then, but there is little reason to assume that any significant alterations occurred in the Buddhist saṅgha of this city as a result of that change. Hsüan-Tsang provides the first evidence to suggest that India's *Śākyabhikṣus* could be anything other than its generic Buddhist monks. For the Chinese pilgrim notes that Buddhism was quite prominent in this city, there being nearly one hundred monasteries and 10,000 monks. More significant yet, Hsüan-Tsang observed that all of Kāñcī's monks "study the teaching of the Sthavira school belonging to the Great Vehicle."⁴⁴ The presence of the Mahāyāna in Kāñcī is further supported by the *Mattavilāsa's* mention of two doctrines associated predominantly with this *yāna*. First, after Nāgasena refuses to show the *Kapālin* Satyasoma his bowl which he conceals under his robe, Satyasoma puns: "this is the concealed [i.e., relative] truth, I wish to hear the ultimate truth."⁴⁵ A clear reference to the doctrine of the two-truths, often associated with the name of Nāgārjuna. Second, after Nāgasena becomes so fed up with Satyasoma's shenanigans that the monk

⁴⁴ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. Trans. by Samuel Beal. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): vol. 2, 229.

⁴⁵ *idaṃ tat saṃvṛtasatyam | paramārthasatyam śrotum icchāmi* | Mahendravarman. *Mattavilāsaprabhasana*, 52.

offers the Kapālin the bowl, Satyasoma quips: "Most probably this is how the Buddha fulfilled the Perfection of Giving."⁴⁶ On the same note, hearkening back to the commentary on Varāhamihira's *Brhatsaṃhitā*, we will see that, according to Bhaṭṭotpala, Śākya install an image of the Buddha following the method of the Perfections (*pāramitākrāmeṇa*):⁴⁷ another suggestion of linkage between the Śākya epithet and the Mahāyāna.

This evidence certainly is more lively than the inevitable repetitiveness of epigraphic formulae. And, as I stated above, I will return to the question of *yānas* below. Still it is not conclusive, for the Ujjain of Varāhamihira was also visited by Hsüan-Tsang, where he found only three hundred monks, belonging to both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Were only Mahāyānist Buddhists, Śākya**bhikṣus**, auspicious on days ruled by Mars? Was the power of the Indian planetary gods subordinate to the internal skirmishes of heretic Buddhists?

A more reasonable way of viewing the evidence reviewed to this point is suggested by a quip Satyasoma makes in the *Mattavilāsa Prahasanam*. At one point, Satyasoma accuses Nāgasena of performing magic, of changing the color of his *kapāla* skull from white to black. In his words, Nāgasena is capable of this act for he is "truly the progeny of Māyā's son."⁴⁸ This pun works because *Māyā* can mean 'illusion' as well as being the proper name of the Buddha's mother. Nāgasena the Śākya**bhikṣu** is the son of the son of Māyā. Whereas, this particular phrasing is unique to Mahendravarmān's play, it echoes a common epithet used for Buddhist monks throughout their own literature: *śākya**putrīya śramaṇa***, which can be translated as the mendicant sons (or followers) of

⁴⁶ *nūnam evaṃ buddhenāpi dānapāramitā pūritā* | Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, 60.

⁴⁷ Varāhamihira. *Brhatsaṃhitā, with commentary*, 705.

⁴⁸ *nanu māyāsantānasambhavāḥ khalu bhavantaḥ* | Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, 60.

the son of the Śākya. Śākyaabbikṣu can be viewed as having its parentage in this common designation for Buddhist monks. Moreover, śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa seems not to have been a title by which members of the Buddha's saṅgha described themselves or referred to their own members. Generalizing from the Pāli canon, S. Dutt writes, "It will be observed that in the legends of the (Theravāda) Canon, the name by which outsiders designate the *Bhikkhusaṅgha* is always 'Sakyaputtiya Samaṇas.'"⁴⁹ And turning from Pāli literature to the Mūlasarvāstivādin texts, one finds a similar pattern. Although my survey of the MSV on this point has not been particularly exhaustive or meticulous, in the instances I have noted the phrase śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa it always expresses a lay-man's view of the saṅgha. In the one instance where a monk uses this epithet, he is using indirect speech for a lay-man.⁵⁰

To conclude this section, the evidence presented so far suggests that non-Buddhist literary sources can be read as using the term Śākyaabbikṣu in precisely the way D. C. Sircar claims, as a generic term for Buddhist monk. If so, it is not unreasonable to view it as a development or echo of the śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa found so often in Buddhist literature. Still there is a large distinction to be drawn between these two means for identifying members of the Buddhist saṅgha. Whereas śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa is often found in Buddhist literature, I have not discovered a single instance of its use in Buddhist epigraphs, our principle source of references to Śākyaabbikṣus. And whereas śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa is typically used by lay folk for members of the Buddha's saṅgha, the epigraphic use of Śākyaabbikṣu almost invariably occurs in donors' self-descriptions. In short, one will have to conclude that either Śākyaabbikṣu is merely an insider's equivalent for śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa or that sometime in the fourth-century certain monks started referring to themselves as Śākyaabbikṣus for an as-yet unstated reason, and for some

⁴⁹ Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 35, n. 5.

⁵⁰ Nalinaksha Dutt (ed). *Gilgit Manuscripts*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984): vol. 3.1, 80.

reason, also as-yet unstated, this epithet became disseminated within the broader population of India as a generic reference for Buddhist monks.

Sarkar on Śākyabhikṣu

The above study of references to Śākyabhikṣus in India's classical literature left ambiguous whether this epithet refers generically to Buddhist monks or to a distinct group within the saṅgha; and whether, if the latter, that group may have gained such prominence that, by the time of Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* its name became generic for the Buddhist monks. In any event, we can be certain of the solution opted for by Sircar and the authors of Sanskrit dictionaries. One scholar who rejected their conclusions is H. Sarkar. He writes, "It may be argued that Śākyabhikṣus need not be distinguished as a distinct group of monks. But the Śākyabhikṣus have always been differentiated from other monks or bhikṣus."⁵¹

For Sarkar, India's Śākyabhikṣus were not only institutionally distinct within the *caturdśa bhikṣusaṅgha*, they also had "a definite ideal and mission."⁵² Namely, the Śākyabhikṣus were "interested in offering the image of Buddha to different Buddhist saṅgha."⁵³ Sarkar hypothesizes that in order to realize this practice, "the Śākyabhikṣus formed a compact group by itself with a central saṅgha guiding the activities of the individual monks stationed in different parts of India."⁵⁴ One of those different parts of India -- in fact, given that it has the single largest cache of Śākyabhikṣu inscriptions, the most important part -- would have been the Ajaṅṭā caves. Indeed, one crucial piece of

⁵¹ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

⁵² Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

⁵³ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

⁵⁴ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

evidence Sarkar cites to substantiate his claim is a verse that was included within two dedicatory inscriptions at Ajañṭā. Found in Cave 10 (app. A, No. 52) and Cave 22 (No. 90), this verse, in Sarkar's words, "expresses the view point of the *Śākya-bhikṣus*."⁵⁵

Those who have an image of the Conqueror made
In this [very life] become possessed of
Beauty, fortune, and good qualities;
Blazing like the sun in their faculties and senses,
They become a delight to the eye.

Sarkar's claim must be considered seriously. His interpretation is based principally upon epigraphic and art-historical evidence, and thus is more appropriate for the study of Ajañṭā than the examples from literary works cited above. If acceptable, Sarkar's conception of the *Śākyaabhikṣu* will assist us in addressing the significance of *Śākyaabhikṣu* at Ajañṭā itself, one of the "different cave monasteries" in which "*Śākyaabhikṣus* made a concerted effort to introduce image-worship."⁵⁶

Sarkar's argument has two stages. First he sets out to demonstrate that India's *Śākyaabhikṣus* were a distinct organization; second, he discusses the ideals and mission of this group. The evidence he proposes through which one "can easily visualize the oneness of this community"⁵⁷ includes an argument based upon the names of individual *Śākyaabhikṣus*. Sarkar finds that these names have "common links," they appear to be names "conferred by the *saṅgha*," and "in the majority of cases followed a definite pattern."⁵⁸ I will set this point aside, as Sarkar's argument is completely unconvincing. A second way Sarkar hopes to establish that the *Śākyaabhikṣus* were a separate group is by comparing the use of '*Śākyaabhikṣu*' with that of '*bhikṣu*' within inscriptions: there are

⁵⁵ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

⁵⁶ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

⁵⁷ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

⁵⁸ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

epigraphic records that draw a distinction between *Śākyabbikṣu* donors and those who are mere *bhikṣu*; and even after "the term *Śākyabhikṣu* must have attained considerable popularity" there are still inscriptions in which "a Buddhist monk is simply referred to as *bhikṣu*."⁵⁹ In other words, Sarkar claims the *Śākyabbikṣu*' were a separate group within the saṅgha because the use of this epithet appears to have been a matter of choice, and therefore encoded a set of canons which some Buddhist monks accepted and some did not.

This argument parallels my own in terms of its reasoning, but the evidence Sarkar uses for support is quite problematic. To establish his point, Sarkar cites only a single example wherein *Śākyabbikṣu* and *bhikṣu* occur in the same inscription. Not only is his evidence sparse, but Sarkar does not adequately assess the suitability of this one inscription. He appears not to have looked at the actual record upon which he bases the assertion that "*Śākyabhikṣu* have always been differentiated from other monks or *bhikṣu*,"⁶⁰ Sarkar refers to this epigraph solely according to the information contained in Lüders' list: "Moreover no. 134 of Lüders' draws a line of distinction between the *bhikṣu* Buddharakṣita and a *Śākyabhikṣu* whose name is now missing."⁶¹ Lüders' list refers to readings made by R. Mitra, J. Dowson, and Lüders himself.⁶² Were these reconstructions correct, this would be the earliest use of *Śākyabbikṣu* by several centuries. However, Lüders subsequently re-edited this record and pronounced his and the other scholars'

⁵⁹ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

⁶⁰ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 106.

⁶¹ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

⁶² Lüders. "A List of Brāhmī Inscriptions," 23, #134.

reading of "*śākyabbikṣu*" an "arbitrary alteration."⁶³ Lüders instead presents this as one of four separate records inscribed onto the torus and square-base of a pillar discovered in Mathurā all of which refer to a gift made by a *bhikṣu* named Buddharakṣita who was a 'Vaḍakṣa' or 'Vaṇḍakṣa' (possibly meaning an inhabitant of Bactria in northern Afghanistan), but not a '*śākyabbikṣu*.'⁶⁴

Although Sarkar reached his conclusion through a single wrong example, there is at least one instance -- not noted by Sarkar -- where *śākyabbikṣu* and *bhikṣu* do occur in the same record. This is the Devnī Morī casket inscription, possibly the earliest extant use of *śākyabbikṣu*.⁶⁵ Two monks, named Agnivarman and Sudarśana, are said to have built the Great Stūpa at Devnī Morī, and two monks, named Pāśāntika and Palla, to have supervised the laborers: all four monks are called '*śākyabbikṣu*' in this verse inscription. A fifth monk, Mahāsenā, called '*bhikṣu*' in the epigraph, commissioned the casket in which the Buddha's relic was placed. This record would seem to support Sarkar's conclusions quite nicely. However, because the record is in verse, we cannot say for certain whether Mahāsenā is designated '*bhikṣu*' because of meter rather than an institutional affiliation. All in all, lacking the Rappaportian spin whereby epithets are treated as public indices of acceptance, this epigraphic evidence for the *śākyabbikṣus* being a separate group is not overly compelling.

After 'proving' the *śākyabbikṣus* were a distinct entity, Sarkar wants to claim they possessed "a definite ideal and mission." The inscription from Devnī Morī provides an entre onto the canons that Sarkar proposes were associated with the *śākyabbikṣus*.

⁶³ Heinrich Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*. Ed. by Klaus L. Janert. Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse. ser. 3. no. 47. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961): 76.

⁶⁴ Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 75-77, #39-40.

⁶⁵ R. N. Mehta and S. N. Chowdhary. *Excavation at Devni Mori*. (Baroda: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 1966): 121.

Though we know little of the beliefs or interests of Devnī's Morī's Śākyabbikṣus beyond their obvious devotion to Buddha, the *bbikṣu* Mahāsenā is said to personally desire the Buddha's grace (*sugataprasādakāma*), but his reason for commissioning this casket was "in order to augment the Dharma and the Saṅgha" (*vṛddhyarthan dharmma-saṅghyābhyām*). One might differentiate this *bbikṣu* from Devnī Morī's Śākyabbikṣus because Mahāsenā's interest is divided between the Three Jewels, whereas the work of Agnivarman, Sudarśana, Pāśāntika, and Palla is centered on the Buddha alone. As I said, Sarkar does not discuss this inscription; and the interpretation I have just presented seems a bit far-fetched. But it does capture what Sarkar views as the heart of the Śākyabbikṣu movement: "the emergence of the Śākya-bhikṣus as a distinct group was possibly the outcome of a trend which aimed at popularizing the image of Śākya-muni" and "not only populariz[ing] the anthropomorphic form of Buddha but also the oblong shrines,"⁶⁶ and perhaps even free-standing stūpas like that at Devnī Morī.

This claim of Sarkar's is reasonable so far as it goes. A decisive majority of the inscriptions bearing the epithet Śākyabbikṣu are attached to images of a Buddha; the verse found in Ajaṅṭā's Caves 10 and 22 cited above does highlight the efficacy of making a Buddha image; the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*'s verse 59.19 cited above does specify that Śākyas are responsible for the installation of Buddha images. Nevertheless, Sarkar is again demonstrating a distinct lack of depth in his investigation. Though most of the donations made by Śākyabbikṣus appear to have been Buddha-images, to my knowledge in no case is the Buddha ever identified as Śākyamuni himself. Even leaving that point aside, at Ajaṅṭā one finds two bodhisattva images that were donated by Śākyabbikṣus, one being an *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in Cave Upper 6 (app. A, No. 18), the other, probably Maitreya, is found in Cave 9 (app. A. No. 32; Fig. 54). Similarly, an inscription dated to 506 C.E. makes

⁶⁶ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

mention of a Mahāyānist Śākyabhikṣu teacher named Śāntideva for whom a Gupta ruler named Vainyagupta was building the 'Ārya Avalokiteśvara's Hermitage' monastery.⁶⁷ Even though this particular inscription records Vainyagupta's donation of a village to supply perfume, flowers, and so on for the performance of pūjā to the Buddha in particular, the name of Śāntideva's monastery gives a clear indication of this Śākyabhikṣu's personal orientation. Finally, in addition to images of Buddha, we find the Śākyabhikṣu epithet in connection with the donation of a railing post,⁶⁸ a bell,⁶⁹ and a pillar.⁷⁰

The image associated with inscription No. 96 provides still further insight into the Buddho-philic nature of the Śākyabhikṣus. Fig. 56 shows that despite the Buddha's miraculous powers, two Buddha images cannot occupy the same physical space. Apparently, one anonymous intrusive donor paid for an image of a seated Buddha to be carved on the right wall of Cave 26's ambulatory. After this Buddha was outlined, however, a second standing Buddha was cut directly over it. This second Buddha was the donation of the Śākyabhikṣu Saṅghamitra. We cannot be certain of the chain of events that led to this intrusive layering of Buddhas, but clearly this Śākyabhikṣu had no scruples about the desecration of a roughed-out Buddha-form. One should be aware, however, that whereas decorative motifs and incomplete Buddha-images were subject to intrusive depredations, at Ajaṅṭā no fully realized Buddhas were violated thus.

Now, even supposing that Śākyamuni Buddha was clearly the object of every

⁶⁷ Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya. "A Newly Discovered Copperplate from Tippera, The Gunaighar Grant of Vainyagupta: The Year 188 Current (Gupta Era)," *Indian Historical Quarterly*. 6 (1930): 45-60, 561, 572.

⁶⁸ Daya Ram Sahni. *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972): 212, D(a)18.

⁶⁹ E. H. Johnston. "Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 11 (1943-46): 382.

⁷⁰ Sahni. *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*, 239, D(f)2.

reverential Śākyabhiḥṣu donation, one would still wonder about Sarkar's claim that merely because the objects bearing the Śākyabhiḥṣu imprimatur are Buddha images, this group of Buddhists was dedicated specifically to the dissemination of Buddha images. Invariably at Ajaṅṭā, the dedicatory inscriptions of Śākyabhiḥṣus begin, "*deyadharmmo 'yam*;" the simplest form of a Śākyabhiḥṣu inscription reads, as in app. A, No. 96, *deyadharmmo 'yam śākyabhiḥṣo saṅghamitrasya*, "This is the religious donation of the Śākyabhiḥṣu Saṅghamitra." The Śākyabhiḥṣus' Buddha images are all referred to as *deyadharmanas*, yet Sarkar does not inquire into the significance of this term. Indeed, through a cursory survey of Buddhist inscriptions one finds that *deyadharma* did not necessarily designate a Buddha-image. Other inscriptions refer to a *deyadharma* of two cisterns at Kuḍa,⁷¹ and at Bedsa another cistern,⁷² a cave at Śailarwadi,⁷³ at Karle a *maithuna* sculpture,⁷⁴ and a pillar base at Mathurā.⁷⁵ This list is far from exhaustive.

Within Buddhist literature too, *deyadharmanas* could be items other than Buddha images. In the *Mahāvastu*, the Licchavis of Vaiśālī feed the Buddha and his monks for one week, a gift described as a *deyadharma*;⁷⁶ later in this same text the Buddha thanks Uruvilvā-Kāśyapa for his *deyadharma* of a meal.⁷⁷ In the Lokottara-Mahāsāṅghika *Abhisamācārikā*, the gift lay donors provide monks on the occasion of the Poṣadha ceremony

⁷¹ James Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*. (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975): 84, #3.

⁷² Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 90, #3.

⁷³ Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 92, #19.

⁷⁴ Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 91, #13.

⁷⁵ Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 82, #46.

⁷⁶ J. J. Jones (trans). *The Mahāvastu*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1987): vol 1, 246.

⁷⁷ Jones. *The Mahāvastu*, vol 3, 427.

is alternately referred to as *dakṣiṇā* and *deyadharmā*.⁷⁸ In this text the precise material objects that could be included within the laity's *deyadharmā* are not specified. But the *Mahāniddeśa* and *Cullaniddeśa* of the Pāli canon both contain a list of fourteen items that could be given to monks as *deyadharmā*: robes, cooked food, lodging, medicine, rice, water, clothing, carriages, garlands, perfumes, unguents, beds, dwellings, or lamps.⁷⁹ Clearly at some point Buddha-images and a range of other items were added to the list.

Moving to the Mūlasarvāstivādin sphere, the *Divyāvadāna*'s narrative of King Aśoka tells that as a boy in previous life this emperor placed a handful of dirt in the Buddha's bowl. His glorious birth as Aśoka resulted from this "*deyadharmā*."⁸⁰ In the MSV, *kaṭhina* robes, given at the ceremony to celebrate the end of the rainy season, are described as the *deyadharmanas* of donors.⁸¹ And in the MSV, one even finds a 'spiritualizing' of the term, whereby it becomes associated with the meritorious intention underlying a gift rather than the material object itself. For instance, when the Buddha is injured by a fragment of rock, a young girl is requested by the Jīvaka the physician to donate milk as medicine to stop his hemorrhage. Although her milk proves insufficient medicine, the Buddha prophecies that she will become a Pratyekabuddha as a result of her act: "The Blessed One said, Ānanda, did you see that young woman who gave milk after conceiving faith in me? I saw her, Sir. Ānanda, this young woman will become a Pratyekabuddha named Kṣīraprada because of this root of merit, aspiration, and giving of a

⁷⁸ Sanghasen Singh and Kenryo Minowa. "A Critical Edition and Translation of the *Abhisamācārikā Nāma Bhikṣuprakīrṇakāḥ* (Chapter One)," *Buddhist Studies* 12 (1988): 81-146.

⁷⁹ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1986): 329a.

⁸⁰ Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 369.

⁸¹ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 152.

deyadharma. Her *deyadharma* was just this: the conception of faith in me."⁸²

The simple fact is, *deyadharmanas* in the form of painted and sculpted Buddha images, cave monasteries, cisterns, and pillars, have far greater permanence than *deyadharmanas* such as food, clothing, and medicine, let alone the conception of faith. Sarkar's argument that because the dedicatory inscriptions that use the epithet *Śākyabhiḥṣu* are most found with images of the Buddha, the *Śākyabhiḥṣus'* *raison d'être* was the dissemination of Buddha images is made from negative evidence: an unacceptable mode of archaeological argumentation, for it ignores the variable rate at which artifacts of material culture decay. Surely, as Buddhahadra's Cave 26 inscription says, "a memorial enduring as the moon and sun should be made in the mountains" (verse 8). But one cannot expect that all memorials or *deyadharmanas* of *Śākyabhiḥṣus* would have been so permanent.

I conclude this section with a lament for Sarkar's sloppy investigation of India's *Śākyabhiḥṣus*. Despite my criticisms of his methods, evidence, and conclusions, there is much of interest in his discussion. In point of fact, the starting point for my own analysis comes very close that of Sarkar: "there might be some direct or indirect relationship between the terms *Śākyamuni* and *Śākyabhiḥṣu*" and the "emergence of the *Śākyabhiḥṣus* as a distinct group was the outcome of a trend which aimed at . . . emphasizing the importance of the Śākya-clan."⁸³ The '*Śākya*' of *Śākyabhiḥṣu* is, after all, this epithet's first peculiarity and its most evident innovation. It is the point from which my own investigation into the canons this epithet encodes will commence.

⁸² *bhagavān āha dr̥ṣṭā tvayā ānanda sā dārikā, yayā mamāntike cittam abhiprasādyā kṣīram dattam? dr̥ṣṭā bhadanta; eṣā sā ānanda dārikā anena kuśalamūlena cittotpādena deyadharma parityāgena ca kṣīraprado nāma pratyekabuddho bhaviṣyati; ayam asyā deyadharma yo mamāntike cittaprāsādaḥ iti* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Aḍbikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): vol. 2, 173.

⁸³ Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, 107.

Towards Identifying Ajaṅṭā's Śākyabhikṣus

To identify Ajaṅṭā's Śākyabhikṣus (and Śākyā-upāsakas), the place to begin is with the epithet itself. *Bhikṣu* and *upāsaka* mean monk and lay devotee respectively, and offer little grist for the interpretative mill. The prefix Śākyā is, of course, the name of the Buddha's family.

On the face of it, this familial designation is clear enough. As a prefix, Śākyā is first attested in the Rummindei pillar inscription of Emperor Aśoka; found in Lumbini, this inscription claims to demarcate the birth-site of "Sakyamuni Buddha."⁸⁴ Whereas Śākyamuni (Sage of the Śākyas) is the most common context for this prefix, the MSV's formula for ordination into the Buddhist saṅgha is rather productive in its use of Śākyā. The entrant recites: "I follow in renunciation the Blessed One, Tathāgata, Arhat, Complete and Perfect Buddha Śākyamuni, the Lion of the Śākyas (Śākyasiṃha), the Overlord of the Śākyas (Śākyādhirāja)."⁸⁵ Indeed, within the MSV Śākyā is used almost exclusively for members of the Buddha's family. The Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, is called "one paṇḍit of the Śākyas"⁸⁶ by the heretic teacher Pūraṇa Kaśyapa. When the Buddha receives the Nyagrodha monastery in Kapilavastu from his father, he dedicates the merit to the Śākyas using a formula that resonates with many found at Ajaṅṭā.⁸⁷ As part of a series of verses

⁸⁴ E. Hultzsch. *Inscriptions of Aśoka*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 1. (New Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 164; Alfred C. Woolner. *Aśoka Text and Glossary*. (Delhi: Panjab University Oriental Publications, 1982): 51.

⁸⁵ *bcom ldan 'das de bshin gzhbegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas shākya thub pa | shākya'i seng ge | shākya'i rgyal po gts'o bo de rab tu byung ba'i rjes su rab tu 'byung ste* (Derge Ka 50^b6-7)

⁸⁶ *ekaḥ śākyānām paṇḍitaḥ* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977): vol. 2, 256.

⁸⁷ "Whatever merit [comes] from this gift, let it go to the Śākyas. May they obtain an eternal place or cherished desires." *ito dānād dhi yat puṇyam tac chākyaṇ upagacchatu | prāpnuvantu padam nityam īpsitān vā manorathān || iti* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 199.

wherein monks recount past acts that resulted in their rebirth at the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, one named Śaivala notes his good fortune for being born in the Śākyakula, the Śākya family;⁸⁸ a second is glad for his birth in the Śākyarājakula, the family of the Śākya kings.⁸⁹ And the full line of those Śākya kings is recited at the beginning of the MSV's *Sanḅhabbedavastu* by Mahāmaudgalyāyana, after which the Buddha states: "It is fitting for a faithful renunciate, a son of good family, to preserve, accept, and recite the religious discourse on the subject of the ancient succession of the Śākya family."⁹⁰ As yet one more example, just before the nun Utpalavarṇā is struck and killed by Devadatta, she states that he should not harm her for he is the Blessed One's brother as well as a renunciate from the Śākya family.⁹¹

This last instance is particularly interesting, for Utpalavarṇā's wording, *śākyakulād pravrajitaḥ*, is equivalent to a phrase we have encountered before, in this dissertation's Saṅgha chapter. As one will recall, at the beginning of the MSV's *Śayanāsanavastu* the monks of Śrāvastī argue among themselves as to which monk is the most worthy: the first answer offered is *śākyah pravrajitaḥ*, a Śākya renunciate, followed by suggestions of the brāhmaṇa renunciate, and so on through the four castes, then a renunciate from a wealthy family, one with great learning, and so on. Clearly, not all Buddhist monks are Śākya renunciates. The Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya reveals in these and numerous other instances a conscious awareness within the Buddhist saṅgha of there being certain monks who were

⁸⁸ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 191.

⁸⁹ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 208.

⁹⁰ *yuktam eva bhikṣavaḥ śraddhayā pravrajitena kulaputreṇa śākyānāṃ paurāṇaṃ kulavaṃśam ārabhya dbarmyām kathāṃ dhārayitum grābayitum vācayitum* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanḅhabbedavastu*, vol. 1, 32-3.

⁹¹ *sā praghātyamānā karuṇadīnavilapitair akṣarair uvāca: ārya śāntaṃ kim aham evaṃ kariṣye? tvaṃ tāvad bhagavato bhrātā punaḥ śākyakulād pravrajitaḥ*; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanḅhabbedavastu*, vol. 2, 254.

members of the *Śākyakula* (Śākya family) or *Śākyavaṃśa* (Śākya lineage), who could claim a direct familial relationship to Śākyamuni Buddha, and who thought themselves to be deserving of special recognition for that reason.

This phrase, *Śākya-pravrajita*, is particularly interesting and significant because *pravrajita* and *bhikṣu* are synonyms. A third synonym is *śramaṇa*. And I have already introduced the secondary nominal formation *śākyaputrīya śramaṇa*, which literally means a follower of a *Śākyaputra*, this latter being the Buddha himself.⁹² Whereas the MSV's *Śākyappravrajitas* were the Buddha's kin, there is no direct implication that Buddhist monks as *śākyaputrīya śramaṇas* were Śākyas themselves.

Returning now to the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu*, I have found this precise term used only twice in Buddhist literary sources. The first instance, from the MSV, will be discussed straightaway; the second, from a doxographic text, Vasumitra's *Samayabhedoparacakra*, will be discussed by way of a conclusion to this chapter. In fact, the *Śākya* prefix of the MSV's *Śākyabhikṣu* is used in a manner distinctly parallel to the other instances of *Śākya* in the MSV. This occurrence, like so many of the others I have cited, is found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, a chapter of the MSV largely concerned with recounting the Buddha's life. The particular story that interests us takes place six years after the Buddha's awakening. At this time, Śuddhodana, the Buddha's father, wants to see his son. So, Śuddhodana sends a messenger to the Buddha, who is staying in Śrāvastī. The Buddha converts this countryman, and that Śākya remains in Śrāvastī with the saṅgha. This happens several times until, finally, Śuddhodana sends a childhood companion of the Buddha named Udāyin. Śuddhodana commits Udāyin to promise that, even if he is converted, he will return to Kapilavastu. Udāyin finds the Buddha, becomes a monk, and keeping his word, returns to Kapilavastu. Before he leaves, however, the Buddha tells

⁹² Cf. Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 160, 264.

Udāyin how to act upon his return:

The Blessed One said: "Go Udāyin. But do not enter the royal palace immediately. Standing at the door, you should announce: 'A Śākyaabhikṣu has come.' If they tell you to enter, you should enter. If they ask you whether there are any other Śākyaabhikṣus, answer that there are. If they ask, 'Is the clothing of Prince Sarvārthasiddha just like this?' you should answer, 'Just so.'⁹³

In this context it is once again clear that this epithet is used specifically to refer to a monk who is a member of the Śākya clan; not simply a follower of its favorite son, but a blood member of the lineage. Udāyin is a Śākya who is a *bbikṣu*.

Does this mean that all of India's Śākyaabhikṣus were related to Śākyaṃuni in the same way as Udāyin? Were the nearly 80% of Ajaṇṭā's intrusive period donors whom we know to have been Śākyaabhikṣus and Śākya-upāsakas, members of the Śākya family like Devadatta, Ānanda, Śaivali, Udāyin, and Rāhula, the "chief of the Śākya family?"⁹⁴ Does grammar and these parallel examples compel the conclusion that perhaps most of Ajaṇṭā's monastic residents, and many monks throughout India in the 5th century and after, claimed direct blood descent to the same line as the Buddha?

Before rejecting this possibility outright through an appeal to the near universal use of familial metaphors in religious literature, let us consider whether it might indeed be the case that true Śākyas, kin to the Buddha, remained in India. To begin with legend, according to the MSV blood Śākyas did have a significant presence within the Buddhist saṅgha. When the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu at his father's behest, Śuddhodana was disgusted to see that the Buddha's followers were predominantly fire-worshipping *jaṭilas*

⁹³ *bhagavān āha: udāyin gaccha; na te sabasaiva rājakulaṃ praveṣṭavyam; dvāre sthithvā vaktavyam, śākyaabhikṣur āgata iti; yadi kathayanti praviṣeti, praveṣṭavyam; praviṣṭasya yadi kathayanti, santy anye 'pi śākyaabhikṣava iti, vaktavyaṃ śantīti; yadi kathayanti sarvārthasiddhasyāpi kumārasya evaṃvidha eva veṣa iti, vaktavyam evaṃvidha eveti; Gnoli. Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, vol. 1, 186.*

⁹⁴ Edward Byles Cowell (ed). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990): vol. 4, 99.

(a type of ascetic, named for their long, twisted dread-locks), whose bodies had been racked by the penances of their former practices. In this father's opinion, these *ex-jaṭilas* did not appear fit companions for his boy. Accordingly, Śuddhodana convened a meeting of the Śākya. He observed that had Sarvārthasiddha not become a Buddha, he would have been a Cakravartin, and the Śākya his followers. Hence, now that Sarvārthasiddha is the Supreme Dharmarāja, should not the Śākya still be his followers? Accordingly, one son from every Śākya family was enrolled as a Buddhist monk.⁹⁵ Not all of these Śākya were eager to join: of the five hundred Śākya who became *bhikṣus*, the Buddha's half-brother Nanda and his cousin Devadatta are the best known for their reluctance; a group of four Śākya named Kokālika, Khaṇḍadravya, Kaṭamorakatiṣya and Samudradatta also joined against their will, and became Devadatta's chief supporters in his schismatic plot.

Further provisions were made for Śākya to join the saṅgha, in a ruling that could be significant for our investigation. While the Buddha was dwelling in Śrāvastī a *tīrthika* who had entered the Buddhist saṅgha forsook the Buddha for his former religion. As a result of this, Śākyaṃuni made the following rule: only non-Buddhists who are fire-worshipping *jaṭilas* or Śākya can be ordained as monks immediately upon application;⁹⁶ all other non-Buddhists must have a probationary period of four months. This injunction is

⁹⁵ *rājñā śuddhodanena jaṭilā pravrajitāḥ bhikṣavo dṛṣṭāḥ; śānteryāpathatvāc cittaprāsādikā no tu kāyaprāsādikāḥ kaṣṭais tapovrataviśeṣaiḥ karṣitaśarīrāḥ; dṛṣṭvā ca punar asyaīta abhavat: kiṃ vāpīme jaṭilāḥ śānteryāpathatvāc cittaprāsādikāḥ no tu kāyaprāsādikāḥ; kathamrūpeṇa parivāreṇa bhagavān śobheta; samlakṣayati, śākyaparivārenaiti; tataḥ sarvaśākyān sannipātya kathayati; bhavanto yadi sarvārthasiddhaḥ kumāro na pravrajito 'bhaviṣyat, ko 'bhaviṣyat? rājā cakravartī; yūyam ke 'bhaviṣyata? anuyātrikāḥ; idanīm sarvārthasiddhaḥ kumāro 'nuttaro dharmarājāḥ; kasmān nānuyātrikā bhavatha; deva kiṃ pravrajāmaḥ? pravrajata; kiṃ sarva eva? kulaikikayā; evaṃ kurmaḥ; rājñā śuddhodanena kapilavastunagare ghaṇṭāvaghoṣaṇam kārītam; rājā evaṃ samājñpayati mama viṣayanivāsibhiḥ śākyaiḥ kulaikikayā pravrajitavyam iti Gnoli. Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu, vol. 1, 200.*

⁹⁶ *dge slong dag de lta bas na nye du śākya dang me ba ral ba can ma gtogs pa sems mgu bar ma gyur ba'i mu stegs can rab tu dbyung bar mi bya zhing bsnyen par rdzogs par mi bya 'o | gal te nye du śākya mu stegs can gyi rgyal mtshan 'ongs shing gal te legs bar gsungs pa'i chos 'dul ba la rab tu 'byung ba dang bsnyen bar rdzogs pa dge slong gi gnos po 'dad na | dge slong dag de rab tu dbyung bar bya zhing bsnyen par dzogs par bya 'o | de ci'i phyir zhe na | dge slong dag nga ni nye du rnams la nye du'i yongs su spongs ba sbyin par byed pa'i phyir ro | (Derge Ka 72^a5-6).*

not unique to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition: the Pāli vinaya records it as well (*Mahāvagga* 1.38).⁹⁷ With this rule, the vinaya institutionalizes a privileged place for Śākya within the Buddhist institution merely because they are the Buddha's blood kin; the *jaṭilas* receive this privilege because their own doctrines include that of karma, right action, causality, and vigor.⁹⁸

The question remains, however, whether the Śākya line continued in India as late as the fifth century C.E. and after. According to tradition (here in the telling of Hsüan-Tsang), shortly before the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, the Śākya family was almost completely destroyed by Virūḍhaka, the king of Kośala, whom they had gravely insulted.⁹⁹ Hsüan-Tsang claims that 9990 Śākyas were killed by Virūḍhaka. But this pilgrim also recounts that four Śākya men escaped their family's fate. Each set up a Śākya kingdom in India's northwestern mountains: one in Uḍḍiyāna near Gandhāra, one in Bāmyān, one in Himatala, and one in Śāmbhī. Although Virūḍhaka's destruction of the Śākyas is universally accepted within Buddhist traditions, the number of Śākyas who survived and location of their kingdoms varies. According to the MSV, only one Śākya escaped, to Uḍḍiyāna in the northwest.¹⁰⁰ A parallel legend is kept in Sri Lanka's *Mahāvamsa* (verse 8.18f.).¹⁰¹ In this text, a son of Amṛtodana (the younger brother of Śuddhodana), escapes and establishes a city south of the Ganges; later this Śākya gives his daughter in marriage

⁹⁷ I. B. Horner (trans). *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume IV: Mahāvagga*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1982): 85-9.

⁹⁸ *me ba ral pa can dag ni las mra ba dang | me ba ral pa can dag ni bya ba smara ba dang | rgyu smra bad | brtson 'grus msra ba yin pa'i phyr ro |* (Derge 73^b4-5).

⁹⁹ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 20-21. Also see André Bareau. "Le Massacre des Śākya: Essai d'interprétation," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*. 69 (1981): 45-73.

¹⁰⁰ W. Woodville Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of his Order Derived from Tibetan Works in the bkab-hgyur and bstan-hgyur*. (New Delhi: Navrang, 1991): 118.

¹⁰¹ Wilhelm Geiger (trans). *The Mahāvamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1986): 63.

to the ruler of Sri Lanka, whereby this island's rulers claim a familial relation to Kapilavastu's Śākya. I will return to the *Mahāvamsa's* version below. Lamotte records a tradition that the Mauryas and Aśoka claimed descent from the Śākya.¹⁰² According to Tibet's *Blue Annals* the first king of Tibet, gNya' khri bstan po, was a descendant of the Śākya.¹⁰³ Kuṣān Buddhists also regarded Śākyamuni and Maitreya "as the most eminent ancestors" in the words of K. Tanabe, although he provides no documentary support for this claim.¹⁰⁴ In sum, as Rockhill asserts "many other Buddhist sovereigns of India and elsewhere claimed the same descent."¹⁰⁵

Hsüan-Tsang's repeated mention of this legend as he travels through India's northwest suggests that the Śākya founding of local kingdoms was a prominent and accepted legend in this region. It is possible that by Hsüan-Tsang's day, however, a certain conflation had occurred between the Śākya and the Śakas, a race of nomadic people who invaded this region in second century B.C.E. In fact, the Śakas passed through India's far northwestern borders, penetrated Gandhāra, the Punjab, Gujarat, and were stopped in Ujjain, at the northern limit of the Deccan plateau.¹⁰⁶ As part of their initial invasion, the Śakas must have been particularly brutal in their attack, for Buddhist literature stigmatizes the Śakas as one of a trio of foreign powers predicted to bring about final destruction of Śākyamuni's Dharma. Jan Nattier suggests that this stigma must not be taken as an

¹⁰² Étienne Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1988): 681.

¹⁰³ George N. Roerich (trans). *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 36.

¹⁰⁴ Katsumi Tanabe. "Iranian Origin of the Gandharan Buddha and Bodhisattva Images," *Bulletin of the Ancient Orient Museum*. 6 (1984): 21.

¹⁰⁵ Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha*, 203.

¹⁰⁶ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 443-5.

indication of a continuing persecution of Buddhists by Śakas,¹⁰⁷ for soon after their conquest many Śakas became Buddhists themselves.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, in the first years of the fifth century, Fa-Hien claimed that in the Śakan city of Khotan "the inhabitants all profess our Law."¹⁰⁹ Given the Śakas' bad name within Buddhism, and the fact that Śākya is a perfectly correct Sanskrit derivative form meaning "Śakan," one could imagine that some Buddhist Śakas would call themselves Śākyas. This could explain, in part, why Hsüan-Tsang found so many Buddhist Śākya kings in areas that were once ruled by the once marauding Śakas. Just as in the phrase *śākyaṣṭrīya śramaṇa*, the noun *śramaṇa* is qualified by the adjectival *śākyaṣṭrīya*, so in this hypothesis *śākya* would adjectivally identify a *bhikṣu* of Śaka origin. Stranger things will have happened in the history of religions than that people known as Śaka would describe themselves using a secondary derivative of their own name that also happens to be the name of the lord to whom they are devoted.

Indeed, to take this hypothesis one step further, the earliest known use of Śākya**bhikṣu** is that found at Devnī Morī. At the time of the inscription's creation in the late fourth century, this region was under Śaka control. Devnī Morī's four Śākya**bhikṣus** might well have been Śakas as well. Wars displace people: shortly after this inscription's composition, the Gupta king Candragupta II waged a fierce campaign against this region's Śaka rulers,¹¹⁰ no doubt leaving refugees in his wake. Indeed, the fifth century was a terrible time for Śaka lands. In the middle part of this century, India's northwest saw multiple waves of incursions from Hūṇa tribes. Harold Bailey calls attention to a number

¹⁰⁷ Jan Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*. (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991): 155-6.

¹⁰⁸ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 486-92.

¹⁰⁹ Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 16.

¹¹⁰ D. R. Bhandarkar, B. C. Chhabra, B. C. and G. S. Gai. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume III (revised). (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 52-71.

of records regarding the Śakan city of Khotan for this period: one text tells that in approximately 471 c.e. the Zuan-zuan attacked Khotan, which implored China for assistance; similarly, the Tibetan Annals of Khotan, a fifth century text, refer to the incursions of Turks (*dru gu*); Heftalite Hūṇas gained control over the city between 505 and 550.¹¹¹ By Hsüan-Tsang's day, this city, which Fa-Hien had found to be vibrant and pious, was still Buddhist but for the most part "nothing but sand and gravel."¹¹² Several decades before the Hūṇas took control of Khotan, about 454-57 c.e., these nomadic hordes also attacked the Gupta lands but were beaten back by Skandhagupta.¹¹³ In short, I am suggesting the possibility that the sudden explosion of monks calling themselves Śākyabbikṣus in central and southern India could be tied to movements of Buddhist monks of Śaka/Śākya origin from the subcontinent's western and the northern borders.

Before I, or the reader, becomes carried away by this chain of speculations, however, I wish to cite the cogent observations of Gérard Fussman. Writing on a group of inscriptions from Gilgit, a region on a major route linking India with Central Asia, Fussman sums up the difficulties of this hypothesis:

It is difficult to associate the apparent intensification of the contacts between Gilgit and the Indian world in the 5th century of our era with political events, seeing as the ethnic origin of the people who engraved their names on boulders E-F cannot be determined. . . . As one cannot say whether the people who passed through the Alam Bridge in the 5th century had been educated in Mathurā, in Taxila, or in Kashmir, one cannot know the reasons for their leaving their own countries. There is no proof which permits one to associate this graffiti with Hūṇa invasions, for example, and to imagine an exodus of Indian monks in front of the massacres accompanying them.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Harold Bailey. *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*. (Delmar, NY: Caravan Publishers, 1982): 4.

¹¹² Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-yu Ki*, vol. 2, 309.

¹¹³ Bhandarkar, Chhabra, and Gai. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, 81.

¹¹⁴ Gérard Fussman. "Inscriptions de Gilgit," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*. 65 (1978): 58.

Despite the difficulties of assessing the reasons for the sudden increase in North-South traffic, Fussman indicates that there *was* a dramatic change in the patterns of intercourse between the two regions in Ajañtā's century.

This set of reasonings is particularly interesting for the study of Ajañtā, for it has long been believed that there is a great deal of artistic influence from India's northwest upon the Vākāṭaka period artistry. This topic could well deserve a dissertation of its own, so I will resort to citing the opinions of others for support. Art historian Lawrence Binyon observes that several of Ajañtā's paintings "indicate a certain amount of intercourse with foreign lands."¹¹⁵ Yazdani, similarly discussing the pronounced number of foreign types in a painting in Cave 1, writes that "there is no doubt that the figures of foreigners represented in the scene bear a very striking resemblance to the people of Turkistan and some other countries to the north-west of India, and as in the frescoes the artists have invariably delineated Buddhist stories, adopting characters from contemporary life, the presence of these foreigners seems to mark a period when the people of the Deccan had acquired familiarity with the inhabitants of the countries north-west of India"¹¹⁶ (Fig. 57). Yazdani also describes many foreigners in a depiction of the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to Sāṃkāśya.¹¹⁷ Anand Krishna found on the pillars of Cave 10 "an exceptional group of painted Buddha figures" showing "heavy Gāndhāra influence" (Fig. 58).¹¹⁸ Odile Divakaran also suggests the possibility of flights from India's North-West in the face of Hūṇa invasions, and enumerates five developments in the Gupta period art of

¹¹⁵ Ghulam Yazdani. *Ajanta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930-55), vol. 1, xvi.

¹¹⁶ Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 1, 46.

¹¹⁷ Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 3, 66-70.

¹¹⁸ Anand Krishna. "An Exceptional Group of Painted Buddha Figures at Ajañtā," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4 (1981): 96.

central India and the Deccan that can be tied to Gandhāra.¹¹⁹ Kurt Behrendt also hypothesizes the Hūṇa invasions as occasion for the influx of northerners to the Deccan. To support this claim, he cites a number of motival elements that are found commonly in the north-west and Central Asia, but nowhere else in the India of this century except Ajaṇṭā, these include full-body halos, pearl rondels, foliage organized into a crescent, and monumental imagery.¹²⁰

Furthermore, the Śākyaas themselves are portrayed as north-westerners in Cave 16's rendition of Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*. Verse 5.1 of Aśvaghoṣa's text describes the Śākya's reaction to Śākyamuni in their midst: "Then the Śākyaas, dismounting from their horses chariots and elephants, and clothed according to their wealth, devoutly made obeisance to the Great Sage."¹²¹ My own slide of this scene is unusable. Accordingly, I supply a detail from Schlingloff's *Studies* (Fig. 59), and an extract from Yazdani's description: "Starting from the top right end a Parthian, or Scythian, chief is seen, who is riding on a steel-grey horse. The features of the rider are indistinct, but his conical cap with a fur brim and long full-sleeved coat prove him unmistakably to be an inhabitant of one of the Asiatic countries to the north-west of India."¹²² Finally, there is the matter of the relationship between Ajaṇṭā and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. The provenance and composition of the MSV has been a topic of some controversy, most prominently in a

¹¹⁹ Odile Divakaran. "Avalokiteśvara -- from the North-West to the Western Caves," *East and West*. 39 (1989): 156-57.

¹²⁰ Kurt Behrendt. "Ajaṇṭā's Relationship to Gandhara and Central Asia: An Analysis of the Impact of the Huna's Invasion." (Unpublished paper written in 1991).

¹²¹ Aśvaghoṣa. *The Saundarananda of Aśvaghoṣa*. Ed. by E. H. Johnston. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975): 25.

¹²² Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 3, 52.

debate between E. Frauwallner¹²³ and Lamotte¹²⁴ as to whether this text originated in Mathurā or Kaśmīr. Although, as Gnoli observes, neither scholar's hypothesis has a secure basis,¹²⁵ he and the majority of scholars whose opinions he reviews concur in Lamotte's position that the MSV originated "from an immense compendium of discipline which . . . was probably compiled in Kaśmīr,"¹²⁶ and which "cannot . . . [be] date[d] earlier than the fourth-fifth centuries"¹²⁷ in its present form. By the late seventh century, in I-Tsing's account, "in the northern region all belong to the Sarvāstivādanikāya."¹²⁸

To conclude this discussion, we have evidence of at least one person who fits our criteria for a *Śākyabhikṣu*: Buddhabhadra. No, unfortunately not the Buddhabhadra responsible for Ajaṅṭā's Cave 26, but Buddhabhadra the translator, born in Kashmir in 369 C.E., died in Kashmir in 448. In between these dates, Buddhabhadra travelled to China, where he translated treatises on meditation. According to the *Kao seng chuan*, a Chinese collection of the biographies of prominent Buddhists, Buddhabhadra was himself a Śākya, whose family originated in Kapilavastu. One will recall that according the Sri Lankan *Mahāvamsa*'s version of the Śākyas' massacre, Amṛtodana, the nephew of Śuddhodana and brother of Ānanda and Devadatta, escaped to found a city south of the Ganges. The *Kao seng chuan*'s information seems to support this text's version of events: Buddhabhadra's family claims descent from the Śākya king Amṛtodana; but its north-western provenance is said to be due to more recent circumstances, namely that

¹²³ Erich Frauwallner. *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1956).

¹²⁴ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 176-79.

¹²⁵ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, xvii-xxi.

¹²⁶ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 178.

¹²⁷ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 657.

¹²⁸ I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 9.

Buddhabhadra's merchant grandfather, Dharmadeva, moved to that region.¹²⁹ Finally, Lamotte calls attention to a second such *Śākyabhikṣu*: Vimokṣaprajña, a kṣatriya from the Śākya-descended ruling family of Uḍḍiyāna, who worked as a missionary in Lo-yang China from 516 to 541.¹³⁰

This attempt to understand *Śākyabhikṣu* as meaning that certain Buddhists claimed genealogical membership within Śākyamuni's own family appears to have more basis than one might think. There is a tradition, still accepted in the seventh century, that Śākyas from Kapilavastu established kingdoms in the Northwest. *Śākya* can be derived grammatically from *Śaka*; this fudging of terms seems possible in light of the fact that Buddhist literature reviles the Śakas as the destroyers of Śākyamuni's religion but many Śakas in fact became Buddhists. Śaka territories in India's southwest and northwest alike were invaded by the Guptas and Hūṇas respectively at precisely the time the *Śākyabhikṣu* epithet came into vogue in central and southern India. One can draw many parallels directly between the Buddhist art of the regions under Hūṇa attack and Ajaṅṭā. Finally, there is the strong possibility that the text which seems to have had the greatest influence upon the architecture and decoration of Ajaṅṭā, the MSV, was compiled in the north-west.

Lest one push this interpretation too hard, however, Fussman's caveat must be remembered: this is a chain of circumstantial evidence providing a possible, though by no means definite, identification of Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*. Indeed, while this is one possibility, such a literal interpretation is not necessary. Familial metaphors are productive in that they can be applied to a range of relationships that are not physically realized in blood or marriage. This can be as simple as when a preceptor addresses his student

¹²⁹ Paul Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*. 44 (1954): 377, n. 3.

¹³⁰ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 682.

"putra," son;¹³¹ or, similarly, when the Buddha's disciple Mahākāśyapa calls himself a son of the Dharmarāja.¹³² More explicit yet is the MSV's injunction that a monk newly entered into the saṅgha should address the preceptor as a father, and the preceptor should address the new monk a son.¹³³ The potentially metaphoric or symbolic nature of this familial lineage is explicated by Sthiramati, a Buddhist paṇḍit of the 6th century, in his sub-commentary to Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. This text's authorship is attributed to Maitreya, the next Buddha, whom Vasubandhu characterizes as *sugatātmaja*.¹³⁴ Literally this Sanskrit can be translated, "born of the self of the Sugata;" *ātmaja* is a common word for "son," however, allowing "son of the Sugata" as a reasonable translation. Sthiramati clarifies that, according to a sūtra (he does not say which), Maitreya is the Buddha's *ātmaja* because he belongs to the Buddha's *vaṃśa*, his lineage.¹³⁵ Nor is Maitreya the Buddha's only mid-sixth century *ātmaja*. An inscription from Nālanda dated to this period records that King Yasovarmmadeva gave a dwelling to the local monks, called "*Śākyaātmaja*" in the inscription.¹³⁶ As these were not literally the Buddha's sons, would we say they were blood members of the Śākya lineage?

Yet, even here, to decode this metaphor it is best to refer to the genuine article, the true *Śākyaātmaja*. Buddha Śākyamuni did have a son, named Rāhula or Rāhulabhadra. And to foreshadow my conclusions, I will suggest that Rāhula can be viewed as the chief of

¹³¹ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 175.

¹³² Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 174.

¹³³ *deng phyin chad khyod kyis mkhan po la pha'i 'du shes nye bar gzhag par bya 'o | mkhan pos kyang khyod la by'i 'du zhes nye bar gzhag bya 'o* (Derge Ka 63^a5-6).

¹³⁴ Vasubandhu. *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor*. Ed. and trans. by Stephen Anacker. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984): 424.

¹³⁵ *sugatātmanā jāta iti sugatātmajaḥ | yatboktaṃ sūtrāntare jāto bhavati tatbhāgatavaṃśe tadātma-kavastu pratilābhād iti* | In Demiéville "La Yogācārahūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 386, n. 9.

¹³⁶ Hirananda Sastri. "Nalanda Stone Inscription of the Reign of Yasovarmmadeva," *Epigraphia Indica* 1929-30. 20 (1933): 44, line 15.

Śākyabhiṣus, for not only was Rāhula the Buddha's son, but he symbolized or embodied the lineage of Buddhahood as a family affair. To explore these contentions, let us return to Ajañṭā again. In my chapter on the sources for studying Ajañṭā, one of the arguments I used to establish the MSV as having an eminent role at the site was the following passage from the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu*, where the Buddha tells Anāthapiṇḍada how to decorate a monastery:

On the outer door, you should represent a yakṣa holding a staff; in the vestibule, the Great Miracle [at Śrāvastī] and the Wheel [of Existence] in five divisions; in the pavilion, a cycle of jātaka stories; at the entrance to the Gandhakuṭī, yakṣas holding garlands; in the assembly hall, the most venerable monk [=Buddha] descending to teach the Dharma; in the kitchen, yakṣas holding food; on the treasury door, a yakṣa with an iron hook; at the well, nāgas adorned with ornaments, holding water vessels; in the bathhouse and steam-room, sufferings from the *Deva-sūtra* or the different hells; in the infirmary, the Tathāgata giving treatment; in the toilet, a horrible cemetery; on cell doors, draw a skeleton and skull.

And as one will recall, Cave 17 corresponds quite closely to these prescriptions. Of the twelve elements described, the evidence at hand allows us to investigate only five. Ajañṭā's Cave 17 is the sole Indian Buddhist monastery retaining each of these five: a Great Miracle on the antechamber's right wall, a Wheel of Existence on the veranda's left wall, *jātaka* stories on all the walls, *yakṣas* holding garlands at the central shrine's entrance, and the Buddha teaching after descending from heaven on the antechamber's left wall.

This close correspondence between the MSV's stipulations and Cave 17 is significant, for within this cave there is yet another iconographic group. This group is not described in the MSV, but apparently had great import for this cave's Mūlasarvāstivādins. These images were painted upon what may well be the second most sacrally significant place in Cave 17 after the central shrine itself: namely, the rear walls of the antechamber, flanking the entrance to the Buddha shrine (Fig. 60¹³⁷). Similarly at Cave 19, which we

¹³⁷ I have reproduced only the left wall. See Suresh Vasant ("Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Ajanta." In *The Age of the Vākātakas*. Ed. by A. M. Shastri. [New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992]: 215 & plate 54) for a discussion and photograph of the right.

consider the donation of the same patron, these two images flank the entrance to this stūpa hall (Figs. 61, 62, 63, 64). These paired scenes can be found elsewhere at Ajañtā as well: in a window-box of Cave 17,¹³⁸ and the clerestory of Cave 26 (Figs. 65, 66, 67).

The first of these paired scenes recounts a past life of Buddha Śākyamuni, in which, as the youthful brāhmaṇa Sumati, he worshiped Dīpaṅkara Buddha and vowed that he himself would become a Buddha in the future for the benefit of all living beings. The second occurs during the Buddha's return to Kapilavastu, where he met his son Rāhula for the first time, and inducted Rāhula into the saṅgha. These two tales have several redactions in various textual traditions, the intricacies of which I have no inclination to explicate. There are two points I wish to make in regard to these images, the first minor, the second crucial. First, they provide supplementary evidence for a connection between India's northwest and Ajañtā. In addition to the northwest, the pairing of these images is attested in only two places: Ajañtā and China of the year 424 CE.¹³⁹ Surely, China received this iconography from Central Asian Buddhists; it is conceivable Ajañtā did so as well.

More important than this supporting evidence of a northwestern Śaka/Śākya-Ajañtā connection, however, is the Dharma, encoded in these paired images. As has been noted by Suresh Vasant and Maurizio Taddei,¹⁴⁰ these two images "are so often grouped together because they reflect a dynastic ideology -- the [Dīpaṅkara] *jātaka* can be read as a 'Story of Lineage,' and the same could be said of the meeting of Siddhārtha and his son Rāhula."¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ See Vasant ("Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Ajanta," 214-15 & plates 52-3) for his reproductions.

¹³⁹ Alexander Coburn Soper. *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*. (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959): 43.

¹⁴⁰ Maurizio Taddei. "Appunti sull'iconografia di alcune manifestazioni luminose dei Buddha," in *Gururājamañjarikā. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Tucci*. volume 2. (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1974); Maurizio Taddei. "The *Dīpaṅkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula: How Are They Linked to the Flaming Buddha?," *Annali di Istituto Universitario Orientale*. 52 (1992): 103-107.

¹⁴¹ Taddei. "*Dīpaṅkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula," 105.

Both scenes depict the issue of transmission of a lineage. For the encounter with Dīpaṅkara this point is clear: young Sumati is inspired by Buddha Dīpaṅkara, vowing to become a Buddha through the act of placing his hair under that Buddha's feet. Dīpaṅkara predicts that Sumati's aim will indeed be realized: he will be born as a Buddha, the "Śākyātmaja Śākyamuni."¹⁴² Just as Sthiramati explained Maitreya to be the Sugata's *ātmaja* because of his membership in the *Tathāgatavaṃśa*, the lineage of Tathāgatas, so in this encounter with Dīpaṅkara Sumati becomes Dīpaṅkara's spiritual son and joins the family of Buddhas. As we see, for the *Divyāvadāna*'s authors a crucial sign of his identity within this lineage is that he will be a *Śākya*.

The tale of Sumati's encounter with Dīpaṅkara is well-known, its symbolism clear. The tale of Rāhula meeting his father is both more obscure and ambiguous, as is Rāhula himself, who is seldom met in Buddhist literature despite his unique status as Śākyamuni's biological son. According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, Rāhula was conceived on the day of the bodhisattva's renunciation¹⁴³ and born at the moment of the Buddha's Awakening, following a six year period of gestation.¹⁴⁴ During those six years Yaśodhara performed ascetic penances like her husband.¹⁴⁵ Not only did poor Yaśodhara have the distress of a six year pregnancy, but young Rāhula had the pain of never knowing his father. They met as follows: One day during Śākyamuni's return to Kapilavastu, six years after his awakening, Yaśodhara saw the Buddha begging for food at the palace, and resolved to win him back. So Yaśodhara went to another renunciate living in Kapilavastu

¹⁴² Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 252.

¹⁴³ *yam eva divasaṃ bodhisattvo nirgatas tam eva divasaṃ yaśodharā āpannasattvā samvṛttā* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu*, vol. 2, 30.

¹⁴⁴ *anuttarajñānādbigame ca bhagavataḥ yaśodharāyāḥ putro jātaḥ* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu*, vol. 1, 119.

¹⁴⁵ *yadā bodhisattvo duṣkarāṇi carati tadāntaḥpuram api duṣkaram caritum ārabdham*; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu*, vol. 2, 30.

who was clever with magic. She paid this ascetic five hundred *kārṣāpaṇas* for a sweet that could entice the Buddha to her arms. Yaśodhara then gave the candy to Rāhula, bidding him to offer it to his father. The Buddha knows all. When Rāhula came to him, Śākyamuni miraculously created an array of five hundred identical Buddhas. As the Buddha's son, Rāhula was able to identify the real Śākyamuni. Rāhula gave the candy to his father; the Buddha returned it to Rāhula, who ate and fell under the magic spell. The story ends with the six year old Rāhula leaving his mother and becoming the first Buddhist novice under the tutelage of Śāriputra.¹⁴⁶

There is a two-fold significance to this encounter. The first, of course, is the familial element, the bringing together of a father and his son. The blood link between Rāhula and Śākyamuni is highlighted within the story by Rāhula's ability to identify his father from a field of five-hundred duplicates. Second, this tale defines the relationship between this unique father and his only son through Śākyamuni's giving Rāhula to Śāriputra for ordination. With this inheritance, Rāhula became the first *śrāmaṇera*, i.e., a novice who has renounced the household but is not full ordained. Indeed, according to Hsüan-Tsang¹⁴⁷ and Fa-Hien,¹⁴⁸ Rāhula was the special object of *śrāmaṇeras'* worship in Mathurā. Rāhula's association with studentship may also be seen in his traditional identification as the *śikṣākāmānām agraḥ*, the foremost of those who desire to train.

More crucially, the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition very explicitly intertwines these genealogical and spiritual relationships between Buddha and Rāhula. Rāhula's conception at the moment of the bodhisattva's renunciation, his gestation over a six year period during which Yaśodhara performs penances equivalent to her husband's, and Rāhula's birth at the

¹⁴⁶ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 31-2.

¹⁴⁷ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 1, 181.

¹⁴⁸ Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 45-6.

moment of the Buddha's Awakening make Rāhula a near duplicate of his father. Indeed, in the *Saṅghabbedavastu*'s narrative, immediately after the Buddha's Awakening, the narrator switches scenes to Kapilavastu, where Rāhula's birth is announced.¹⁴⁹ Rāhula gestated for a span parallel to that required for Gotama to go from layman to Buddha. Rāhula's life from gestation to birth is structurally equivalent, albeit on an abbreviated temporal scheme, to the Buddha's process of Awakening, which began at his birth as Dīpaṅkara Buddha's spiritual son, and ended with his realization of Buddhahood, the same moment that Rāhula was born to perpetuate these two lineages.

A further indication of Rāhula's significance as the heir to both the Śākya and Buddhist lineages is an interesting passage found at the end of the MSV's enumeration of the Śākya genealogy. The *Saṅghabbedavastu* begins with Mahāmaudgalyāyana narrating a procession of kings from the Mahāsaṃmata at the beginning of terrestrial time, to the founding of the Śākya family, to Śuddhodana, the Buddha, and finally son Rāhula. Mahāmaudgalyāyana's narration ends thus:

*bhagavato rāhulaḥ putra iti gautamā rāhule mahāsaṃmatavaṃśaḥ
pratiṣṭhitaḥ; ucchinnā bhavanetrī vikṣīṇo jātisaṃsāro nāstīdanīṃ
punarbhavaḥ*¹⁵⁰

Rāhula is the son of the Blessed One, O Gautamas. The lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula. The will to existence is cut, the round of births is broken: now there is no more rebirth.

This final mention of Rāhula's spiritual attainments is out of place in this otherwise straightforward listing of kings and princes. It appears, however, that the MSV's characterization of Rāhula draws from a broader tradition of statements about all Buddhas'

¹⁴⁹ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu*, vol. 1, 119-20.

¹⁵⁰ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabbedavastu*, vol. 1, 32.

offspring, and has significant parallels in the Sarvāstivādin *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*¹⁵¹ and Buddhaghosa's *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*.¹⁵² For our purposes, the MSV's phrase, "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula," is most salient. The *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*'s parallel passage is especially interesting and significant in its rendition of this line. A Chinese translation of the *Mahāvadāna sūtra* seems to have reproduced almost precisely the text found in the MSV, for Waldschmidt's translation of the Chinese reads that Rāhula as well as other sons of Buddhas "das Geschlecht der Buddhas fortsetzten."¹⁵³ The extant Sanskrit text of the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra* is rather more ambiguous:

ete putrā mahātmānaḥ śarīrāntimadbārīṇaḥ |
sa(rve)ṣām (ā)sravāḥ kṣīṇā nāsti teṣāṃ punarbhavaḥ ||

These sons [of the Buddhas] are saints.

*

They are the final preservers of the[ir] fathers' bodies

or

They are heirs who succeed the[ir] fathers' bodies

*

All their afflictions are destroyed.

For them there will be no rebirth.

The second line of my translation represents the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*'s equivalent of the MSV's "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula." Whereas the MSV's Sanskrit is clear, the *Mahāvadāna*'s compound *śarīrāntimadbārīṇin* is ambiguous, allowing for at least two translations. It may be interpreted as saying that Rāhula is the ultimate preserver of Śākyamuni's physical remains, or that Rāhula is an heir who succeeded his father's body within the lineage of Śākyas. These two interpretations play off two syntactic functions of the word *antima* -- which can be the adjectival "last" or the verbal "following after" -- and

¹⁵¹ E. Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra*. Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst. Jahrgang 1952 Nr. 8 / Jahrgang 1954 Nr. 3. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953-56).

¹⁵² Cited in Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra*, 79, n. 2.

¹⁵³ Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra*, 79, n. 1.

two meanings of the word *śarīra* -- which can be translated as "relic" or as "body." The first interpretation gives the sense of Rāhula as Buddha's spiritual heir in living form, a living caitya, the physical flesh of the Buddha's spiritual flesh; in the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is the Buddha's successor in a familial lineage.

This first interpretation gains particular significance in light of a tradition which held that Rāhula was one of group of special arhats charged by Śākyamuni to wander the earth as protectors of his Dharma until Maitreya's coming.¹⁵⁴ Hsüan-Tsang attests to the currency of this legend in Rājagṛha as late as the seventh century, where Rāhula, after receiving a meal from a pious Brāhmaṇa, revealed himself: "Have you never heard of Rāhula, Buddha's own son? I am he! Because I desire to protect the true law I have not yet entered *Nirvāṇa*." The Brāhmaṇa responded by making a shrine for Rāhula, and revered his image as if Rāhula were present.¹⁵⁵ If Rāhula was the final embodiment of the Buddha's body, a living reliquary, the ability to meet him after Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa* would be significant indeed.

In the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is the Buddha's successor in a familial lineage, socially as well as spiritually. This, of course, comes closer to the redaction of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* and the *Mahāvadāna*'s Chinese translation cited above. In short, this compound's ambiguity encapsulates the ambiguous role that Rāhula perhaps played within the (Mūla)Sarvāstivāda tradition. The circumstances surrounding Rāhula's birth forced him to undergo *in utero* a spiritualizing process parallel to that adopted by his father. Thus was Rāhula fit to be the *śarīrāntimadbārin*: to be the *śarīrāntimadbārin*: to be the Buddha's biological son, maintaining the Śākyan lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata; and to be the Buddha's spiritual son, the embodiment of the

¹⁵⁴ Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes. "Les Seize Arhat Protecteurs de la Loi," *Journal Asiatique*. série xi, 8 (1916): 5-50 & 189-304.

¹⁵⁵ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 42-3.

Tathāgatavaṃśa during the long interval between Śākyamuni and Maitreya Buddhas. After Śākyamuni, Rāhula is the preeminent Śākyātma and Śākyabhikṣu.

To descend yet deeper into speculation, I would call attention to the two plates I have included showing the encounter between Sumati and Dīpaṅkara (Figs. 62, 66). One will notice that in both plates four figures are shown: Sumati, Dīpaṅkara Buddha, a young girl who provides Sumati with flowers in exchange for becoming his wife in every subsequent life,¹⁵⁶ and fourth, a flying dwarf that seems to be making an *añjalī* to Dīpaṅkara (see Fig. 63 for a detail of this figure from Fig. 62). Although no literary tradition records a Rāhula-to-be as having been present at Sumati's prediction to Buddhahood, I would speculate that this dwarf could be a representation of Rāhula in embryo. Thus we would have the entire "holy family" present at its foremost figure's entrance into the *Tathāgatavaṃśa* as a Śākyātma.

To conclude this discussion of Rāhula, we would want to ask whether there is any special association between him and the Sarvāstivādins or Mūlasarvāstivādins. In fact, this has been proposed. A. F. Hoernle writes, "Tradition asserts that the Buddhist school of the Mūlasarvāstivādins . . . traced their origin back to Rāhula, the son of the Master."¹⁵⁷ A. Banerjee refers to this same 'tradition,'¹⁵⁸ and proposes that this may be why Rāhula's image is to be found on the first page of the Tibetan Vinaya that both he and Csoma Cörösi¹⁵⁹ used. More likely, Hoernle's tradition derives from Bu ston, who writes that the Mūlasarvāstivādin's "teacher was Rāhulabhadrā of the Kṣatriya caste, renowned for his

¹⁵⁶ Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 152.

¹⁵⁷ A. F. Hoernle. *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature found in Eastern Turkestan*. (St. Leonards: Ad Orientem, 1970): 166.

¹⁵⁸ Anukul Chandra Banerjee. *Sarvāstivāda Literature*. (Calcutta: D. Banerjee, 1957): 80.

¹⁵⁹ Alexander Csoma Cörösi. "Analysis of the Dulva, A Portion of the Tibetan Work Entitled the KAH-GYUR," *Asiatic Researches*. 22 (1836): 44.

devotion to the disciplines."¹⁶⁰ This tradition can be traced still further, as early as the Mūlasarvāstivādin monk Śākyaprabha's *Prabhāvatī*, an eighth century commentary on a vinaya text for *śrāmaṇeras*.¹⁶¹ At least as early as the eighth century we find that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks believed that a *ḷḷatriya*, like the Buddha's son, devoted to the disciplines, like the Buddha's son, named Rāhulabhadra, like the Buddha's son, was intimately connected with the Mūlasarvāstivādin school.¹⁶² Can we assert that this belief was held by Ajaṇṭā's Mūlasarvāstivādins as well? Of course not. But, by bringing together Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions, images, and relevant textual passages we find sufficient evidence to assert that proposition's possibility and to explore what it might have meant had it been current at Ajaṇṭā in the 5th century. Lévi and Chavannes observed there is no need to deeply question Rāhula's place among the special arhats, for he was especially qualified to inherit and continue the paternal oeuvre.¹⁶³ Were this work to be the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's Śākyabhikḷḷus, we will have now finished the first step to its recovery. Now to begin the second.

¹⁶⁰ Bu ston. *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu ston*. Trans. by E. E. Obermiller. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1986): 100.

¹⁶¹ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 546.

¹⁶² One should be aware that Śākyamuni's son is not the only Rāhulabhadra in Indian Buddhist history. Though the Buddha's Rāhula is the only to fit Bu ston's identification, Bu ston mentions a second Rāhulabhadra, the abbot of Nālanda and the preceptor of Nāgārjuna (*The History of Buddhism in India*, 123). Tāranātha claims that this second Rāhula, Nāgārjuna's teacher was a Brāhmaṇa, a founder of the Mahāyāna, and intimately associated with Nālanda (Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990]: 102-5, 110, 131). Whatever the merit of this association between Nāgārjuna and Rāhulabhadra II, the *Prajñāpāramitāstotra* found at the introduction of many *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras is traditionally attributed to this Rāhulabhadra and is found in full in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* attributed to Nāgārjuna (Étienne Lamotte. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna [Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra]*. [Louvain: Peeters, 1981]: vol. 2, 1060, n. 2). Again, Hsüan-Tsang hints at a legendary connection between a Rāhula and Nālanda (*Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 167). Tāranātha names a third Rāhulabhadra as well: a sūdra by birth, native to the South, and Āryadeva's pupil, though Āryadeva is identified as Nāgārjuna's student (Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History*, 126, 136). Still a fourth Rāhulabhadra is known from Tāranātha's *History* (280); he lived at the time of the Pāla kings, was of ḷḷatriya birth, and was not very intelligent.

¹⁶³ Lévi and Chavannes. "Les Seize Arhat Protecteurs de la Loi," 197.

Between Two Yānas

I have presented a series of speculations through which to reconstruct the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's Śākyabhikṣus. This has ranged from consideration that Śāka invaders came to call themselves Śākyas, to the ambiguous personage of Rāhula, his symbolism a potential encapsulation of the Śākyabhikṣus own self-understanding. The one point I have not explored is how a Mūlasarvāstivāda monk could be like Rāhula, and claim membership in the Śākyā family or the lineage of the Tathāgatas were he not a Śākyā or Śāka. If Ajaṅṭā's monks were not the Buddha's blood relations, how could they spiritual kinship with the Buddha, metaphorically aligning themselves with him in terms of a familial genealogy?

Let us begin with a story. At the time Anāthapiṇḍada began to erect a monastery for the Buddha, *tīrthikas* already living in Śrāvastī became concerned over the potential competition for scarce resources, and objected to the king. To prove the preeminence of the Buddha and his disciples, Śāriputra challenged these *tīrthikas* to a contest of magic powers. Naturally Śāriputra's tricks were far superior to those of his opponents. Having defeated the *tīrthikas*, and after making the audience members' minds supple and receptive, Śāriputra then preached the Buddha's Dharma. "And after the audience heard Śāriputra's discourse, many thousands of people realized great attainments: some conceived an aspiration for the awakening of a Śrāvaka; some for the awakening of a Pratyekabuddha; some for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening; some grasped the going for refuge and the principles of training; some realized the fruit of a Stream Enterer; some the fruit of a Once Returner; some the fruit of a Never Returner; some undertook renunciation and realized the Arhatship through the elimination of all afflictions."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ *dbarmadeśanā kṛtā yāṃ śrutvā anekaiḥ satvasabasraiḥ mahān viśeṣa āgataḥ; kaiścic chrāvakabodhau cittāny utpāditāni; kaiścic pratyekāyāṃ bodhau; kaiścic anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau; kaiścic charaṇagamaṇaśikṣapadāni gṛhītāni; kaiścic srotaāpattiḥ phalaṃ sāḥśātḥkṛtaṃ; kaiścic sakṛdāgāmiḥ phalaṃ; kaiścic anāgāmiḥ phalaṃ; kaiścic pravrajya sarva-*

This list of the audience's spiritual attainments can be divided into two parts. First it enumerates three species of realization, and second, the steps along a Buddhist spiritual path from taking refuge to Arhatship. For reconstructing the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's Śākya-bhikṣus, our concern is with the distinction between the awakenings of a Śrāvaka, a Pratyekabuddha, and a Buddha. This tripartite division of spiritual aspirations is found elsewhere in the MSV as well. For instance, during Devadatta's schism, the text claims that no one in the saṅgha planted a seed in the Śrāvaka-bodhi, no one planted a seed in the Pratyekabuddha-bodhi, and none in the Buddha-bodhi either.¹⁶⁵ And this distinction of *bodhis* is not unique to this Mūlasarvāstivādins. Within the Theravāda tradition, the Buddha and lesser arhats are distinguished in the *Samyuttanikāya* (22.58)¹⁶⁶ and the abhidharma text *Puggalapaññatti*¹⁶⁷ explicates the difference between all three. As I will soon indicate, the Mahāyāna too was quite interested in these distinctions.

Moving on from the MSV, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* takes us a step closer to understanding this distinction with its explanation for why the individuals in Śāriputra's audience would have had such different aspirations after hearing the same Dharma discourse. Vasubandhu writes, the "three [types of] *bodhi* arise due to the distinctions between people: the Śrāvakabodhi, Pratyekabodhi, and Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Bodhi" (verse 6.67).¹⁶⁸ Still more informative than the *Kośa* on this point is the *Abhi-*

kleśaprabāṇād arhatvaṃ sākṣātkṛtam; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu*, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 205.

¹⁶⁶ F. L. Woodward (trans). *The Book of Kindred Sayings (Samyutta-Nikāya)*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1925): part III, 57-8.

¹⁶⁷ Bimala Charan Law (trans). *Designation of Human Types (Puggala-Paññati)*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1924): 97.

¹⁶⁸ Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*. Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 1016.

dbarmadīpa, a text dating to almost the same period as Ajaṅṭā.¹⁶⁹ Like the *Kośa*, the *Dīpa* asserts that the three *bodhis* are distinguished because there are three types of people. It elaborates:

[As for] Buddhobodhi, Pratyekabuddhabodhi, and Śrāvakabodhi, these are the three divisions of supreme nirvāṇa. This is so because these three *bodhis* are predominantly the fruits of human effort. [As for] easy, middling, and difficult: the Mahāyāna divides the 37 wings of *bodhi* according to the divisions, easy, intermediate, and difficult. The categories easy, intermediate, and difficult are said [to correspond to] the *yānas* of the Buddha, Pratyekabuddha, and Śrāvaka.¹⁷⁰

First let me note, this passage contains the only mention of the Mahāyāna I have ever seen in an Indian non-Mahāyānist text. More important for the present argument, however, is the *Dīpa's* linking of the three *bodhis* with three different types of people as well as with the three *yānas*. Following the *Abhidharmadīpa's* interpretive scheme, we may say that those *tīrthikas* in Śāriputra's audience who conceived an aspiration for Śrāvakabodhi can be classified as travelling on the Śrāvakayāna; their spiritual species being distinct from that of the Pratyekabuddhayānist who conceived an aspiration of Pratyekabodhi; both also differ distinctly from the *tīrthikas* who conceived a desire for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Buddhahood, and thereby entered onto the Buddhayāna.

The *Abhidharmadīpa* suggests that this interpretive scheme whereby Buddhist practitioners are into shunted onto three *yānas* is a distinctly Mahāyānist doctrine. And, to be sure, such terminology is often found in the Mahāyānist literary corpus. For just a few examples: Within the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa sūtra*, a goddess dwelling at Vimalakīrti's house confuses Śāriputra by claiming to simultaneously belong to the Śrāvakayāna, a

¹⁶⁹ Padmanabh S. Jaini (ed). *Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti*. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1977): 134.

¹⁷⁰ *buddhapratyekabuddhaśrāvakabodhayaḥ | uttamanirvāṇāṅgabbūtā tad dhi tisṛṇām api bodhinām puruṣakāraphalam tatprādhānyatvāt | mṛdumadhyādbhimātrāḥ saptatṛiṃśadbodhipakṣyā dbarmāḥ mṛdumadhyādbhimātrabhedabbinnā mahāyānam | mṛdumadhyādbhimātrabhedabbinnam buddhapratyekabuddhaśrāvakayānam iti ucyate | Jaini. Abhidharmadīpa, 358.*

Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Mahāyāna all.¹⁷¹ This passage gets its punch, of course, from the expectation that, like the members of Śāriputra's audience in Śrāvastī, any individual will have conceived an aspiration for only a single form of *bodhi*. Here, also, we see that the *Vimalakīrtinirdēśa* equates the *Abhidharmadīpa*'s 'Buddhayāna' with the Mahāyāna itself. The *Aṣṭasahasrikāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* claims that a being should be considered a bodhisattva mahāsattva if his thoughts and realizations are not shared in common with the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas;¹⁷² a bodhisattva is someone established in and mounted on the Great Vehicle.¹⁷³ As a final example, let us look at what has become the locus classicus for this doctrine within modern discussions of the three *yānas*, from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*:

There are some beings who, following and desiring another's words, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the Four Noble Truths so as to attain parinirvāṇa for themselves. These are said to adhere to the *Śrāvaka-yāna*. . . . There are other beings who, desiring knowledge without a teacher, restraint, and concentration, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the causes and conditions so as to attain parinirvāṇa for themselves. These are said to adhere to the *Pratyekabuddha-yāna*. . . . There are still other beings who, desiring omniscience, the knowledge of a Buddha, the self-originated knowledge, knowledge without a teacher, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the knowledges, powers, and confidences of a Tathāgata so as to attain parinirvāṇa for all beings, for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit and happiness of the great body of people, of gods and of humans. These are said to adhere to the *Mahāyāna*.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Étienne Lamotte (trans). *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdēśa)*. Trans. by Sara Boin. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1976): 163-4.

¹⁷² *bodhisattvo mahāsattva iti bhagavann ucyate | yad api tad bhagavan bodhicittam sarvajñatācittam anāsravaṃ cittam asamamā cittam asamasamā cittam asādhāraṇam sarvaśrāvakaṃ pratyekabuddhaiḥ* P. L. Vaidya (ed). *Aṣṭasāhāsrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960): 10.

¹⁷³ *evaṃ bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo . . . mahāyānasampratisthito mahāyānasamārūḍho bhavati* | Vaidya. *Aṣṭasāhāsrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 11-12.

¹⁷⁴ *tatra kecit sattvā paragoṣaśravānugamanamākāṅkṣamāṇā ātmaparinirvāṇabetoś caturāryasatyānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bbiyujyante | te ucyante śrāvakayānaṃ kāṅkṣamāṇāḥ . . . anye sattvā anācāryakaṃ jñānaṃ damaśamatham ākāṅkṣamāṇā ātmaparinirvāṇabetor betupratyayānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bbiyujyante | te ucyante pratyekabuddhayānam*

I trust the trajectory of my argument is becoming clear: insofar as *Śākyabbikṣu* encodes a canonical identification of its bearer with the familial and spiritual lineages of Śākyamuni Buddha, use of this epithet is a declaration that one differs from other Buddhists, mere *bhikṣus*, in that one has conceived an aspiration for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening. In brief, I am claiming that *Śākyabbikṣu* is a highly resonant and complex synonym for *bodhisattva*. Like Rāhula, India's *Śākyabbikṣus* were *Sugatātmaja*, the true sons of the Sugata.

According to a terminology used widely in Mahāyāna literature, the epithet *Śākya-bhikṣu* could be viewed as an affirmation that one belongs to the *gotra* of a bodhisattva. This term, *gotra*, came into Buddhism from a Brāhmaṇical usage, where it means 'clan.' More specifically according to popular Indian usage, there were eight *gotras*, each of which claimed descent from one of seven seers named in the *Ṛg Veda* or Agastya, that text's author.¹⁷⁵ And according to the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the male members of these eight *gotras* were often went by the name of their *gotra*'s sage-father;¹⁷⁶ the Śākyas were the descendants of ṛṣi Gotama, for instance, and accordingly one often sees the Buddha called 'Gotama.' However, Baudhāyana, a systematizer of the *gotras*, asserted that in fact "there were . . . thousands, nay millions of 'gotras' . . . all neatly [arranged] under their appropriate patriarchs."¹⁷⁷ I would not want to say that Śākyamuni came to be considered

ākāṅkṣamāṅās . . . apare punaḥ sattvāḥ sarvajñajñānaṃ buddhajñānaṃ svayambhujñānaṃ anācāryakaṃ jñānaṃ ākāṅkṣamāṅā babujanabitāya babujanasukhāya lokānukampāyai mahato janakāyasyārthāya hitāya sukhāya devānāṃ ca manusyāṅāṃ ca sarvasattvaparinirvāṇābetos tathāgatajñānabalavaīśāradyanubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bhīyujyate | te ucyante mahāyānaṃ ākāṅkṣamāṅās P. L. Vaidya (ed). *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram*. (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960): 55.

¹⁷⁵ John Brough. *The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953): 4.

¹⁷⁶ Govind S. Ghurye. *Two Brahmanical Institutions; Gotra and Charana*. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972): 86.

¹⁷⁷ Ghurye. *Two Brahmanical Institutions*, 84.

the patriarch of one of these millions of alternate Brāhmaṇic *gotras*, but the Śākyabhiṣus taking the name of Śākyamuni suggests resonances with and an appropriation of this broad cultural practice. In fact, such resonances may explain how an epithet significant for an internal division within the Buddhist saṅgha could function in extra-Buddhist discourse generically for 'Buddhist,' as we found above in my discussion of Sircar et. al.

Functionally, these Brāhmaṇic *gotras*' were a means for designating exogamous clans. And whereas this social function was not taken wholesale into Buddhism, the term *gotra* most definitely did penetrate Buddhist thought. In this religion's literature, however, it is most often used in the sense of the spiritual predisposition or capability of an individual. According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, a person of the Śrāvaka *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Śrāvakayāna; one of the Pratyekabuddha *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Pratyekabuddhayāna; one of the Buddha *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Mahāyāna; but a person who has no *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the thought of a good rebirth.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya* posits an individual's predisposition towards one of the *yānas* as a function of his individual *gotra*: "there is a differentiation of *gotras* in the three *yānas* . . . because the fruit corresponds to the seed" (verse 3.2).¹⁷⁹ Within this latter text *kula*, rather than *gotra*, is used for 'family,' as when it claims that birth in the Tathāgata's *kula* (*tathāgatakule janma*) is the eleventh of a bodhisattva's thirteen practices for benefiting beings, who are fixed severally within a lesser, intermediate, or superior *gotra* (verse 5.5).¹⁸⁰ This latter equation

¹⁷⁸ *tatra paripācyāḥ pudgalāḥ samāsataś catvāraḥ | śrāvakagotraḥ śrāvakayāne | pratyekabuddhagotraḥ pratyekayāne | buddhagotro mahāyāne paripācayitavyaḥ | agotrastho 'pi pudgalaḥ sugatimanāya paripācayitavyo bhavati |* Asaṅga. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Ed. by Nalinaksha Dutt. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1978): 55.

¹⁷⁹ *asti yānatraye gotrabbedhaḥ . . . bījānurūpatvāt phalasya |* Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 20-21.

is quite natural, as this same text glosses the term *jinātmaja*, son of the Jina, with *bodhisattva* (verse 8.1).¹⁸¹ I have touched here upon only the very surface of the meaning of *gotra* within Buddhist literature, and refer the reader to Dutt, Obermiller, Dayal, Lamotte, and most prominently David Ruegg for far more adequate investigations of this important topic.¹⁸²

So far in this section I have presented a few points of interest: 1) Buddhist traditions know of a tripartite division of beings based upon their ultimate spiritual aspirations, 2) the Mahāyāna equates each of these aspirations with a particular *yāna* as well as with a spiritual disposition, a *gotra*, and 3) the Mahāyāna equated possession of the Buddha *gotra* with being a bodhisattva and belonging to the Buddha's family. Thus, as I claimed above, *Śākyabhikṣu* can be viewed as almost a synonym of *bodhisattva*. Bringing us back to the question with which I began this chapter, i.e., Ajaṇṭā's *yānic* affiliation, several of the Mahāyānist passages cited make yet another point: the equation of bodhisattva-hood with participation in the Mahāyāna. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* claims that one of the Buddha *gotra*, a bodhisattva, should be nurtured to fruition in the Mahāyāna; this same text contains a simple apposition: the bodhisattva path, the Mahāyāna;¹⁸³ the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* cited above makes a similar equation; the

¹⁸¹ Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 29.

¹⁸² Nalinaksha Dutt. *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its Relation to Hīnayāna*. (London: Luzac, 1930): 84f.; E. E. Obermiller. "The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation, Being a Manual of Buddhist Monism, The Work of Ārya Maitreya with a Commentary by Āryāsanga," *Acta Orientalia*. 9 (1931): 96-104; Har Dayal. *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978): 51-53; Lamotte. *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, 303-307; David Seyfort Ruegg. *La Théorie du Tatbhāgatagarbha et du Gotra: Études sur la Sotériologie et la Gnoséologie du Bouddhisme*. Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient. volume 70. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient 1969); David Seyfort Ruegg. "Pāli *Gotta/Gotra* and the Term *Gotrabbū* in Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit." In *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I. B. Horner*. Ed. by L. Cousins, A. Kunst, and K. R. Norman. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing 1974); David Seyfort Ruegg. "The Meanings of the Term *Gotra* and the Textual History of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 39 (1976): 341-363; David Seyfort Ruegg. "A Further Note on Pāli *Gotrabbū*," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*. 9 (1981): 175-177.

¹⁸³ Asaṅga. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 1.

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra claims that enthusiasm for Mahāyānist teachings is a sign that one belongs to the bodhisattva *gotra* (verse 3.5).¹⁸⁴ Indeed, as I also noted at the beginning of this chapter, Western scholars have taken the Mahāyāna literature's appropriation of the bodhisattva ideal as historical fact. Robinson's introductory textbook on Buddhism summarizes this view best: "Mahāyāna is synonymous with the course (*yāna*), or career (*caryā*), of the bodhisattva."¹⁸⁵ The remainder of this chapter will consider the question of whether the converse is valid as well, i.e., whether Asaṅga's claim that the Mahāyāna is truly the native ground of bodhisattvas¹⁸⁶ was Dharma for the *Śākyabhikṣus* at Ajaṇṭā; whether Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*, monks concerned to affirm their spiritual gotra headed by *Śākyamuni* Buddha, necessarily belonged to the Mahāyāna.

Was Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣu* saṅgha Mahāyānist? This question not only brings us back to the question at the beginning of this chapter, but also to the third scholar to offer a hypothesis for the meaning of *Śākyabhikṣu*, Gregory Schopen. In fact, Schopen's conclusions were very close to my own. Where I suggest that *Śākyabhikṣu* can be taken as an equivalent for bodhisattva, he proposes that "the term *śākyabhikṣu* . . . must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community who was also a member of a monastic community."¹⁸⁷ Surely, the Mahāyānist ideology which holds that bodhisattvas are by definition Mahāyānists would reduce the gap between our positions. But is this correct? Schopen reached his conclusion by a careful, albeit convoluted series of reasonings (simplified here for clarity): 1) the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* is used epigraphically in such a

¹⁸⁴ Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson. *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*. (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1982): 74.

¹⁸⁶ *mahāyānaṃ hi bodhisattvānām adhyātmam* | Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 166, verse 19.66.

¹⁸⁷ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

way as to make clear that it is the "property" of some group," 2) every time an inscription uses the term *Mahāyāna* it also uses the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* (or a lay equivalent), 3) hence the group the *Śākyabhikṣus* belonged to was the Mahāyāna.¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately, Schopen's data is very problematic when it comes to fifth century Indian Buddhism, for he has only one inscription that uses both *Śākyabhikṣu* and Mahāyāna in this period,¹⁸⁹ and Mahāyāna is not found epigraphically again until the ninth or tenth century.¹⁹⁰ The polemic celebration of the Mahāyāna is evident throughout Mahāyānist treatises of this Ajaṅṭā's era and before, why did the Mahāyānists wait so long to tell true names in their inscriptions?

As one will recall, the "standard Mahāyāna" form of a donative inscription reads: "This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu X. Whatever merit there is in it may that be for all beings' attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge." And, before setting off on my investigation of the *Śākyabhikṣus*, I promised to investigate two parts of this formula, the epithet and the dedication of merit. Moreover one will recall that Schopen also determined this formula used in this inscription for dedicating spiritual merit is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."¹⁹¹ I have rendered this conclusion of Schopen's problematic as well, for it is based upon the high statistical correlation within Buddhist epigraphs of *Śākyabhikṣu* and this formula; if the *Śākyabhikṣus* were not necessarily Mahāyānists in the fifth century, neither is this formula.

Yet, well before Schopen's attempt to set this formula's *yānic* association upon an

¹⁸⁸ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

¹⁸⁹ This is the Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta referred to earlier in this chapter. Schopen thought he had a second piece of evidence, and from Ajaṅṭā at that (app. A., No. 90). In my reconsideration of this inscription, I have determined the proposed reading of *Mahāyāna* is all but impossible.

¹⁹⁰ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 13-14.

¹⁹¹ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 12.

'objective' basis, scholars already referred to it as "a common Mahāyāna formula"¹⁹² or "in the well-known *Mahāyāna* style"¹⁹³ or "of Mahāyāna origin."¹⁹⁴ Schopen observes that although he concurs with Johnston, et. al. vis-à-vis his conclusions, none of those scholars "has given any evidence to support his assertion."¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Schopen affirms that 'internal' evidence from Mahāyāna Buddhist literature cannot be the source of these scholars' unsupported insights, for "the vocabulary used to express the idea [of transferring merit] in our formula is not the vocabulary used to express the same idea in Mahāyāna literary sources."¹⁹⁶ The epigraphic formulation for transferring merit towards Buddhahood is "for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge" (*anuttarajñānāvāptaye*), whereas in Schopen's survey, Mahāyāna scriptures and exegetical treatises typically use a formulation that reads, "he turns [merit] over to Unexcelled, Perfect and Complete Awakening" (*anuttarasamyak-sambodhaye pariṇāmayati*). These two formulations differ in regard to the phrase used to describe the goal towards which merit is transferred (*anuttarajñāna* vs. *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*), as well as the verb indicating transference (*ava-āp* vs. *pari-ṇam*).

In point of fact, Schopen is able to cite two examples from Mahāyānist literature in which *anuttarajñāna* is used: the *Kāśyapa-parivarta* and the *Suvikrāntavirāmi-paripṛcchā*.¹⁹⁷ Needless to say, however, the question is begged if only Mahāyānist sources are searched for internal supportive evidence for this formula's Mahāyāna provenance. Returning to the ever-trusty MSV, on page 114 of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* alone, the

¹⁹² Johnston. "Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan," 366.

¹⁹³ M. Venkataramayya and C. B. Trivedi. "Four Buddhist Inscriptions from Phophnar Kalan," *Epigraphia Indica*. 37 (1967): 148.

¹⁹⁴ Shizutani, "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," 355.

¹⁹⁵ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

¹⁹⁶ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

¹⁹⁷ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 17, n. 14.

expression *anuttarajñānam adbi-gam* occurs five times.¹⁹⁸ Of course, the verb *adbi-gam*, to realize, is not the same as the inscriptions' typical *ava-āp*, to attain. With this caveat noted, however, I think we can safely say that the MSV's *anuttarajñānam adbi-gam* can satisfy Schopen's failed search within Mahāyāna texts for this epigraphic formula's literary precedent. This expression is used throughout this text in instances where the realization of a bodhisattva's or disciple's attainment of Buddhahood is discussed, and is the phrase most often used in the MSV's narration of Śākyamuni's conquest under the Bodhi tree.¹⁹⁹ Schopen suggests that despite the difference of vocabulary between the epigraphic formula and the Mahāyāna sūtras they "express the same idea."²⁰⁰ These two expressions' synonymity is exploited in the following passage from the MSV's *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (Chapter on Medicine), where *anuttarajñāna* and *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* are used in the same passage. King Prasenajit wonders aloud why he has never received a prediction to Buddhahood although he is a very generous donor. The Buddha responds by telling the Māndhātā *jātaka*, after which the Buddha concludes: "What do you think, O Mahārāja, I was King Māndhātā at that time, in that era. [Yet,] I did not realize Unexcelled Knowledge on account of [actions] I performed for the benefit of [other] beings as [King Māndhātā]. Rather, this gift was merely a cause for, merely a support for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening."²⁰¹

Now the question is, if one looks to Buddhist literature for the precedents and

¹⁹⁸ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 114.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 97, 243; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 83, 109, 111, 113, 114, 119, 120, 151.

²⁰⁰ Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

²⁰¹ *bhagavān āba | kiṃ manyase mahārāja yo 'sau rājā māndhātā abam eva sa tena kālena tena samayena | yan mayā itthaṃ sattvhitam kṛtam tena nānuttaram jñānam adbigatam | kiṃ tv etad dānam anuttarāyāḥ samyaksambodher hetumātrakaṃ saṃbhāramātrakaṃ |* Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 97.

sources of this epigraphic formulation which is considered to be *prima facie* Mahāyānist because it expresses the bodhisattva ideal, and if the most likely precedent is found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, a text that is not Mahāyānist, do we or do we not call the monks who used this formula Mahāyānists?

To answer this question, and that of Ajaṅṭā's *yānic* affiliation, I must first review a crucial assumption about Buddhism's institutional history in India, widely accepted within the field. To wit, that several centuries after Śākyamuni's nirvāṇa the saṅgha split into numerous fraternities based upon diverging teachers' lineages, as well as disputes over doctrine and monastic practice. Native doxographers have traditionally numbered these sects (Sanskrit, *nikāyas*) as eighteen;²⁰² and Indian Buddhist literature and epigraphs make reference to "the monks of the eighteen *nikāyas*" as a metonymy for the saṅgha as a whole. The important point here is that modern scholars corporately equate the eighteen *nikāyas*, including the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*, with the Hīnayāna.

More significantly yet, scholars represent these *nikāyas* as a corporate group in contradistinction to the Mahāyāna. Such an understanding is witnessed, for example, in a recent monograph by Jan Nattier: her index includes the entry "Nikāya Buddhism (the 'eighteen schools')"²⁰³ -- a terminology Nattier equates with, but prefers to, "Hīnayāna"²⁰⁴ -- and she explicitly sets Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhisms in opposition on several

²⁰² The number eighteen is the traditional count of Buddhist sects. A browse through any text on the subject, however, will quickly reveal that there were more than eighteen schools in total. For a summary of the fundamental Indian literature on the sects see Lamotte (*History of Indian Buddhism*, 517-548), which includes a bibliography of the principal secondary work on the Buddhist sects to his date. The terms "sect" and "school" are both found variously in the scholarly literature on Buddhism. As "school" generally connotes a group based around a particular doctrine or teacher, while "sect" carries no such definite implications, and as there were a multiplicity of reasons for the sects' divergence, I have used the latter term.

²⁰³ Jan Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time*, 314.

²⁰⁴ Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time*, 9, n. 1.

occasions.²⁰⁵ Let me repeat, Nattier is not alone in drawing this equation; the institutional incommensurability between the Hīnayāna as comprised of the 'eighteen' *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna is accepted wisdom within scholarship on Buddhism. This attitude -- further exemplified by the title of the finest study on the eighteen sects, André Bareau's *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*,²⁰⁶ and Étienne Lamotte's calling the Sthavira, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda and Saṃmatīya *nikāyas* "the four principle Hīnayānist schools"²⁰⁷ -- is succinctly reviewed by Heinz Bechert:

That Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect' is settled by unambiguous textual evidence. The formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with Śrāvakayāna, the vehicle of the hearers, or Hīnayāna, the small vehicle i.e. with the old doctrine. The so-called 'sects', i.e. the *nikāyas* or *vādas*, on the other hand had come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna or Śrāvakayāna.²⁰⁸

Bechert's precis assumes the well-rehearsed account of Buddhism's institutional development: a linear branching of monastic assemblies due to disputes over cenobitic rule and doctrine resulted in the eighteen Hīnayāna *nikāyas*; the Mahāyāna, by contrast, had a diffuse origin, in which monks, nuns, and lay-persons drawn from many communities, with their multiplicity of doctrines, practices, and texts, were united around a common religious aspiration: to become Buddhas themselves for the benefit of all living beings.

Now, as one will recall, both Sarkar and Schopen used an inscription from Cave 22 (No. 90) as an important piece of evidence to support their interpretation of the epithet *Śākyabhiṣu*: Sarkar took the verse accompanying this dedication as an expression of the *Śākyabhiṣus'* Dharma; Schopen, relying upon Chakravarti's reading, thought the

²⁰⁵ Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time*, 25, 89, 124, 127.

²⁰⁶ André Bareau. *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*. Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient volume 38. (Saigon: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955).

²⁰⁷ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 548.

²⁰⁸ Heinz Bechert. "Notes on the Formations of Buddhist Sects and the Origins of Mahāyāna." In *German Scholars on India*. (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1973): 11.

inscription used the term *Mahāyāna*. Prompted by these scholars' interest I reviewed Cave 22's disputed inscription while at Ajañṭā, and discovered that Chakravarti's "Mahāyāna" was impossible. But I also found more. In the place where this epigrapher had reconstructed "Mahāyāna," I read the term *Aparaśaila*. Along with the Mūlasarvāstivāda, *Aparaśaila* is the name of a *nikāya*, one of the 'eighteen'! This donor, whatever his status as a *Śākyabhiṣṭu*/bodhisattva, seems to have declared himself a member of a *nikāya*. And one cannot dispute that for modern scholars (to recite Bechert from above) "the formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with the . . . Hīnayāna. . . . The . . . nikāyas . . . come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna." In short, this inscription transgresses the fundamental taxonomy by which we have constructed Buddhism's institutional history. Based upon this common understanding of the genealogical relationship between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna, the prominence of the Mūlasarvāstivāda at Ajañṭā and this inscription in particular would suggest the site was in fact Hīnayānist!²⁰⁹

Can a self-described member of a *nikāya* accept the bodhisattva vow and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? Clearly, the answer has less to do with Buddhist history than with the scholarly conventions we adopt. This is a matter of definition, of "low order meaning" in Roy Rappaport's phrase.²¹⁰ It is a matter of fixing distinctions within a

²⁰⁹ In point of fact, Dieter Schlingloff has used a similar argument to show that Ajañṭā's so-called Mahāyāna phase was patronized by members of Hīnayāna sects. Schlingloff's claim is based upon the wide use of the MSV as a literary precedent for Ajañṭā's paintings: "pictorial subjects agree with the form of stories as they are recounted . . . within the tradition of Hīnayāna Buddhism. Pictorial representations of decidedly Mahāyānist themes are not . . . to be found in Ajanta" (*Studies in the Ajanta Paintings*. [Delhi: Ajanta Books, 1988]: 175). Because Schlingloff understands the *nikāyas* and Mahāyāna to be institutionally incommensurable, he is forced to contend with data that contradicts this thesis, such as the numerous icons of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Schlingloff dismisses this conundrum with a remarkable observation: "the worship of this Bodhisattva was not limited to the followers of the Mahāyāna; this is demonstrated primarily by evidence of the Avalokiteśvara cult that it is not unusual to find in regions of classical Hīnayāna-Buddhism like Ceylon" (175). However, this is mere equivocation on Schlingloff's part. He must be aware that the Mahāyāna had a prominent presence in Sri Lanka for much of the first millennium C.E., and that Avalokiteśvara's inclusion within the Sri Lanka's pantheon is a vestige of that period in the island's religious history.

²¹⁰ Roy A. Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979): 127.

hierarchy of meanings. In short, it is a question of taxonomy. How do we, should we, construct a taxonomic model of Buddhist institutions?

To understand what is stake in this question, let us review how taxonomies work. (The following discussion is indebted to F. Suppe's *The Semantic Conception of Theories*.)²¹¹ Taxonomy is a means for organizing information whereby units of information, taxa, are clearly distinguished one from the other, enabling the coherent grouping of individuals with shared attributes. Differentiation occurs in terms of characteristics -- morphological, phylogenetic, functional, social, etc. -- resulting in a system of taxonomic categories capable of being emplotted on two axes, horizontally as well as vertically. The Linnaean system is the most familiar, allowing a quick reminder of how these two axes relate. The Bodhi tree of Śākyamuni Buddha, for instance, is categorized within Linnaean taxonomy as the species *Ficus religiosa*, of the genus *Ficus*, of the family *Moraceae*. Through these categories, the actual Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya may be grouped with similar individuals at increasing levels of generalization, allowing horizontal differentiation of varying degrees. Thus the *Ficus bengalensis*, the Bodhi tree of Śākyamuni's mythical predecessor, Kāśyapa Buddha, is of the same family and genus as Śākyamuni's *Ficus religiosa*, but differs in species due to morphological variations. Any given taxon is characterized by the similarity of the members of its class, which are absolutely differentiated from members of other taxa within the taxonomy's universe *contingent upon the level of abstraction within the categorical hierarchy*.

Turning to Indian societies, we may abstract the *religious* from the *political* from the *economic* realm, for example, and call these "families." *Buddhism* would then be one "genus" of Indian religion, and *Hīmayāna Buddhism* one "species." According to this classic taxonomic model, a *nikāya*, a sub-species of the species *Hīmayāna Buddhism*

²¹¹ Frederick Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories and Scientific Realism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

cannot belong to another species, e.g., *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. The taxonomic architecture prohibits this vertically (recall Bechert from above: "Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect'") as well as horizontally ("the nikāyas come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna"). Nevertheless, in terms of the particulars of religious life -- practices, monastic rule, and so on -- the Mahāyāna is continuous with one *nikāya* or another in many details. Mahāyānists might come from all *nikāyas*; yet there is an expectation that prior *nikāya* affiliations become moot once a *yānic* conversion is made. A clear understanding of the relationship between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, accordingly, will depend upon the precision with which one maintains awareness of the relationships and logical levels between the contrasted entities. Although overlaps between an individual *nikāya* and the Mahāyāna may occur in selected individual characteristics, analytically the two remain absolutely separate.

Now, in the broadest terms, taxonomies come in two flavors, "natural" and "artificial." Taxa definitions in natural taxonomies are considered to have a natural basis in reality; they "are factually true or false assertions about the characteristics distinctive of [their] members."²¹² In artificial taxonomies, categories are defined according to arbitrary and functional conventions. Accordingly, when we seek to classify these two 'species' of Buddhism, we must first decide whether we want this classificatory system to conform to, and describe, historical actualities on their own terms, reconstructed through available evidence; or whether it should be treated as a conventional construction, stipulatively defined so as to yield a useful analysis of whatever specific material is at hand. In point of fact, Suppe attests that many current theorists of taxonomy are suspicious of terms often used for natural taxonomies (such as "natural," "intrinsic property," and "empirically true"),

²¹² Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 248.

and believe that only conventional taxonomies are possible;²¹³ post-structuralists can readily demonstrate that most anything "natural" is always already constructed, conventional. However, there is no reason to believe that scholars of Buddhism have heretofore sought anything but a natural, historical understanding of the *yānas*: such criticisms stand beyond the scope of this investigation.

For a taxonomy to be natural, the taxa must be defined so that there is "a single intrinsic property characteristic of all and only those individuals belonging to a given taxon."²¹⁴ The Linnaean system attempts to maintain fidelity to nature by classifying individuals within taxa defined according to "*all* characteristics of the organism, where these become necessary and sufficient characteristics for species membership."²¹⁵ This totalistic essentialism is unthinkable for our post-Darwinian world, wherein species are not immutably fixed by God himself. To make 'Mahāyāna' and 'Hīnayāna' work as natural taxa we need but a single intrinsic property characteristic of all members of the Mahāyāna and another characteristic of all Hīnayānists. In this study, I have suggested that modern scholars' view the Mahāyāna's essential property as its members' acceptance of the bodhisattva ideal as an active religious model; the Hīnayāna's, as its members' identification with a specific *nikāya*. Membership in the Mahāyāna is diagnosed primarily by an ideological position; membership in the Hīnayāna by an institutional affiliation. Yet, according to my reading of the Cave 22 inscription, for instance, we have a self-identified member of the Aparaśaila *nikāya* committing himself to the quintessential Mahāyānist aspiration as a *Śākyabhiṣu*. In view of this inscription how do we maintain a strict analytic separation between taxa, such that every individual fits into only a single taxon?

²¹³ Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 249.

²¹⁴ Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 217.

²¹⁵ Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 206.

Do we choose (1) the nominal separation between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna as our criterion for categorizing the *yānic* affiliation of the Cave 22 donor? Or do we choose as criteria (2) the tenets and practices this donor accepts within his epigraph?

Selection of the former possibility leads to an identification of this donor with the Hīnayāna; select the latter and he is a Mahāyānist. In natural taxonomies "the definitional form for given taxa in a domain is a question of empirical fact."²¹⁶ Accordingly, if we choose the first alternative, 'Mahāyāna' and 'Hīnayāna' are meaningful as naturally defined taxa insofar as they are defined through data that explicitly communicates a *nikāya* or *yāna* affiliation. Such a taxonomy could not support generalizations about the *yānic* substrate of Buddhist ideologies and practices: the unqualified identification of the *bodhisattvayāna* with the Mahāyāna, so prevalent in scholarship on Buddhism, would have to be relinquished. Selection of the second alternative leads to the conclusion that an individual's membership in one of the *nikāyas* cannot be treated as having a predictive value for his *yānic* affiliation. This, in turn, means that the prevailing conception of the *nikāyas* as sub-species of the Hīnayāna should be aborted. Here the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction can be preserved on the level of doctrine and practice, but loses most of its significance as a handle for Indian Buddhist institutional history.

Can a member of a *nikāya* accept the bodhisattva vow and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? If one assents to this proposition, then one treats Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna as a pair of institutional taxa whose members are best determined through sociological and demographic studies. If one denies the assertion, then the *yānas* retain their value as categories for Buddhist ideology, and the nomological and doxographical literatures of Buddhism remain principle sources for their definition. The trade off is that these taxa will lose value as institutional indices, except where direct, explicit evidence for an individual's

²¹⁶ Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 248.

yānic affiliation is preserved. However, since we possess no evidence for a Buddhist affirming his inclusion within the "Hīnayāna" akin to Asaṅga's professions vis-à-vis the Mahāyāna, we are left with a history of Indian Buddhism that includes a few self-declared Mahāyānists, a few members of various *nikāyas* -- albeit of unknown *yānic* affiliation -- and no Hīnayānists at all. Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna becomes an odd distinction indeed.

I introduced this chapter by expressing my own puzzlement over the typical characterization of Ajaṅṭā's Vākāṭaka phase as "Mahāyānist." To be sure, the taxonomic distinction between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna taxa make our lives simpler when talking or writing about Buddhism in India. But (to paraphrase Geertz) they formulate a conceptual ordering of Buddhism and clothe this conception with such an aura of factuality that it seems uniquely realistic; they are icons, in both senses, Piercean and devotional. Of all the categories through which to reconstruct the Indian Buddhist history, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are the most productive. Nevertheless, our reconstructions have a secret life of their own. Each *yāna* can be defined positively, through a necessary and sufficient characteristic for individuals' membership within that taxon. Moreover, because these two *yānas* are logical opposites, each can also be defined negatively, through its lack of the other's necessary and sufficient characteristic. However, in both cases, these positive and negative definitions are not conceptually equivalent. That is, the Mahāyāna is positively characterized by its members' pursuit of the bodhisattva path; the Hīnayāna is negatively characterized as the non-Mahāyāna, i.e., its members do not pursue Buddhahood as their ideal. However, when positively characterized, the Hīnayāna is defined by members' affiliation with one or another *nikāya*, which, of course, means that the Mahāyāna is known negatively by its members' institutional separation from those same *nikāyas*. In short, discourse on the *yānas* has treated an apples-and-oranges distinction as one of apples alone.

Finally, perhaps the only single intrinsic property characteristic of everything Mahāyānist is that it is not Hīnayānist, and vice versa. Here we are left with the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction as a mere structural dualism devoid of specific content, a mere nominalism. This conclusion hardly yields a worthwhile definition of these taxa appropriate for historical research. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct natural, historical, and meaningful taxonomies based upon these *yānas*, wherein all individuals within each taxon possess at least one element in common, and that element does not belong to members of the other *yāna*. To realize this possibility, we must recognize that taxonomic schemes, like maps, are appropriate only to restricted domains. One can create more than one taxonomic scheme using a single set of data; change the way taxa are defined, the model's conceptual universe, and the categorization of members, may change as well. We do not labor within a Linnaean universe where individuals are defined only by the totality of their characteristics. Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhiḥṣus*, one an Aparasāila, many probably Mūlasarvāstivādin, can be both "Mahāyānists" and "Hīnayānists," albeit not within the same taxonomic moment. Our approach to the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhiḥṣu* saṅgha must rely upon an hermeneutic sensitive to, and respectful of, the many divergent discursive, historical, institutional, psychological, practical, ideological, and social contexts within which we use these analytic categories. In the end, there is no Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction: there are many.

To conclude: When introducing my discussion of the *Śākyabhiḥṣus*, I noted two uses of this epithet within Buddhist literary sources. The first came from the MSV. The second is found in the introductory verses of the *Samayabhedoparacakra*, a doxographical text devoted the origins and tenets of the eighteen *nikāyas*. This text, unfortunately, does not come to us in Sanskrit, but was preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. In fact, it was translated into Chinese three times -- in the Ts'in (385-431),

putatively by Kumārajīva, between the years 557 and 569 by Paramārtha, and in 662 by Hsüan-Tsang; the Tibetan translation was made in the ninth century by Dharmākara.²¹⁷ I recount these details of the text's transmission, for the verse in which one finds Śākyabhikṣu was not part of the Ts'in period translation.²¹⁸ Thus, one can surmise that this verse's characterization of Vasumitra was a follower's view, and not Vasumitra's own personal assessment. According to this verse, "Vasumitra, possessed of wisdom, [was] an enlightened Śākyabhikṣu, a bodhisattva of great knowledge."²¹⁹

What makes this characterization of Vasumitra so interesting, and the reason I kept him for this chapter's end, is because of who Vasumitra was. Far from being a luminary in the Mahāyāna commentarial tradition, this Śākyabhikṣu is considered a co-author of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*,²²⁰ a Sarvāstivādin text whose title came to be eponymous with Hīnayānist doctrine in India. According to a tradition recorded by Hsüan-Tsang,²²¹ the *Mahāvibhāṣā* was compiled at a council convened by King Kaniṣka for the purpose of reconciling differences between the *nikāyas*, and making the saṅgha whole. At first, the arhats present in Kaniṣka's realm forbade Vasumitra from joining the assembly, because Vasumitra had not yet attained arhatship. Little did they know that Vasumitra was a bodhisattva, disinterested in such attainments, for he sought "only the fruit of Buddha." To prove his spiritual merit to the arhat-elite, Vasumitra cast a ball in the air, declaring that by the time it

²¹⁷ André Bareau. "Trois Traités sur les Sectes Bouddhiques Attribués à Vasumitra, Bhavya et Vinītadeva, première partie," *Journal Asiatique*. 242 (1954): 231.

²¹⁸ Bareau. "Trois Traités sur les Sectes Bouddhiques," 235.

²¹⁹ *de tshe dbyig bshes blo ldan pa | śākya'i dge slong blo chen po | byang chub sems dpa' blo gros che | phyad par sems la brtag bya ste* | Enga Teramoto and Tomotsugu Hiramatsu (eds). *Samaya-bbedoparacanakra*. (Kyoto, 1935): 1.

²²⁰ Jiryo Masuda. "Origin and Doctrines of the Early Indian Buddhist Schools," *Asia Major*. 2 (1925): 7-9.

²²¹ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-yu Ki*, vol. 1, 151-6; Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629-645)*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973): vol. 1, 270-278.

hit the earth he too would be an arhat; its fall was stopped by the gods, who asked Vasumitra why he sought such a meager fruit, given that he was destined to be the next Buddha following Maitreya. In consequence of this miracle, Kaśmīr's arhats made Vasumitra the president of their convocation. Although Hsüan-Tsang's tale affords the fullest account of this convocation, Demiéville records that Vasumitra's status as the sixth Buddha of our age was accepted at least as early as the year 384 C.E.²²² With this background, one can well understand the verses interpolated into the introduction to Vasumitra's *Samayabhedopacaracakra*: that he is wise, enlightened, a bodhisattva, and a Śākyabhikṣu.

But, Vasumitra was also belonged to the Hīnayāna. And not only was the work of Hīnayāna philosophy *par excellence* said to be composed under the stewardship of bodhisattva Śākyabhikṣu Vasumitra. In point of fact, Przyluski²²³ and Lamotte²²⁴ both suggest that the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya itself was first compiled in this same council. Thus we would have Maitreya's successor in the *Tathāgatavaṃśa* as a patriarch of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school vis-à-vis its doctrines and its vinaya, the charter of its institutional integrity. Demiéville refers to Vasumitra as a '*bodhisattva-bhikṣu*,' his persona reflecting a conflict between the Great and Little Vehicles,²²⁵ but not committed to either. As Śākyabhikṣu Vasumitra, so Ajaṇṭā.

²²² Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 366-8.

²²³ Jean Przyluski. *The Legend of Emperor Aśoka in Indian and Chinese Texts*. Trans. by D. K. Biswas. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967): vii.

²²⁴ Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 174.

²²⁵ Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 366.