CHAPTER V

BUDDHA: AJAṆṬĀ'S IDEAL SAVIOR

In the preceding chapter I argued that one fundament of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*' Dharma was the concern to establish and legitimate their inclusion within the family of Śākyamuni, and by extension the lineage of Tathāgatas. In this way, these *Śākyabhikṣus* showed themselves to be bodhisattvas; many sought the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge for themselves and others. Further, I argued that although both Western scholarship and Indian Mahāyānist polemics tend to equate the bodhisattva-*yāna* with the Mahāyāna, this correlation cannot be presupposed to have historical verity for Ajaṇṭā. Whereas Mahāyānist literature and doctrine do take the bodhisattva's development and practices as a primary focus, in the person of Vasumitra one finds the possibility that India's *Śākyabhikṣus* need not have entered on to the Great Vehicle. Indeed, Vasumitra's intimate association with Sarvāstivādin doctrine and, perhaps, the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, leaves the *yānic* issue wide open.

This present chapter will address the sort of Buddha Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* may have sought to become. We have a sense that, at Ajaṇṭā, Śākyamuni Buddha played a parental, even ancestral, role. But there remains the question of what it would have meant for one's spiritual progenitor to be a figure who, in Buddhabhadra's words, has departed for the City of Tranquility, which has no fixed location, yet still accomplishes the aims of living beings (app. A, No. 93, verse 2). The Buddha was at once the *Śākyabhikṣus'* ideal and goal, the final and formal cause of their religious life. Nevertheless, as a present absence and absent presence, the Buddha's identity was fluid; his position within this

community, like the location of his nirvāṇa itself, was not fixed.

Étienne Lamotte has presented Indian Buddhology as in tension between two basic hermeneutic modes -- the 'supermundane' and the 'rationalist' -- and he uses the lotus flower as a trope for their explication. Lamotte writes, "The *Logion of the Lotus,* introduced in Buddhist Sūtras established a comparison between the lotus 'born and grown in the water, rising above the water and not sullied by the water' and the Tathāgata 'born in the world, grown in the world, having dominated the world and remaining unsullied by the world.' . . . Two responses, each having an infinity of nuances, have been proposed. Under the impulse of religious sentiment, certain Hīnayānist sects, followed by the great Mahāyānist schools, subtract the Buddha from the world-of-becoming and do not impute to him any form of existence. His manifestation within the world is a pure and simple fiction. . . . Other Hīnayānist sects, interpreting the old canonical texts, give a more rational response. Śākyamuni in the course of his last existence and after his Awakening was both man and Buddha, or, more exactly, Buddha while remaining provisionally human."[1] This chapter will explore some of the ramifications of a tension between these two modalities of Buddhahood as they were played out at Ajaṇṭā.

The Miracle and the Descent

Let us begin with the simple observation that Śākyamuni Buddha, whatever the idiosyncracies of his life and 'ministry,' participated in an ideal type. The Theravādins stand at the far edge of Lamotte's rationalist Buddhology, for which Buddha is Man perfected. One may expect, therefore, that the Theravāda Buddha was a unique individual in the same way that all humans are unique individuals. Yet one finds that, when a single norm

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[1] Étienne Lamotte. "Lotus et Buddha Supramondain," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 69 (1981): 44.

of human perfection obtains, all perfect humans are very much the same. In the *Sampasādaniya Sutta* of the *Dīgha nikāya,* for instance, Śāriputra is taken to task by Śākyamuni for making what the Buddha considers to be a false, if ecstatic, statement. Śāriputra proclaims, "Lord! such faith have I in the Exalted One, that methinks there never has been, nor will be, nor is there now any other . . . who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One."[2] Śākyamuni gently mocks Śāriputra, whose spiritual-eye is myopic when compared with that of a Buddha, instructing him that "in times gone and in future times there have been, and will be other Supreme Buddhas equal to himself in the matter of Enlightenment, yet that in one and the same world-system there should arise two Arahants, Buddhas Supreme, the one neither before nor after the other:-- that is impossible and unprecedented. That cannot be."[3] Though Śākyamuni is Śāriputra's Buddha, and is uniquely perfect within the present age, Śākyamuni is simply one of a long line of equally perfect figures. Indeed, as has been often noted, a reverence for Śākyamuni's Buddha predecessors is evidenced at least as early as the period of Aśoka, whose Nigālī Sagar pillar commemorated the enlargement and worshipping of a stūpa dedicated to Buddha Konākamana by Aśoka.[4]

In this way, Śākyamuni is one in an infinite progression of Buddhas. Nor is he the last: Buddhist traditions universally acknowledge Maitreya as Śākyamuni's successor; and as I noted at the end of the last chapter, the Sarvāstivādins believed that Vasumitra would be the next Buddha to Awaken after Maitreya. But with this mention of future Buddhas I

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[2] T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (trans). *Dialogues of the Buddha*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1977): part 3, 95.

[3] Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha,* part 3, 108-9.

[4] E. Hultzsch. *Inscriptions of Aśoka*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 1. (Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 165; Alfred C. Woolner. "Niglīva Dedication," *Aśoka Text and Glossary*. (Delhi: Panjab University Oriental Publications, 1982): 51.

am getting ahead of myself. For Western scholars, the *locus classicus* for a presentation of Śākyamuni as one in a progression of Buddhas is the Sarvāstivādin *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*[5] (and its Pāli equivalent, the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*[6]). This text focusses upon the life story of Vipaśyin, a Buddha who lived 91 aeons ago. Most significantly, the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra* presents Vipaśyin's life as a paradigm for the lives of all Buddhas. Though the parallel details of Buddhas' lives differ -- e.g., their castes and clans, the trees under which they gain Awakening, the names of their two chief disciples, and so on -- Buddhas are equivalent insofar as the actual events in their lives on earth are virtually identical. A Buddha always descends from Tuṣita heaven; a Buddha always stands after his birth, and proclaims this to be his final life; a Buddha's mother always dies seven days thereafter. This compulsory nature of a Buddha's life to conform to an ideal is signalled within this text by a term which introduces every major event: *dharmatā*. When something is *dharmatā* it is natural, to be expected, in the order of things. As the events in a Buddha's life are *dharmatā*, we might say that the very nature of the world requires Buddhas to act just as they do. A Buddha who does not live an archetypical Buddha's life is no Buddha at all.

Whereas the consistency of Buddhas' lives is a point of universal agreement among the various Buddhist traditions, the actual events and actions that define the Buddha's exemplum are not thus fixed. By way of example, the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, a Mahāyānist *śāstra,* enumerates 12 principle acts;[7] the commentary to the *Buddhavaṃsa,* a Sri Lankan

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

[6] Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha,* part 2, 4-41.

[7] E. H. Johnston (ed). "The Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra." Appendix to *Journal of Bihar Research Society*. 36 (1950): 87-88; 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): 254-55; Jikido Takasaki. *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio

chronicle of Śākyamuni and his twenty-four predecessors, mentions Buddhas as having thirty identical deeds.[8] For our purposes, of course, the most interesting typification of the Buddhas' life will be one found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya and its related text, the *Divyāvadāna*, wherein Buddhas are presented as necessarily accomplishing ten acts before they enter nirvāṇa:

> It is the rule (*dharmatā*) that living, abiding, existing, animate Buddhas, Blessed Ones must necessarily accomplish ten [deeds]. A Buddha, Blessed One does not enter nirvāṇa as long as 1) the Buddha has not predicted that [another will become] a Buddha; 2) a second person has not conceived an irreversible aspiration for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening; 3) all beings who can be converted by the Buddha are [not] converted; 4) three-quarters of [the Buddha's] life-span has [not] elapsed; 5) [the Buddha] has [not] marked out a *sīmā*; 6) [the Buddha] has [not] designated two of his Śrāvakas as supreme; 7) [the Buddha] has [not] displayed [himself] descending from the *devas* in the town of Sāṃkāśya; 8) on [the shore] of Anavapta lake, [the Buddha] together with [his] Śrāvakas have [not] exposited the thread of previous actions; 9) [the Buddha's] parents are [not] established in the Truth; 10) [the Buddha] does [not] display a great miracle in Śrāvastī.[9]

Whereas all of these acts were doubtless fraught with significance, I wish to call attention to two in particular: the descent from the *devas* in Sāṃkāśya and the great miracle in Śrāvastī. To begin, these two acts are further privileged within Buddhist traditions, for memorials of their occurrence were included within the paradigmatic circuit

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ed Estremo Oriente, 1966): 329-31.

[8] Étienne Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*. Trans. by Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1988): 661.

[9] *dharmatā khalu buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ jīvatāṃ tiṣṭhatāṃ driyamānānāṃ yāpayatāṃ yaduta daśāvaśyakaraṇīyāni bhavanti | na tāvad buddhā bhagavantaḥ parinirvānti yāvan na buddho buddhaṃ vyākaroti, yāvan na dvitīyena sattvenāparivartyam anuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau cittam utpāditaṃ bhavati, sarvabuddhavaineyā vinītā bhavanti, tribhāga āyuṣa utsṛṣṭo bhavati, sīmābandhaḥ kṛto bhavati, śrāvakayugam agratāyāṃ nirdiṣṭaṃ bhavati, sāṃkāśye nagare devatāvataraṇaṃ vidarśitaṃ bhavati, anavatapte mahāsarasi śrāvakaiḥ sārdhaṃ pūrvikā karmaplotir vyākṛtā bhavati, mātāpitarau satyeṣu pratiṣṭhāpitau bhavataḥ, śrāvastyāṃ mahāpratihāryaṃ vidarśitaṃ bhavati* | Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 150. A similar list is found in the MSV (Nalinaksha Dutt [ed.] *Gilgit Manuscripts*. [Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984]: vol. 3.1, 163).

of Buddhist pilgrimage in central India; they were counted as two of eight great caityas.[10] Moreover, as one will recall, the great miracle and descent are the only events from the Buddha's life that the MSV stipulates as necessarily depicted within a monastery's precincts: "in the vestibule (*niryūha*), the Great Miracle [at Śrāvastī] . . . in the assembly hall (*upasthānaśala*), the most venerable monk [=Buddha] descending to teach the Dharma." One may suspect, accordingly that these two acts held great import for Ajaṇṭā's monks. And indeed, although the placement of these scenes at Ajaṇṭā does not always coincide with the location stipulated by the MSV, programmatic depictions of them both are present: the great miracle at Śrāvastī can be found in Caves 1, lower 6, 7, 11, 16, 17 (intrusive variations on this theme were painted and incised in many more caves as well); the descent from Sāṃkāśya is still to be found in Caves 16 (where it is depicted twice: once on the veranda, and once inside the hall) and 17. As always let me reiterate, the fact that we do not know of these scenes in other caves does not necessarily mean that in some cases they could not have been painted therein at one time, or that, given Ajaṇṭā's troubled history, they may not have been included within iconographic programmes which never reached fruition.

I would propose, in brief, that the great miracle at Śrāvastī and descent at Sāṃkāśya together provide the foundation for unpacking one set of symbolisms and canons associated with Buddha at Ajaṇṭā. Although these events are enumerated as separate

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[10] See John C. Huntington ("Pilgrimage as Image: The Cult of the *Aṣṭamahāpratihārya,*" *Orientations* 18 [April 1987]: 55-63) and the companion articles to which he refers in the note on p. 55 for a more detailed discussion of Buddhist pilgrimage to these eight sites. As Huntington observes, there are no 'early' literary basis for this division into eight paradigmatic sites. In fact, Huntington dates "the earliest surviving stele depicting in detail the exact set" of eight scenes to the late 5th century ("Pilgrimage as Image," 62). P. C. Bagchi provides a list of works in Tibetan and Chinese dedicated to the worship of these eight sites, none may be dated to a period earlier than that of King Harṣa Śīlāditya, a contemporary of Hsüan-Tsang ("The Eight Great Caityas and their Cult," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 2 [1941]: 223-235). Finally, see Sylvain Lévi. "Une poésie inconnue du roi Harṣa Śīlāditya" *Actes du X^e^ Congrès international des Orientalistes.* 2 (1897): 189-203.

moments in a Buddha's paradigmatic life, in fact they are two parts of one story. By way of an introduction to the web of associations attached to the great miracle and the descent from the gods, allow me to recount the underlying tale, citing Rockhill's summary of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya at length (the accompanying plates are taken from the depictions of these two events on the right and left walls of Cave 17's Buddha-shrine antechamber):

> Buddhist works mention six principal philosophical masters who were the chief opponents of the Buddha. . . . They were Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa, (Maskari)-Goçala, Sanjaya son of Vairatī, Ajita-Keçakambala, Kakuda-Katyāyana, and Nirgrantha son of Jñāta. . . . [T]hey all claimed to be great magicians, and as they felt the Buddha was depriving them of their popularity, they decided to have a public trial, which would establish their supernatural powers and superiority over the Çramana Gautama. Prasenadjit, king of Kosala, had everything made ready in place between Çravasti and Jetavana; the Buddha performed such wonderful feats that the tirthikas dared not show their inferiority, so they fled in dismay (Fig. 68). The most prominent of these six was Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa, "a man who went naked in the villages before all the world." . . . He could no longer reason, so with wandering mind he also ran away. As he went along he met a eunuch, who recognized him and said, "Whence comest thou, thus crestfallen, like a ram with broken horns? Ignorant though thou art of the truth (taught by) the Çākya, though thou wanderest about without shame like an ass." Then Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa told him that he was seeking a lovely pool full of cool water, in which he wished to clean himself of the dirt and dust of the road. When the eunuch had pointed it out to him, he went there, and fastening around his neck a jar full of sand, he threw himself into the water and was drowned.[11]

Rockhill neglects to provide a description of the Buddha's miracle itself, although this is typically the moment in this narration that is depicted in Buddhist art. According to the *Divyāvadāna*:

> The Blessed One conceived a mundane thought. . . . Then it occurred to the gods beginning with Śakra and Brahmā: 'Why has the Blessed One conceived a mundane thought?' And they considered, '[The Buddha] desires to display a great miracle in Śrāvastī for the benefit of living beings.' . . . Then Brahmā and the gods [in his retinue] circumambulated the Blessed One three times, bowed to the Blessed One's feet, and sat to the right. Śakra and the gods [in his retinue] circumambulated the Blessed One three times, bowed to the Blessed One's feet, and sat to the left. The Nāga kings Nanda and Upananda conjured [and] placed before the Blessed One a lotus, whose thousand petals were as large as wagon wheels, entirely

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[11] W. Woodville Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of his Order Derived from Tibetan Works in the bkah-hgyur and bstan-hgyur*. (New Delhi: Navrang, 1991): 80-81.

> golden, [and] studded with jewels. The Blessed One sat on the lotus's pericap. Then after bending [his legs] into the lotus-position, holding his body erect, and setting his awareness before him, [the Blessed One] conjured a lotus on top of [that] lotus upon which sat a second Blessed One, legs crossed. Similarly in front, behind, and to the sides as well, the Buddha Blessed One conjured a mass of Buddhas; [reaching] as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven, the Buddhas Blessed Ones formed in assembly (Figs. 69, 70). Some of the conjured Buddhas walked, some stood, some sat, some reclined. Further, they entered into the fire-element, and performed the miracles of flaming, burning, raining, and flashing. Some asked questions; others replied, speaking a pair of verses (Fig. 71). . . . Thus empowered by the Blessed One, the entire world, including even young children, saw a garland of Buddhas without obstruction, [reaching] as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven.[12]

Rockhill's narrative summary then continues:

> After defeating the tirthikas the Buddha vanished from amidst his disciples and went to Trayastrimcat heaven, where, seated on a slab of white stone in a beautiful give of parijātaka and kobidharaka (*sic*) trees, he instructed his mother and a host of devas (Fig. 72). . . .
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> The disciples were greatly worried at the Buddha's disappearance, and

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[12] *bhagavatā laukikaṃ cittam utpāditam । . . . atha śakrabrahmādīnāṃ devānām etad abhavat । kimarthaṃ bhagavatā laukikaṃ cittam utpāditam । teṣām etad abhavat । śrāvastyāṃ mahāprātihāryaṃ nidarśayitukāmo hitāya prāṇinām । . . . atha brahmādayo devā bhagavantaṃ triḥ pradakṣiṇīkṛtya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvā dakṣiṇaṃ pārśvaṃ niśritya niṣaṇṇāḥ । śakrādayo devā bhagavantaṃ triḥ pradakṣiṇīkṛtya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvā vāmaṃ pārśvaṃ niśritya niṣaṇṇāḥ । nandopanadābhyāṃ nāgarājābhyāṃ bhagavata upanāmitaṃ nirmitaṃ sahasrapattraṃ śakaṭacakramātraṃ sarvasauvarnaṃ ratnadaṇḍaṃ padmam । bhagavāṃś ca padmakarṇikāyāṃ niṣaṇṇaḥ paryaṅkam ābhujya ṛjuṃ kāyaṃ praṇidhāya pratimukhaṃ smṛtim upasthāpya padmasyopari padmaṃ nirmitam । tatrāpi bhagavān paryaṅkaniṣaṇṇaḥ । evam agrataḥ pṛṣṭhataḥ pārśvataḥ । evaṃ bhagavatā buddhapiṇḍī nirmitā yāvad akaniṣṭhabhavanam upādāya buddhā bhagavanto parṣannirmataṃ । kecid buddhanirmāṇāś caṅkramyante kecit tiṣṭhanti kecin niṣiḍanti kecic chayyāṃ kalpayanti tejodhātum api samāpadyante jvalanatapanavarṣaṇavidyotanaprātihāryāṇi kurvanti । anye praśnān pṛcchanty anye visarjayanti gāthādvyaṃ bhāṣante . . . bhagavatā tathādhiṣṭitaṃ yathā sarvaloko 'nāvṛtaṃ adrākṣīd buddhāvataṃsakaṃ yāvad akaniṣṭhabhvanam upādāya antato bāladārakā api* । Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 162-3.

I have cited this portion of the *Divyāvadāna's* "Prātihāryasūtra," for this particular part of the story is that most often associated with Ajaṇṭā's depictions of the Śrāvastī 'miracle.' However, as Robert L. Brown ("The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī," *Archives of Asian Art*. 37 (1984): 79-95) rightly points out, in the *Divyāvadāna's* depiction of the events at Śrāvastī, the Buddha performs not one miracle, but a series of supernatural actions, including the so-called *yamakaprātihārya*, or twin miracle, wherein the Buddha alternately shoots out fire and water from his shoulders and feet while he lifts into the air. See Brown's article for references to additional characterizations of the Buddha's Great Miracle, both literary and plastic.

> questioned Maudgalyayana, who told them where the Blessed One was. When three months had passed away the disciples sought Maudgalyayana again, and told him that they wanted to see the Buddha, that they thirsted after him. Maudgalyayana, by the power of samadhi, went to the Trayastrimcat devas' heaven, and told the Buddha how all the people of Jambudvipa longed to see him (Fig. 73). The Blessed One bid him return and tell the disciples that after seven days he would return to them, and would be at the foot of the udumbara tree of the Avadjaravana (*sic*) of the town of Sāmkaçya in Jambudvipa. Then the Buddha visited many other abodes of the devas, teaching them all the truth; after which he descended to the earthy by a vaīdurya (lapis lazuli) staircase, while Brahmā, bearing a jewelled yak tail, descended a golden one on his right together with all the gods of the Rūpaloka, and Çataketu (Indra), bearing a hundred-ribbed parasol over him, descended by a crystal staircase on his left accompanied by all the devas of the Kamaloka (Fig. 74).
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> Now the bhikshuni Utpalavarnā saw the Blessed One descending to earth, so she took the appearance of an emperor (*Chakravartin*), and there came to honour him. [King] Udayin, who was also there, recognized her by the sweet odour that her body emitted; but the Blessed One rebuked her, saying, "It is not seeming in a bhikshuni to perform magical feats in the presence of the Master." (Plate 6-8) Then he sent her away.[13]

To reiterate the claim with which I introduced this retelling of three months in Śākyamuni's life, and indeed that of all Buddhas: the great miracle in Śrāvastī and the descent at Sāṃkāśya jointly encode the multivalent significances associated with the figure of Buddha; through their narrative and, in Cave 17 at least, pictorial pairing, they give expression to the tensions between what Lamotte has characterized as 'supermundane' and 'rationalist' Buddhologies.

Turning first to the event at Śrāvastī, we find two concerns of note. First is the basic setting for the day's events: a challenge by the Buddha's opponents, who were distressed that Śākyamuni's popularity was growing at their expense. This particular issue should be understood within the temporal context in which the contest took place. That is, the tīrthikas' challenge was levied towards the end of the hot season, in May or June. Soon thereafter the rains retreat would have begun; this was a period in which ś*ramaṇas,* Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, were expected to enter fixed dwellings for three months. Some scholars, most notably Sukumar Dutt, have expressed the opinion that the

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[13] Rockhill. *Life of the Buddha,* 80-82.

gathering of individual communities in specific locales during the rains retreat was the chrysalis from which Buddhist monasticism came to full flower.[14] Although I did not explore Dutt's hypothesis in the chapter on Ajaṇṭā's Saṅgha, the argument I made therein obviates any simple acceptance of Dutt's proposition. The yearly gathering of monks could not have been the sole mechanism for the saṅgha's domestication; the inescapable obligation Buddhist monks were under to participate in a system of generalized exchange was, to recall Strenski's dictum, domestication itself. In short, I would suggest that one important sub-text to the magic contest at Śrāvastī was the issue of patronage and social integration. At stake in this display of power was the issue of which ascetic teacher could claim supremacy on earth; which would be able to gain the highest social standing for his order at the time of maximum contact between monks, lay supporters, and potential lay supporters. As the Buddha reflected before performing a miracle in the harem of Kapilavastu, the display of thaumaturgic "power is a way to win over common people quickly."[15] In its fundamental conception, the Śrāvastī miracle had less to do with the Buddha's superior wisdom or the quality of the doctrines and practices he taught, than with a matter of sheer power, and by extension the social benefits resulting from superior power. The Buddha's success in Śrāvastī demonstrated that, in a cycle of generalized exchange, the saṅgha with the Buddha at its head would have had the highest 'potential energy,' the greatest spiritual efficacy.

A religious leader that could so drive so powerful a figure as Pūraṇa-Kāśyapa to lunacy and suicide could surely keep a demoness like Hārītī at bay. In fact, the scope of

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[14] Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 53ff.

[15] *asty āśu pṛthagjanasya riddhir āvarjanakarī;* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977): part 2, 37.

the Buddha's accomplishment in Śrāvastī is signaled by the terminology used to describe his 'miracle:' "the Buddha displayed a miracle of power in regard to the highest human state."[16] Nothing in the human world is beyond the power of a being who could perform this act. Here we begin to enter into the Buddhological tensions that I am most concerned to explore within this chapter. We commonly call the performance at Śrāvastī a "miracle." But this term is a translation of the Sanskrit *ṛddhiprātihārya*, and in fact, is only one of three *prātihāryas*. According to the *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 7.47), the other two are the *prātihārya* of knowing others' thoughts and the *prātihārya* of teaching.[17] In this context, *prātihārya* less means "miracle" or "extraordinary occurrence" as suggested by Edgerton,[18] than a "means of conversion." This latter definition tallies with Vasubandhu's etymological explanation of the term: "These [three] are *prātihāryas* because, from the first and with great force, they carry away (*har*) the minds of those to be trained; *pra* and *ati* signify initial action and intensity [respectively]."[19]

The question remains, however, whether the display of the Buddha's thaumaturgic powers at Śrāvastī for the purpose of immediately and forcibly captivating the minds of his audience was a trick. Were these conjured Buddhas, produced through the power of Śākyamuni's mind, *merely* fictive illusions? Or was the event in Śrāvastī a "miracle" in the Humean sense, a transgression of the natural order? In Lamotte's terms, was the Buddha at

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[16] *vidarśitaṃ bhagavatā uttare manuṣyadharme ṛddhiprātihāryaṃ* Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna,* 163.

[17] *ṛddhicetaḥparyāyāsravakṣayābhijñās trīṇi prātihāryāṇi yathākramam ṛddyādeśanānuśāsanaprātihāryāṇi* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa & Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sputārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra.* Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 1114.

[18] Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): vol. 2, 392a, s.v. *prātihārya.*

[19] *vineyamanasām ādito 'tyarthaṃ haraṇāt pratihāryāṇi; prātiśabdayor ādikarmabhṛśārthatvāt* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa,* 1114.

Śrāvastī a 'rational' or 'supermundane' Buddha? The *Divyāvadāna's* phrase, wherein the Buddha's *ṛddhiprātihārya* is called the highest human state (*uttara-manuṣyadharma*),[20] plays into Lamotte's 'rationalist' Buddhology, for which the Buddha stands at the furthest edge of, but within, the envelope of human being. Upon further reflection, however, the Buddha's performance at Śrāvastī seems to blur the line between his status as a mundane being, subject to the limits of what is *dharmatā*, and as supermundane being beyond all such laws.

One will recall that according to the *Sampasādaniya Sutta* cited above there may be only a single Buddha in any world system at any one time. In fact, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 3.95) cites this very passage (in its Sanskrit version of course) as a canonical authority for the doctrine that "it is unprecedented and impossible for two Tathāgatas, Arhats, Full and Perfect Buddhas to arise in the world where [one] does not precede and [the other] does not follow. This cannot happen!"[21] Yet at Śrāvastī the Buddha demonstrated that two Buddhas *could* co-exist simultaneously. And not merely two Buddhas, one on top of the other: Śākyamuni conjured such a mass of Buddhas that the universe appeared to be filled in its entirety all of whom acted, spoke, and taught as if each was himself the 'real' and original magician.

The following might count as a rational apologist's explanation: there was ever only one Buddha, the remainder were merely conjured replications, without any individual ontological reality. Here we see the point of divisions between the 'rational' and 'supermundane' Buddhologies: for the latter, the single Buddha we know is neither more

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[20] The translation of *dharma* here is problematic, as it can signify anything from duty, to custom, to law, to essential quality. I have chosen to interpret *dharma* here as "life" or "state of existence," parallel to its use in the phrase *dṛṣṭadharma*. Cf. Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary,* 269a, s.v. *dṛṣṭa-dharma*.

[21] *asthānam anavakāśo yad apūrvācaramau dvau tathāgatāv arhatau samyaksaṃbuddhau loka utpadyeyātām ! nedaṃ sthānaṃ vidyate* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 550.

nor less fabulous than any one of the mass of Buddhas displayed at Śrāvastī. But, let us leave aside this point for the moment. More interesting yet is to find that the *Divyāvadāna* takes care to describe and treat these conjured Buddhas as if each were real according the 'rationalist' paradigm. According to the *Divyāvadāna* the conjured Buddhas adopt all four bodily attitudes (walking, standing, sitting, and lying), they enter the fire-element (i.e., they glow or shoot out fire), and they teach by asking and answering questions. Each, for the duration of its existence, appears to be animate and alive, performing the duties of a Buddha.

A tale told by the Tibetan historian Tāranātha shows that according to some Buddhist ideological traditions the three species of activity performed by the Śrāvastī's conjured Buddhas conformed to a specific set of criteria through which the 'real' Buddha was separated from facsimiles, such as sculptures. Tāranātha's narrative concerns an image of Buddha magically created in Bodh Gayā some one hundred years after the Buddha's nirvāṇa. At this time, according to Tāranātha, a brāhmaṇa named Kalyāṇa built a temple at Bodh Gayā, and accompanied by celestial artists, began to make a precise image of the Buddha. Nobody was allowed to enter the temple for seven days until the image was finished. On the sixth day, however, Kalyāṇa's mother entered. She explained that she alone among the living had seen Śākyamuni face to face, and therefore was the sole legitimator of the image's likeness, however because she was bound to die that very night she could not wait until the next morning. Tāranātha writes that Kalyāṇa's mother's "close examination of the image showed overall likeness with the Teacher. However there were discrepancies in three aspects. These were: no halo radiated from it, it was not preaching the Doctrine and, except for sitting, it did not show the three other attitudes. That is why it is [generally] said that this image resembled the real Buddha."[22] Needless to say, given

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[22] Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990): 42-3.

Tāranātha's separation from Ajaṇṭā, and indeed India, this example must be taken with an appropriately large dash of seasoning. Still, the point should be clear, at least by the traditional criteria reflected in Tāranātha's account, the Buddhas conjured by Śākyamuni at Śrāvastī not only "resembled the real Buddha," but were physically equivalent to that Buddha in every significant way.

Indeed, the irony in the event at Śrāvastī, when considered from the perspective of a 'rationalist' Buddhology is that the Buddha's performance cannot be thought of simply as a magic-trick, a display of the power in the highest *human* state. If, for the duration of the display, all the mass of Buddhas perform the same actions and have the same soteriological effect, then this is not merely a display, but truly a miracle wherein a law of nature, the *dharmatā* holding that only a single Buddha may exist in a single world system at any one time, is contravened. The epitome of the 'rational' Buddha acting within his own constraints therefore gives rise to a canon associated with the 'supermundane' Buddha, who is never subject to the constraints of the world of becoming.

Lamotte noted that this latter Buddhological paradigm was taken over by the Mahāyānists. And we find the paradoxes implicit in the Śrāvastī miracle's symbolisms played out in the adoption of this event's iconology within Mahāyānist literature. One simple and eloquent expression thereof, the *Bhadracarī* prayer at the end of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, captures this cosmological vision in a single verse:

> I realize that in a single grain of dust are Buddhas like [in number] to dust seated in the midst of their sons, and that the entire universe is thus entirely filled with Buddhas.[23]

Far more grandly, however, is a display of the Buddha emanations found in the *Lotus Sūtra's* eleventh chapter. In this scene, Śākyamuni assembles emanations of his own body

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[23] *ekarajāgri rajopamabuddhāṃ / buddhasutāna niṣaṇṇaku madhye{।} evam aśeṣata dhamatadhātuṃ sarva / 'dhimucyami pūrṇa jinebhiḥ* {।।} Shindo Shirashi. "Bhadracarī. Ein Sanskrittext des heiligen Jiun. Abdruck im Jare 1783," *Memoires of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Education*. 13 (1962): 2.

from throughout the cosmos, all of which are acting and working within their own realms as independent Buddhas, saving beings:

> [Śākyamuni Buddha said,] 'The Buddhas who are emanations of my body, who in the world-spheres of the ten directions preach Dharma, are now to gather."
>
> At that time, the Buddha emitted a single glow from his white hair-tuft, by which straightaway were seen Buddhas of lands in the eastern quarter equal in number to the sands of five hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges rivers. . . . The Buddhas of those lands preached the dharmas with a great, subtle sound. . . . To the south, the west, the north, to the four intermediate directions as well as upward and downward, wherever the glow of the white hair-tuft reached, it was also thus.
>
> At that time, the Buddhas in the ten direction all addressed their multitudes of bodhisattvas, saying "Good men! We are now to go to the Sahā world-sphere, to the place of Śākyamunibuddha. . . .
>
> In this way, by turns the [lands of the] thousand-millionfold world were filled, and still there was no limit to the emanations of Śākyamunibuddha in even one quarter. . . . . In the four hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of lands in every quarter, the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, filled every direction.[24]

So far my meditation on the Buddha's performance at Śrāvastī has considered two basic points. First, this miracle had a clear social agenda. The contest between the Buddha and tīrthika leaders took place directly before the beginning of the rains retreat. The Buddha's success can be viewed as a symbolic means for establishing the saṅgha as a desirable participant in a social system of generalized exchange; the very need for this contest attests to the fact that prior to the Buddha's miracle this position was not assured. Second, we found that the Buddha's performance was so very miraculous because it used the 'rationalist' symbolism of Buddha as super-Man as a foil against which to present the Buddha as supermundane-Man. In short, socially as well as religiously, the event at Śrāvastī is very much connected beginnings and their ambiguities.

The *devatāvataraṇa*, descent from the gods, at Sāṃkāśya takes place three months after the events at Śrāvastī, at the conclusion of the rains retreat. By contrast with Śrāvastī's

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[24] Leon Hurvitz (trans). *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra)*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976): 185-7.

symbolisms of community formation, the details told of this latter event show it to have been understood as a time in which the hierarchy of individuals and segments internal to Buddhist saṅgha was clarified. As I began my discussion of the significance of the Śrāvastī miracle by making appeal to its temporal context within the Buddhist liturgical year, let me take that as my point of departure here as well.

If the display of a miracle at Śrāvastī enabled the Buddhists to gain converts and claim spiritual priority over their religious competitors, by the end of the rains retreat local monks and lay donors would naturally have developed a social accommodation with one another and formed a local Buddhist society. The earlier chapter on saṅgha explored this relationship in some depth. Here I supplement that discussion by drawing attention to a particularly important ritual through which that relationship was expressed and defined, and which took place upon the end of the rains: the ceremony of the *Kaṭhina*-robe. In brief, at the end of the rains retreat, the laity presented monks residing in their local monasteries with a new robe called the *Kaṭhina*. As one modern scholar writes, "the [*Kaṭhina*] ceremony symbolized the culminating point of the [laity's] hospitality towards the monks during the rainy season."[25]

Unfortunately, vinaya texts do not elaborate many details concerning the social significance of the *Kaṭhina*-robe or the ceremony in which it is given, and so I will turn to Melford Spiro's discussion of this event in modern Burma. Spiro distinguishes between lay and monastic interests in the *Kaṭhina*. For the monks, the *Kaṭhina*-robe is a badge of spiritual purity, presented only to monks who have respected the rules attendant upon the rains retreat, especially those regulations which restrict movement within a set *sīmā* during the rains. That is to say, only monks who were scrupulous about remaining within the

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[25] Mohan Wijayaratna. *Buddhist Monastic Life, According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition*. Trans. by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 39.

local Buddhist community during the rainy period receive a *Kaṭhina* from that community's lay members. "From the standpoint of the monk," according to Spiro, this badge of monastic purity is "the most important [robe], not only because by custom it is accompanied by many other offerings, but because by ecclesiastical law it confers many privileges upon him."[26] Lacking a *Kaṭhina* robe Burmese monks are greatly restricted in their access to the laity during the remainder of the year. Similarly, "the Burmese [laity] believe that special merit attaches to the offering of a *kaheting* [(=*Kaṭhina*)]."[27] This merit is of two sorts: 1) the spiritual boons generous donors will enjoy in future lives and 2) because donors put the gifts on public display prior to the ceremony, the generous obtain the this-worldly merit of celebrity and prestige. The following story from the MSV's Ś*ayanāsana-vastu* confirms, at least circumstantially, the importance of the robes as emblematic of the ceremonial and meritorious relationship between Buddhist monks and laity:

> The Blessed One said that gifts should be given in the name of the deceased *dānapatis* of the past. An elder of the saṅgha recites a verse for the benefit of deceased *dānapatis* of the past. A certain householder came to the monastery, and heard this. The [elder] gave a gift. The [householder] went to [the elder] and said, "Ārya, if I have a vihāra erected, will you give a gift in my name as well?" [The elder] replied, "It is well. Have it built. I will give." Whereupon, that householder had a vihāra erected. Nothing at all was offered by him there. The [vihāra] remained completely empty. When the householder saw this, he came to the vihāra and said, 'Ārya, my vihāra stands empty, no *bhikṣu* at all dwells there.' The elder of the saṅgha replied, "Dear friend, It must be sweated out." The householder said, "Ārya, it was erected in a saline soiled jungle. How can it be sweated out?" [The elder]: "Householder, I am not speaking esoterically.[28] Rather, there is no

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[26] Melford E. Spiro. *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982): 301.

[27] Spiro. *Buddhism and Society,* 226.

[28] An interesting play is going on here. We have no technical manuals for the construction of monasteries dating back to Ajaṇṭā's day. In fact, our only source on this matter, the *Vāstuvidyāśāstra*, comes from Sri Lanka and should probably be dated several centuries after Ajaṇṭā's abandonment. Still, as the *Vāstuvidyāśāstra* is our only source, it is worth while to note that the text describes various of soils and terrains upon and within which monasteries were to be built. According to this text, *jaṅgala* ground should have fine sandy soil, not oily (E. W. Marasiṅghe (ed. and trans). *The Vāstuvidyāśāstra Ascribed*

profit there." [The donor] replies, "Ārya, now I will clothe with a robe whoever dwells in my vihāra."[29]

The Buddha's descent from Sāṃkāśya, punctuated in later Buddhist liturgy by the ceremony of the *Kaṭhina*, not only provides an occasion for defining the proper relationship between the monk and lay-person. It also seems to have been understood as the moment at which the saṅgha's internal hierarchy was defined. To explain how I arrive at this thesis, let me recall with what might have seemed an odd and minor point in Rockhill's summary of the tale. Namely, that the Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā transformed herself into a Cakravartin, whereby she would have held the highest rank among those present and would be the first to greet Śākyamuni descending from heaven. Utpalavarṇā's involvement in this scene is truly fascinating, and, to my knowledge, has not received any serious study. In fact this detail is not unique to the MSV. It was shared in common by almost all accounts of the *devatāvataraṇa*, and as one see finds Fig. 74 was part of the story as know to Ajaṇṭā's artists as well: the beardless king riding the elephant at the

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to Mañjuśrī. [Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1989]: 9). It would seem, therefore, that this donor believes monks are staying away from his vihāra because they desire to respect propriety, to not inhabit a place built according to improper specifications. As we see, such canonical niceties were far from this elder's mind. Unfortunately, this pun does not work so well in translation, where the double-entendre cannot be maintained. I would guess that the elder's reply, "It must be sweated out (*utsvedya*)," could be idiomatically rendered into English, "The wheels must be greased."

[29] *uktaṃ bhagavatā: abhyatītakālagatānāṃ dānapatīnām nāmnā dakṣiṇā ādeṣṭavyā iti; saṃghastaviro 'bhyatītakālagatānāṃ dānapatinām arthāya gāthāṃ bhāṣate; anyatamaś ca gṛhapatir vihāram āgataḥ; tenāsau śrutaḥ dakṣiṇām ādiśat; satasya sakāśam upasaṃkrāntaḥ kathayati: ārya yady ahaṃ vihāraṃ kārayāmi mamāpi nāmnā dakṣiṇām uddiśasi iti; sa kathayati: kāraya suṣṭv ādiśāmi iti; yāvat tena gṛhapatinā vihāra kāritaḥ; tatrānena na kiṃcid dattaṃ; sa śūnya evāvasthitaḥ; yāvat tena grhapatinā dṛṣṭaḥ; sa vihāram āgamya kathayati: ārya madīyo vihāraḥ śūnya avasthitaḥ; na tatra kaścid bhikṣuḥ prativasati iti; saṃghasthaviraḥ kathayati: bhadramukha utsvedyaḥ; sa gṛhapatiḥ kathayati: ārya ūṣare jaṃgle kāritaḥ, kathaṃ utsvedyo bhavati? gṛhapate nāham etat saṃdhāya kathayāmi api tu tatra lābho nāsti iti; sa kathayati: ārya idānīṃ yo madīye vihāre prativasati tam ahaṃ paṭenācchādayāmi iti;* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): 37.

Buddha's proper left is doubtless Utpalavarṇā.

However, the significance of this *bhikṣuṇī's* transformation, and the assessment of her conduct, do differ from narration to narration. Fa-Hien's fifth century testimony is the most sympathetic. Here, Utpalavarṇā transforms herself into a Cakravartin and thereby gains honor before the assembly as "the foremost of all in doing reverence to him."[30] Fa-Hien's tale is the only in which Utpalavarṇā succeeds thus. The Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, stands at antipodes to this account: Despite Utpalavarṇā's trickery, a male disciple, Subhūti, is the first to greet Śākyamuni. Moreover, *Zambasta* has the Buddha scourge Utpalavarṇā for her display of magical powers: "(You have the limited wisdom) of a woman, the unlimited wiles (and) deceptions, as little gratitude, compassion, as the dew on the tip of a blade of grass. You are inconstant, you are wretched, wherever you come from. In my Śāsana let it not happen that you become chief."[31] Hsüan-Tsang's narration tallies with that of *Zambasta*, albeit without the vitriol. Here too Utpalavarṇā is bested by Subhūti. In *Zambasta*, however, Subhūti seems to greet Buddha in the flesh; according to Hsüan-Tsang, Subhūti was first because he beheld the Buddha's *Dharmakāya* in meditation.[32] Hsüan-Tsang tallies directly with the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra's* account.[33] Further, as we have already seen, Utpalavarṇā was chastised at the end of the MSV's

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[30] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 49. In note 2 on this page, Legge admits his own puzzlement over the translation of this passage. Although Legge's text reads that the Buddha transformed Utpalavarṇā's form into that of a Cakravartin, we can, based upon all the other accounts, accept Legge's alternate interpretation, whereby Utpalavarṇā's transformation was effected through her own power.

[31] R. E. Emmerick (ed. and trans). *The Book of Zambasta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968): 365.

[32] 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. 1, 204-5.

[33] Étienne Lamotte. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*. (Louvain: Peeters, 1981): vol. 2, 634-6.

narration. Fig. 75 shows two Cakravartins kneeling before Buddha after his descent. One might interpret one of these kings as Utpalavarṇā still in disguise receiving her reprimand. However, I would instead propose that these two figures represent Cave 17's royal donor and his deceased brother; this latter point is beyond the scope of our present discussion to explore. Finally, the Pāli tradition, as preserved in the commentary to the *Dhammapada*, contravenes these others, for it does not name Utpalavarṇā as one of the party who greet the Buddha, returning from the gods. Yet, even this text preserves a vestige of this same tradition. To wit, before the Buddha performs his miracle in Śrāvastī, Utpalavarṇā offers to act in his stead: she will transform herself into the form of a Cakravartin, and pay obeisance to the Buddha. The Buddha declines Utpalavarṇā's offer.[34]

Aside from the misogyny revealed in several of these texts, especially *Zambasta,* one crucial theme linking these accounts is the assumption or agreement that whoever was to greet Buddha first was his foremost disciple. *Zambasta* states this explicitly: "The monks, the nuns, all the laymen, all the laywomen then assembled in Rājagṛha. They made an agreement with one another: 'When the Buddha descends hither, whoever can worship him first, wherever this Śāsana may be, that assembly will be chief of all among us.'"[35] This text's continuing narration makes clear that Utpalavarṇā transformed herself into a Cakravartin out of a desire to win this contest, and not from any genuine reverence for the Buddha. Fa-Hien speaks of Utpalavarṇā as "foremost" because of her successful ploy: the assumption is the same as that in *Zambasta*, the results quite different. Even the Pāli apparently concurs in this event's significance. According to the *Dhammapada* commentary, Śāriputra was the first to greet Śākyamuni, and the Buddha's first action after

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[34] Charles R. Lanman (trans). *Buddhist Legends*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921): vol. 3, 44. Within the Theravāda tradition, the commentary to the *Sutta Nipāta* claims that, upon the Buddha's descent, Utpalavarṇā paid homage to the Buddha second, immediately after Śāriputra (Lamotte. *Le Traité*, vol. 2, 634, n. 1).

[35] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta,* 357.

his descent is to demonstrate to the assembly Śāriputra's supremacy of wisdom, second only to that of Buddha himself.[36] The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* clarifies this point still further. In fact, this Mahāyānist text uses a discussion of the descent at Sāṃkāśya to elucidate Subhūti's preeminence over Śāriputra. For this *śāstra's* author, Subhūti was the disciple par excellence, since of all the Buddha's arhats, Subhūti was the one who had penetrated most deeply in the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Thus Subhūti was the first to greet Buddha; the Theravādins, of course, held Śāriputra as the foremost in wisdom, and name him as the Buddha's one-man welcome committee.

So far I have discussed how the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa heaven can be treated as a moment during which Buddhist social orders were expressed and set. Indeed, as members of the Buddhist community were struggling for position at the foot of the triple stair-case descending from Trāyastriṃśa, so the events on the stairs too were a graphic performance of the cosmological hierarchy. The symbolism is unambiguous and in need of little clarification. For three months in the heavens Buddha sat upon a throne while the many gods sat on the ground at his feet. And as the terrestrial relationships established during the rains retreat culminated in the *Kaṭhina* ceremony, so the Buddha's relationship with divine beings came to its fullest expression in this act of descent. But whereas human lay donors have only simple goods to offer, the gods' most precious possession is their own status as gods, and their gift was acclaiming Buddha as chief among them. There at Sāṃkāśya the Buddha displayed to all the world that he was, in the words of Ajaṇṭā's Varāhadeva, the immortal of immortals (app. A, No. 98, verse 1), or as this is more typically phrased, the *devātideva*, the god over other gods.

Within Buddhist cosmology, of course, divine realms are part of saṃsāra, as mundane as the human. So how can one understand the Buddha's descent in the terms I

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[36] Lanman. *Buddhist Legends,* vol. 3, 54-6.

borrowed from Lamotte? For the 'rationalist,' the Buddha is of the world and in the world; the 'supermundane' Buddha is not of the world yet he may be in it. Above we found a tension between these Buddhologies at Śrāvastī, where the Buddha's miracle gained ideological force by blurring boundaries: the Buddha most definitely was in the world, but his miracle left us uncertain as to whether he so far transcended the limits of cosmological propriety, *dharmatā*, as to show that he was not of it. At Sāṃkāśya, a much more troubling tension is expressed and resolved. Namely, what would it mean for the Buddha to be *not* in the world? More significantly, given the Śrāvastī miracle, what would it mean for a Buddha who might not even be of the world to be absent from the world? Twice removed from the world, would that Buddha ever return?

Having successfully demonstrated absolute terrestrial superiority, the Buddha disappeared from Śrāvastī without warning and with no indication of his destination or possible return. There was no Schwarteneggarian promise, "I'll be back." In fact, according to Fa-Hien, after the Buddha disappeared, he deliberately rendered himself invisible to his disciples and hid himself in heaven until the last week of the rainy season's third month.[37] Whereas the Buddha's disappearance from Śrāvastī was rather more unexpected than was his final nirvāṇa, one can draw an obvious parallel between the two events. As John Strong, one of the few scholars to have written on the event at Sāṃkāśya, suggests, the rising of Buddha to heaven and his subsequent descent "is a sort of mythological dry run for the Buddha's disappearance at parinirvāṇa and his reappearances thereafter."[38] This parallel with the Buddha's nirvāṇa is useful, since Buddhists were very concerned about that event and lavished many words upon it. However, when it comes to knowing whether the absent Buddha who returns was the 'rational' or 'supermundane' Buddha, we

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[37] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms,* 48.

[38] John S. Strong. *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 152.

find the authorities diverge.

According to a 'rational' Buddhology like that of the Theravādins, the answer is moot. The Buddha's absence is a state about which he refused to comment. As the Buddha told the monk Māluṅkyāputta in an eponymous *sutta* from the Pāli canon: "Understand as not explained what has not been explained by me. And what, Māluṅkyāputta, has not been explained by me? . . . That after dying the Tathāgata is . . . is not . . . both is and is not . . . neither is not is not."[39] This *sutta* ranks highly within the canon of Buddhist sources used by Western scholars, and as every student learns, the Buddha refused to answer Māluṅkyāputta's queries because their answers would not aid him on the path to his own nirvāṇa. Māluṅkyāputta's incessant questions might be likened to the anxiety of the Buddha's disciples, who, worried at the Buddha's absence, implored Mahāmaudgalyāyana to locate him. The answer Māluṅkyāputta never received may be likened, then, to Maudgalyāyana's report that Buddha had not left the mundane sphere altogether, but instead was dwelling in Trāyastriṃśa heaven among the gods. Just as the Buddha declares that a direct answer would not have benefitted Māluṅkyāputta, so even with Maudgalyāyana's intelligence the tensions occasioned by the absent Buddha were not resolved. Mahāmaudgalyāyana assured the disciples that Śākyamuni was still present in the world, despite his physical absence. However, for those lacking Maudgalyāyana's powers, and therefore having no direct access to the Buddha, this was hardly comforting news. According to the *Book of Zambasta*, for instance, King Udayana of Kosala had "extraordinary, very fiercely bitter anxiety;"[40] Udayana was so worried that he might die of a broken heart before Śākyamuni's return that he commissioned the first Buddha image to

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[39] I. B. Horner (trans). *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya).* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1987): vol. 2, 101.

[40] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 347.

be made at this time.[41] This King of Kosala may have been an extreme case. Yet, even for the 'rational' Buddha paradigm, the descent at Sāṃkāśya's symbolism remains powerful because it offers the possibility that absent Buddhas do return; even if the Buddha is not of the world, he may yet come again to the world.

Just as the possibility of nirvāṇa is the Third Noble Truth of the standard Buddhist formula, the possibility of an absent Buddha's return can be likened to the Third Noble Truth of an alternate formula for devotional Buddhism, wherein the First Noble Truth would be the *duḥkha* of separation, the Second, the cause of this pain, e.g., nirvāṇa or ascent to heaven, and the Fourth, the means for recovering the Buddha such as image making &c. In fact, according to Hsüan-Tsang, after the Buddha descended, Udayana's image stood and gave its seat over to Śākyamuni, who charged the image with continuing his work after his real Mahāparinirvāṇa. Here, as in the miracle at Śrāvastī, Śākyamuni's personal identity is subordinated to his status and soteriological function as a Buddha, one of many. In short, the descent at Sāṃkāśya expresses a Buddha who may or may not be of the world, yet enters into and participates in the world. This re-entry of the Buddha into the lives of his disciples is a definitive moment, at which a social cosmos that had lost its linchpin is formed anew: the physical location of individuals and groups in this tableau at Sāṃkāśya defines their proper positions within the Buddhist social hierarchy.

The preceding paragraphs considered what it might mean for the Buddha to descend from heaven, or return from nirvāṇa, under a rationalist Buddhology. The answer is: we don't know how Buddhas work, just be glad he's back! According to a 'supermundane' Buddhological paradigm, however, such a descent is the Buddha's action *par excellence*. For this paradigm, every terrestrial action of a Buddha is mere display

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[41] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 343ff. Hsüan-Tsang (*Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 1, 235-36) concurs. See Emmerick's summary of the story on page 343 for further references to the story of King Udayana and the first Buddha image.

carried out by a conjured (*nirmita*) Buddha, ontologically equivalent to the myriad of alternate Buddhas conjured for the great performance at Śrāvastī. Thus the descent at Sāṃkāśya, where, from the common person's perspective, the Buddha comes in great pomp seemingly out of nowhere, is an allegory for the Buddha's every action, which, in essence, come out of nowhere.

Although this docetic Buddhology is not strictly Mahāyānist, above I did call attention to Lamotte's observation that the 'supermundane' Buddha was fully a standard doctrine for the Mahāyāna. Similarly, there is a type of nirvāṇa that is specifically associated with the Mahāyāna, and for which the descent at Sāṃkāśya is also emblematic. This state of liberation is called *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*. Edgerton defines *apratiṣṭhita* as "not permanently fixed," and explains that this is "the Mahāyānistic nirvāṇa in which the Tathāgata returns to worldly life to save creatures, tho remaining incapable of personal involvement in it."[42] In the case of Sāṃkāśya, of course, the Buddha returns not only to save creatures, but also to continue his 'ministry' and regulate his community. In an excellent study of the *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* doctrine, Gadjin Nagao provides wealth of citations from Buddhist literature, which show that for the Mahāyāna, just because a Buddha (or bodhisattva) has achieved nirvāṇa does not mean he is irrevocably and for all time fixed in that state.[43] But none of Nagao's citations describe this doctrine, in both its technical and emotional dimensions, as well as these two verses from Buddhabhadra's inscription on Cave 26:

> [The Tathāgata] has definitively conquered death &c., has won the state free of old-age and death, and has departed for the City of Tranquility --- which is blissful [and] free, [but] without a fixed location -- and yet accomplished the aims of living beings. That is why extolling [his] qualities is efficacious, [yielding] extensive and great advantage, and [why even] a single flower

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[42] Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 48a, s.v. *a-pratiṣṭita*.

[43] Gadjin Nagao. "The Bodhisattva Returns to this World," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991): 23-34.

> offered to him is a primary cause for the fruits known as heaven and final emancipation.

Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya are linked events which demonstrate, first the absolute supermundane range of a Buddha's power, and second that Buddhahood's perfection and liberation do not necessarily preclude the Buddha's personal accessibility. Above I used a passage from the *Lotus Sūtra* to show how an iconology associated with the miracle at Śrāvastī was appropriated by a Mahāyāna author. Whereas I have found no similar iconological parallel for the descent at Sāṃkāśya, the *Lotus*' tale concerning Prabhūtaratna, a Buddha who had entered complete and full nirvāṇa aeons in the past, can be taken as Sāṃkāśya's ideological parallel. According to the *Lotus,* "in the distant past . . . there was a Buddha called Many Jewels (Prabhūtaratna). Earlier . . . [that Buddha] took a great vow: 'If I achieve Buddhahood, and if, after my passage into extinction . . . there is a place in which the Scripture of the Dharma Blossom is preached . . . may my stūpa-shrine well up before it and bear witness."[44] In point of fact, Prabhūtaratna's stūpa contains his entire body in pristine form. And as an addendum to this vow, Prabhūtaratna also pledged that another Buddha could only show Prabhūtaratna's body within the stūpa to an assembly if and only if that Buddha were to gather all the emanations of his body into one place. The precondition for Prabhūtaratna's 'descent' from *mahāparinirvāṇa* to the mundane world is the display of a Śrāvastī-like miracle, demonstrating the universal scope, the unity and diversity, of Buddhahood. And just as the descent at Sāṃkāśya is a crucial event in the common biography of all Buddhas, so the meeting of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna was a crucial moment in Mahāyānist mythology. In fact, one of the few distinct iconographic references to Mahāyāna textual traditions at Ajaṇṭā may be an intrusive image of these two Buddhas teaching, seated side by side, carved in Cave 26's caitya arch (Fig. 76). This carving's standing bodhisattvas are a common framing technique, functioning as indices of

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[44] Hurvitz. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*, 184.

both sacrality and narrative closure.

The King is Dead, Long Live King Buddha

I introduced the preceding meditation upon the events at Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya with the claim that the Buddha at Ajaṇṭā may be understood, at least in part, through the symbolic associations attached to these paired performances. Through the following investigation we found that Lamotte's differentiation between 'rational' and 'supermundane' Buddhologies has a degree of value for the precise dissection of Buddhahood. But we also found that such philosophical niceties may not have been not very important on the ground. The narrative cycle of the Buddha's multiplication, his defeat of the *tīrthikas*, his disappearance, and his reappearance flanked by gods all reveal a single basic interest in the Buddha that is not easily delimited by such categories of explanation. Namely, one finds that this cycle shows Buddhists' desire to have their Buddha present and powerful. Perhaps more important yet, the descent expresses anxieties about the absent Buddha, and confirms that absent Buddhas can and do return: this return not only brings the Buddha back to his saṅgha, but also serves is a definitive moment in which the saṅgha, lay followers, and the cosmos at large is reconstituted with every person and group in its proper place.

Although the above exploration of Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya can assist in the recovery of Ajaṇṭā's Buddha there is still a distance to travel. The question remains of how these symbolic associations were manifest at Ajaṇṭā in particular. Let us begin this chapter's final third, therefore, with a suite of verses from Ajaṇṭā's programmatic donative inscriptions. First, a verse from Varāhadeva's Cave 16 inscription (verse 29):

> This cave-[monastery] . . ., which people -- their affection inflamed with joy and faith -- call [Śrī] Vaijayanta, was made in order to share in the felicities piled high in the brilliance of Indra's crown.

Second we read in the Cave 17 inscription (verse 9):

> [These] princes were the very image of Pradyumna and Sāmba. . . . The Elder *avatāra* bore sovereignty alone, the second the name Ravisāmba.

The third verse comes from Cave 26 and Buddhabhadra (verse 5):

> Gods' victories are reversed, for they are subject to adversity: even Śiva became glassy-eyed due to a curse, and Kṛṣṇa, though independent of [others'] will, fell to the will of death. Thus triumph the Sugatas, absolutely free of fear.

This trio of verses from three distinct donors are linked in their suggestive portrayal the Buddha as simultaneously a god and as a warrior; I say 'suggestive' for we have to read between the lines. To understand the example from Cave 16 thus, one must know that Śrī Vaijayanta was the name given to Indra's palace in Trāyastriṃśa heaven. Earlier in his inscription Varāhadeva described his cave-monastery as the "splendid dwelling for the Lord of Ascetics" (verse 22). By using the name of Indra's home for that of the Buddha, Varāhadeva is making a clear homology between the two figures, a link strengthened by Varāhadeva's reference to the "statues of Indra's beauties" (verse 24) and the monastery's rivaling the splendor of Surendra's temples (verse 27). Complementing his role as the lord of heaven, Indra was of course revered for his prowess on the battlefield.

Whereas Indra was the divine king within the Vedic cosmology, *purāṇic* Hinduism is best known for its elevation of Viṣṇu and Śiva as supreme gods. The Cave 17 and Cave 26 verses utilize this more current mythological paradigm for their characterizations of the Buddha. In the verse from Cave 17, this royal donor and his brother are themselves equated with Pradyumna and Sāmba. These two figures were part of a group of five members belonging to Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa's immediate family. Originally deified as heroes and known for their ability as warriors, Pradyumna and Sāmba had, by the Gupta period, come to be considered supermundane manifestations of the supreme Vaiṣṇavite deity

within the theology of the Pāñcarātra sect.[45] The use of the term *'avatāra'* in Cave 17's verse makes clear that its author intended the double significance of hero and god be associated with this king and his brother. When the sovereign *avatāra,* who was Cave 17's donor, vowed to become a Lord of Sages himself (verse 28), he ideologically subverted Vaiṣṇava claims to cosmological and soteriological primacy, setting the Buddha as supreme among heros and gods. Finally, the verse from Cave 26 is the most explicit. In good scholastic fashion, Buddhabhadra is carefully thoroughgoing in his subordination of both Viṣṇu and Śiva to the Buddha, whose victories are assured and who always triumphs.

It goes without saying, however, that the association of royal symbolism with the figure of Buddha was by no means unique to these verses from Ajaṇṭā. In the *Book of Zambasta*, for instance, it was written that while Śākyamuni was in Trāyastriṃśa heaven "Jambudvīpa had become as when no Buddha has been here, just like . . . a land where there is no king."[46] I will return to this passage below, for as one will recall, according to Spink's reconstructed history, the realm of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas in which Ajaṇṭā was located had become a land without a king upon Hariṣeṇa's death. But whereas a mortal king cannot return from the beyond, we know a Buddha can. Before exploring this line of investigation, however, I wish to elaborate further upon the more general association of Buddha and sovereignty.

In the chapter on Dharma above, I cited a passage from the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya which described Śuddhodana's reaction to seeing his son's retinue, comprised

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[45] For Ajaṇṭā, the significance of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism far exceeds the brief mention I make here. For an introduction to this religion's literature, theology and iconography see F. Otto Schrader. *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1916); Jan Gonda. *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism, A Comparison.* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976): 48ff; Doris Srinivasan. "Early Vaiṣṇava Imagery: Caturvyūha and Variant Forms," *Archives of Asian Art* 32 (1979): 39-54; and T. S. Maxwell. *Viśvarūpa.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[46] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 347.

chiefly of misshapen and ugly fire-worshipper ascetics. Śuddhodana pressed the Śākyas of Kapilavastu about their consanguineous relationship to Sarvārthasiddha: "If prince Sarvārthasiddha were not to have renounced [household life], what would he have become?" They answer, "A Cakravartin king." "What would you have become," Śuddhodana further inquires. The reply comes, "Followers." Thus Śuddhodana bids the Śākyas to act as his son's followers by becoming attendants to the King of Dharma as his monks.[47] Indeed, in the same way that it is *dharmatā* for a Buddha to perform a great miracle and to descend at Sāṃkāśya before he can attain nirvāṇa, so it is *dharmatā* that a being like Prince Sarvārthasiddha, born with the 32 marks of a great man, must become either a Cakravartin King or, if he renounces household life, a Unexcelled, Full and Complete Buddha.[48] This cultural assumption can readily explain the Śākya's near unanimous acceptance of Sarvārthasiddha's/Śākyamuni's temporal and spiritual supremacy.

Charged by Śuddhodana with divining his prince's destiny, brāhmaṇas augured that Sarvārthasiddha would become either a Cakravartin or a Buddha. In a sense, those seers' distinction was a false one. In a sense, Śākyamuni became both a Buddha and a Cakravartin. Buddhist writings on Buddhahood and Cakravartin kingship often blur the distinction between the two, drawing parallels between them on two levels, in terms of physical attributes and in terms of their social and soteriological roles. As we have already seen, the physical consonance between the Buddha and Cakravartin is couched in terms of the 32 marks of a great man. This physical equivalence is explained in the *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 3.97): A Cakravartin king differs from others kings in that the Cakravartin, like a Buddha, possesses these 32 characteristics. Buddhas and Cakravartins

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[47] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 200.

[48] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 49; Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadāna*, part 2, 94-5.

are physically distinct, however, in that a Buddha's marks are more visibly placed and more brilliant than those of a Cakravartin.[49]

In addition to these morphological details shared by the Buddha and Cakravartin while alive, the two are equated physically in that their dead bodies are treated similarly as well. Within the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, the Buddha holds that faithful brāhmaṇas and householders should worship of his corpse in a manner analogous to their worship for the body of a deceased Cakravartin king: the body is wrapped in successive layers of cloth; it is then placed in "an oil vessel of iron" which is placed within another such vessel; the body is burned on a pyre of scented wood; the bones are placed in a golden urn, lifted on a golden bier, and interred in a stūpa; finally, parasols, banners, and flags, are erected, the stūpa is carried in a great procession, and is honored, revered, esteemed, and worshipped with perfumes, garlands, flowers, incense, and music.[50] A second parallel is drawn between Śākyamuni as Buddha and Śākyamuni as Cakravartin when, in this same *sūtra*, Ānanda interrogates Śākyamuni as to why he chose Kuśinagara, an unknown back-water village, as the site for his *mahāparinirvāṇa*. Śākyamuni replies with a *jātaka* tale concerning his life as a Cakravartin named Mahāsudarśana: that wheel-turning king ruled from the grand city of Kuśāvatī, which was located in the same spot as the now poor

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[49] Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 553.

[50] Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. Text in Sanskrit und Tibetisch, verglichen mit dem Pāli nebst einer Übersetzung der chinesischen Entsprechung im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins*. 3 volumes. Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaten zu Berlin. Philosophish-historische Klasse Jahrgan 1949 No. 1 / Jahrgang 1950 No. 2 / Jahrgang 1950 No. 3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1950-51): 358, 360. For an English translation of the parallel passage from the Pāli see Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol. 2, 154-56. Note, however that the Pāli and Sanskrit texts do differ. See also Gregory Schopen's essay "Monks and the Relic Cult in the Mahāparinibbānasutta: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism." In *From Benares to Beijing, Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion*. Ed. by Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen. (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991): 187-201. In this article, Schopen treats this passage at some length, but ignores the differences between the Sanskrit and Pāli redactions although they would have important ramifications for his argument.

Kuśinagara. The importance of such physical equivalences between the figures of Buddha and Cakravartin are significant for recovering Ajaṇṭā's conception of the Buddha, since the most significant data at the site, numerically speaking, are the many iconographic representations of the Buddha's body.

According to the Buddhist "Genesis," the first king, the Mahāsaṃmata, of whom Sarvārthasiddha and Rāhula were direct lineal descendants, was elected for this honor because he was "the most handsome, the most attractive, the most pleasing, and the most eminent."[51] Within a karmic universe, physical beauty can be a direct index of spiritual merit and of social role. And thus as Buddhas and Cakravartins are virtually equal in terms of their physical attributes, so their Dharmas, their social and soteriological roles, are nearly parallel as well. To begin, both figures are described as turners of wheels: Buddhas turn the Wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakra*); Cakravartin kings, that of worldly power or state-craft (*ājñācakra*). The *Aṅguttara nikāya* of the Pāli canon enumerates five ways in which each rolls his respective wheel, citing the same five for both:

> Monks, endowed in five ways a rajah rolling the wheel (of state), rolls on the wheel by Dhamma, and that wheel may not be rolled back by the hand of any hostile son of man. In which five ways?
>
> Herein monks, the rajah, rolling the wheel of state, knows good, knows Dhamma; knows measure; knows times; and knows assembled men.
>
> Even so, monks, endowed in five ways, the Tathāgata, arahant, fully enlightened, rolls on by Dhamma the unsurpassed Dhamma wheel; and that which may not be rolled back by recluse, godly man, deva, Mava [*sic*], Brahma, or by any in the world. In which five ways?
>
> Herein monks, the Tathāgata . . . knows good, knows Dhamma, knows measure, knows times, and knows assembled men.[52]

Stanley Tambiah calls attention to the difference-in-unity of these two figures: the

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[51] *yo 'smākaṃ sattvo 'bhirūpataraś ca darśanīyataraś ca prāsādikataraś ca maheśākhyataraś ca taṃ vayaṃ kṣetrāṇām adhipatiṃ sthāpayema* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 15.

[52] Cited in Stanley J. Tambiah. *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): 44.

Cakravartin king's sphere of invincibility is restricted to human society; the Buddhas' laws are supreme over humans, social and extra-social, subhuman demons and superhuman gods, and even (to add Buddhabhadra's two-cents) Śiva and Kṛṣṇa. Tambiah calls further attention to the "simultaneously complementary and asymmetrical relationship" between Buddha and Cakravartin in a second passage of the Pāli *Aṅguttara nikāya*, where it is written that both are born to profit the world, both are extraordinary, both are worthy of a stūpa, yet only the Tathāgata is awakened.[53] Physically identical, the Buddha and Cakravartin differ in terms of the cosmological range of their comprehension and power. Rolling the wheel of Dharma, a Buddha establishes the ultimate, supermundane basis of the world's weal. Rolling the wheel of statecraft, a Cakravartin maintains and preserves the universal Dharma on the mundane plane.

Now before turning to Ajaṇṭā's evidence, there is still one more point to be made concerning the equivalence between the Cakravartin and Buddha. How can the differential identity between these two figures be accommodated to the Buddhology we have already explored at some length, i.e., the Buddha as a performer of great miracles and as a returner from the beyond?

The physical equivalences drawn between Buddha and Cakravartin fit into the conceptual space opened up by the Śrāvastī miracle. Not only is the multiplication of Buddhas as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven a *prima facie* expression of concern with the corporeal Buddha, but recall, the *Divyāvadāna* was careful to show that every conjured Buddha was physically indistinguishable from the 'original.' Now, the discourse surrounding the event at Śrāvastī places this ultimate expression of physicality within the context of a contest over power, spiritual and social, between the Buddha and his rivals. As the Buddha is known to be master of "the ultimate human state" through his bodily

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[53] Tambiah. *World Conqueror & World Renouncer*, 44-45.

display, so the Cakravartin king differs from other kings in his possession of the 32 marks. And as the Buddha vanquished the *tīrthikas* by acclaim, through force of his personal power without directly attacking against these enemies, so Cakravartins conquer lesser kings because those kings submit of their own volition. In Vasubandhu's words (verse 96): no Cakravartin is a killer; even [Cakravartins] who conquer through weapons never kill.[54] Accordingly, Cakravartins are properly said to be *Dharmiko Dharmarājas*: they maintain the political economy through the exercise of Dharma alone, without resorting to force of arms. Finally, an association can be made between the Śrāvastī miracle and the Buddha/Cakravartin homology on the social plane. I claimed that this event in Śrāvastī was symbolically important for Buddhism as a social institution because it legitimates the Buddhist saṅgha's affirmation as a group most deserving of lay alms and support. From the Buddhist perspective, a Cakravartin's reign creates a healthy environment in which the *bhikṣusaṅgha* may flourish, for his support of the monks is precisely what is meant by ruling through Dharma.

Turning to the descent at Sāṃkāśya, we saw that this event had two principle foci of concern: 1) the Buddha's absence and reappearance and 2) the maintenance of a unified and properly ordered saṅgha. The Buddha creates the *bhikṣusaṅgha*; the Cakravartin advances society by maintaining the purity and ranks of that order. Although Buddhist literature contains tales in which a Buddha and a Cakravartin co-exist, the Cakravartin ideal makes sense preeminently for a world in which the Buddha, having entered *mahāparinirvāṇa*, is no longer present. Given the acephalous nature of the Buddhist saṅgha, its lack of an intrinsic mechanism for determining orthodoxy or maintaining unity, and its historical tendency towards fission, only an extra-saṅghic

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[54] *sarve tu cakravartinaḥ*
avadhāḥ || 96 ||
śastreṇāpi jayatāṃ vadho na pravartate | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 553.

individual possessed of appropriate authority could be invoked to ensure the order's perpetuation and purity after the Buddha's death. Ideally, this individual would possess characteristics as similar to those of a Buddha as possible without, however, relinquishing the necessary means and authority to rule effectively. Moreover, because the Cakravartin's Dharma is ultimately reliant upon that proclaimed by the Buddha, which the *bhikṣusaṅgha* perpetuates through its conduct and practice, the Cakravartin's support of the saṅgha requires him to take an active role in augmenting and purifying that body, both through the regulation of monastic orthodoxy and through proselytizing. This aspect of the Cakravartin's duties is the point at which he approaches closest to the Buddha in the social and soteriological roles symbolized through the descent at Sāṃkāśya.

Returning now to Ajaṇṭā, let us consider how this complex ideology of Buddha-hood I have explored was expressed. To begin, let us turn to the central image in Cave 16 (Fig. 23). We saw in the first chapter of my "prolegomena" that Spink considered Cave 16 "the crucial cave" because motival developments therein provide a model for the site's overall development. For my purposes, Cave 16 is crucial because its main image is the first to represent the Buddha in an iconographic form known as *bhadrāsana,* i.e., seated upon a royal throne, his legs pendant "European style" (also called *pralambapādāsana).* Although the *bhadrāsana* Buddha figure was used sporadically in the pre-Ajaṇṭā Buddhist art of the Kuṣāṇas as well as at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, in these cases it was almost always used for depictions of the Buddha within biographical narratives rather than for free standing images that may have been the direct objects of individual worship. Similarly, Spink chronicles Buddhas painted in *bhadrāsana* as part of Ajaṇṭā's narrative murals as many as ten years before the realization of Cave 16's massive central image, which was the very first sculptural rendering of this iconographic form at Ajaṇṭā. In fact, according to Spink's reconstruction, Varāhadeva's original plans placed a Buddha seated in the cross-legged

lotus position, not *bhadrāsana,* in the central shrine; this plan was changed, however, in the wake of the hiatus of 472 and the massive disturbance it betokened. Varāhadeva's innovation soon became the rage. Most notably, the central figure sculpted on the Cave 26 *stūpa* was reconceived to incorporate this new position. Similarly, a majority of intrusive images painted and carved between 479 and 480 -- while the specter of civil war menaced following Hariṣeṇa's death -- represent the Buddha seated in the *bhadrāsana.*

Complementing Cave 16's (initially) unique iconography was this Buddha's unique placement within the cave and style. All other central Buddha figures within Ajaṇṭā's vihāras were carved in shrines and were set apart from their monasteries' principal space. In some vihāras, like Caves 11 and 22, the Buddha was placed within a separate chamber attached to the main pavilion; more typically the Buddha was twice removed, his chapel set behind a shrine-antechamber. By contrast, Cave 16's Buddha was separated from this vihāra's main space by only a pair of pillars. Thus, Spink describes Cave 16's as "a revolutionary new Buddha, authoritatively posed, and looming directly above the devotee, rather than set back within a conventional shrine."[55] And Sheila Weiner writes of this as "the most impressive and awesome of all"[56] Ajaṇṭā's shrine images; "compared with the other shrine images at Ajaṇṭā . . . there is a prepossessing and overbearing majesty to this figure that sets it apart conceptually."[57]

Why did Varāhadeva take the radical step of reconfiguring his entire shrine, both its Buddha and its architecture after the hiatus? Why did he chose the particular iconographic form of the *bhadrāsana*? Why did he set that Buddha so forcefully and majestically within the vihāra's principal living space? What was so evocative and resonant

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[55] Walter M. Spink. "A Scholar's Guide to the Ajanta Caves." Typescript.

[56] Sheila Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 69.

[57] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā*, 98.

about the *bhadrāsana* Buddha that this figure became an iconographic norm at Ajaṇṭā so swiftly after Varāhadeva's introduction of it as a hieratic, free standing, cult-image? To answer these questions we must consider a pair of circumstances. First there is the figure's iconology: the symbolisms associated with the *bhadrāsana.* Second there are the historical circumstances and political developments at Ajaṇṭā itself which made this iconology particularly meaningful for the local community.

Turning to the *bhadrāsana's* iconologic significance, one finds that the majority of this chapter has, in fact, been devoted to precisely this topic. The chapter's first half explored certain symbolisms attached to the Buddha. More recently I have tried to show how the Buddha can be homologized to the figure of the Cakravartin king and how the Śrāvastī miracle and descent to Sāṃkāśya can be linked conceptually to this bi-figure. Now I would propose that the *bhadrāsana* itself embodies this multileveled symbolism. Above, in Lamotte's discussion of the *Logion of the Lotus,* we saw that the lotus, and by extension the cross-legged lotus position, symbolically embody the detachment and tranquility of an Awakened Buddha. This is why the Buddhological paradigms Lamotte extracted from this *logion* were found to be not very useful for analyzing the Buddha of Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya. By contrast, the *bhadrāsana* suggests the "abandonment of this detached attitude in favor of action and manifestation," in Dietrich Seckel's words.[58] In point of fact, this position is generally assumed by art historians to have been introduced to India through the tradition of Kuṣāṇa royal portraiture. As John Rosenfield writes, "This formal and hieratic pose . . . occurred only once to my knowledge in Indian art before the Kushan period, but thereafter played an important role, imbuing sacred images with a majesty and presence lacking in the rather compressed outline of the regular ascetic seated

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[58] Dietrich Seckel. *The Art of Buddhism.* Trans. by Ann E. Keep. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964): 166.

pose."[59] In addition to this iconography's majestic presentation of the body, the accompanying details of such images also bespeak royalty: a lion throne with a wheel of law at its base,[60] attendants bearing chaurīs, the figure's feet on a raised pedestal (since a king's feet may not touch the ground[61]), and so on. Additionally, with two exceptions, Ajaṇṭā's *bhadrāsana* Buddhas are always portrayed with their hands in the *mudrā* of turning the Wheel of Law, an iconographic expression of supremacy shared (as we have seen) by Buddhas and Cakravartins. Indeed, Cave 16's donative inscription records Varāhadeva's awareness and explicit intention to exploit such regal associations for his central Buddha: Varāhadeva's vihāra was Śrī Vaijayanta itself, a splendid dwelling for an ascetic Indra (*yatīndra*).

Despite the spiritual majesty carried within the *bhadrāsana's* semantic field, this position was used for free standing cult figures only infrequently before Varāhadeva's innovation. In regard to Gandhāran art Rosenfield writes, "the European pose became fairly common, but it was reserved (with variations) entirely for princes, Bodhisattvas, and for minor deities -- never for the Buddha as a cult image until the third century and then only rarely."[62] Through the interaction of north and south during the Śātavāhana period, *bhadrāsana* Buddhas came to be sculpted in the monastic sites of Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. But, in these southern monasteries, as at Ajaṇṭā prior to Varāhadeva's

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[59] John M. Rosenfield. *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993): 186.

[60] See Jeannine Auboyer's two works ("Un aspect du symbolisme de la souveraineté dans l'Inde d'après l'iconographie des trônes," *Revue des arts asiatiques*. XI [1937]: 88-101 and *Le Trône et son symbolisme dans l'Inde ancienne*. Annales de Musée Guimet, Bibl. d'étdudes 55. [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1949]) for more complete renderings of the throne's symbolism.

[61] See Jan Gonda. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966): 21.

[62] Rosenfield. *Dynastic Arts*, 186-87.

innovation, this particular iconography was used for representations of the Buddha as part of biographical scenes rather than for free-standing icons. Complementing the *bhadrāsana's* patent royal valences, this iconic form possessed a centuries-long heritage of use in narrative depictions of the Buddha; Ajaṇṭā's murals predating the Cave 16 sculpture made wide use of *bhadrāsana* for portraying the Buddha engaged in his day-to-day interactions with both disciples and opponents. Seckel has observed that within Buddhist iconography in general "a symbol that had its origin and proper place in one of the biographical scenes may acquire a broader significance, and isolated from the original narrative context, may be use anachronistically -- or rather transhistorically -- in contexts where it seems to be out of place."[63] The Buddha in *bhadrāsana* turns this principle on its head. Unlike the *bhūmisparśa* Buddha, for example, which always has a single, fixed, and in a sense trans-historical referent, the *bhadrāsana* was not associated with any single event but with a wide variety of narrative circumstances; for this very reason this iconography was particularly well suited to representations of Buddha in his capacity as a living participant in human history. When this iconography was used for a cult-image, as in the rear of Cave 16, the canon of the engaged and active Buddha, pursuing the world's weal though his diurnal turning of the Dharma-Wheel, was therein encoded. But the Buddha's majesty was there as well. Thus, taking this interpretation one step further, the royal associations native to the *bhadrāsana* form itself may also be introduced within this web of signification, giving us the image of a Buddha who is not only operative in the world, but acting therein as a king, or rather, a Cakravartin. Here we reach the point at which theoretical musings concerning the *bhadrāsana* Buddha's nature may be linked to a consideration of the actual historical circumstances under which that iconographic form

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[63] Dietrich Seckel. "Early Buddha Symbols." In *The Image of the Buddha*. Ed. by David L. Snellgrove. (New York: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1978): 28.

was introduced and adopted.

Despite the commanding potency of Cave 16's Buddha, one cannot presume that Varāhadeva's innovation in and of itself had the power to transform Buddhist iconography at Ajaṇṭā. To complete the picture, this sculpture's appeal to a conception of the Buddha deriving from far earlier strata of the Buddhist tradition should be understood in light of the political and historical events contemporary with its innovation at Ajaṇṭā. As I noted above, Spink proposes that Cave 16's *bhadrāsana* Buddha and the pillared shrine in which it resides had not been conceived in their present form when Varāhadeva stopped the work on his cave in the recession of 468 and hiatus of 472:

> The style and iconography of the colossal Buddha proves that it had not been either carved or indeed conceived of in this form in the first phase of work. . . . It seems likely that the *original* plan was to include -- as in nearly all other caves at the site -- an antechamber fronted by two pillars with an inner image chamber beyond. . . . If we assume that the Cave 16 shrine was indeed to have had an antechamber, it is obvious that the excavation of the first phase broke off before the cutting of the shrine area had progressed very far beyond the two front pillars; otherwise the monolithic Buddha could have been placed where it is.[64]

Although Spink cannot eliminate the possibility that Varāhadeva did originally intend a *bhadrāsana* Buddha as his cave's central deity, let us accept his point that the evidence for a drastic revision of Cave 16's Buddha-chamber signals a similarly innovative iconography for the Buddha himself. Our present task is to understand why Varāhadeva might have pressed his workers to plan and execute these innovations.

Spink himself proposes a viable entre to an answer: "perhaps this shift [to the *bhadrāsana* Buddha iconography] can be explained in part by the fact that the pralambapadasana [=*bhādrāsana*] type projected a regal authority which may have been

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[64] Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," *Ars Orientalis*. 10 (1975): 158-60.

appealing in the anxious times which began so shortly after this image was completed."[65] More specifically, it would be better to view Varāhadeva's decision to adapt his cave's architecture to this regal Buddha in response to the events surrounding the Recession and Hiatus. As I discussed in the prior chapter on Ajaṇṭā's history, Spink suggests this catastrophic period resulted from a prolonged war between the rulers of Ṛṣīka and Aśmaka that took place in the Ajaṇṭā region; I revised his reconstructed history, suggesting that records from Ajaṇṭā and the surrounding territories may be interpreted as indicating that a battle took place between the two branches of the Vākāṭaka family, the Vatsagulma and Nandivardhana Vākāṭakas. Even if one does not wish to accept either reconstructed history, both being highly speculative, I have taken as a underlying principle in this dissertation that Spink's relative chronology is correct in its outlines. Thus, even if we cannot adequately explain the Recession and Hiatus, it appears that a catastrophe of significant proportions did affect Ajaṇṭā and its patrons, and that in the wake of that crisis Varāhadeva, the minster of Vākāṭaka Hariṣeṇa, reconceived his cave's central Buddha as *bhadrāsana*. Given this historical background, Varāhadeva's supposed decision to alter his *vihāra's* central image from *padmāsana* to *bhadrāsana* may be viewed as political a statement as it was religious. Devout Buddhist though he might have been, Varāhadeva was the minister of an overlord whose empire had just heard a disquieting knock.

In point of fact, I would suggest that politics, not religion, was at the heart of Varāhadeva's participation in the realization of Ajaṇṭā. Varāhadeva's dedicatory inscription impresses the reader less with his commitment to Buddhism or Buddhist ideals than with his desire to celebrate his own patron, Hariṣeṇa, and that patron's glory in terms which would have been appealed to that patron. Thus, unlike Buddhabhadra, who took a polemic line against *purāṇic* deities, and unlike Cave 17's donor, who ignored them

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[65] Walter M. Spink. *Ajanta's Buddha Imagery, Part I: The Main Phase (462-478 A.D.).* Unpublished typescript.

altogether, Varāhadeva adopted such figures and their associated imagery as the principle source for his verses' similes. Hariṣeṇa was likened to Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, and Kāma; the cave itself was likened to Indra's palace, and Buddha to Indra himself. Indeed, although Cave 16 was dedicated to Varāhadeva's parents, the inscription details Hariṣeṇa's imperial lineage and virtually ignores Varāhadeva's own. This fact is rendered all the more notable by Varāhadeva's having donated a second cave temple at Ghaṭotkaca, at which he shows himself an eager partisan of the Buddhists and details his own line of descent. The contrast between Varāhadeva's Ajaṇṭā and Ghaṭotkaca inscriptions suggest that Varāhadeva's personal religious beliefs and expectations had very little to do with the cave he commissioned at Ajaṇṭā. Instead, I would suggest that given Cave 16's position as the site's principle vihāra (at the time of Ajaṇṭā's excavation, one had to approach the caves from the river along a path that led directly to Cave 16), given its program of decoration, and given what we have seen of its inscription, Varāhadeva was acting primarily as a good minister when he undertook this cave. His assertion of Vākāṭaka hegemony over the site was not simply for the glorification of the Buddha but for that of his own patron, Hariṣeṇa. In this light, Cave 16's image of the Buddha as King can be viewed as something of a political allegory, interpretable as an icon of King as Buddha as well.

Yet, however effective the *bhadrāsana* Buddha was as a propaganda device during this moment in Indian political history, one more crisis was needed before that figure became widely accepted and used as a free-standing cult image. Spink's motival analyses claim that after the hiatus, patronage restarted at Ajaṇṭā in earnest, with the site's programmatic patrons each striving to realize the finest, most opulent cave he could afford. This fine, careful cave-craft suddenly gave way, however, to a period in which a torrent of rushed and expedient work was done in principle areas such as the Buddha shrines, while ancillary areas were ignored. This period lasted about one year, after which Ajaṇṭā's

programmatic donors relinquished their controls, initiating the "intrusive" phase. According to Spink, the event that ruptured Vākāṭaka society and occasioned the period of rushed work was Hariṣeṇa's unexpected death.[66] Whatever the actual historical occurrence, my reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history agrees with that of Spink in associating the end of Ajaṇṭā's programmatic period with the demise of the Vākāṭaka empire. Accordingly, by the time the intrusive phase began, we might assume that Ajaṇṭā's community was under a great deal of pressure without any hope of protection from a temporal authority.

In sum, let us compare this situation at Ajaṇṭā to that presented in the *Book of Zambasta*. According to the Khotanese text, when the Buddha went to Trāyastriṃśa heaven, Udayana lamented that the Earth had become as a land where there is no king. Whether or not this image may be directly apropos to Ajaṇṭā, the fear of anomy this text expresses is suggestive for the site's community. *Zambasta's* King Udayana managed his anxiety over cosmic anomy by commissioning the first Buddha image. But *Zambasta's* Udayana was only afraid that the universe as a whole had lost its Lord; Udayana maintained firm control over his own domain. Moreover, one learns from *Zambasta* and Hsüan-Tsang both, that the Buddha deputed Udayana's image to serve in his stead after the parinirvāṇa. Ajaṇṭā's community was beset by a problem the converse of Udayana's. One thousand years after the parinirvāṇa, Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* and *Śākya-upāsakas* were familiar with images as the embodiments of the Buddha's absent presence and present absence. As the temporal authority lost its power and social anomy threatened, Ajaṇṭā's community changed their Buddha by modifying his form. Through the *bhadrāsana* iconography, patrons at the site invoked the Buddha to act in his capacity as Cakravartin,

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[66] This is because Spink considers Cave 1 to have been Hariṣeṇa's personal donation, and Cave 1's motival development ends just before the period of rush began. That this cave was suddenly and unexpectedly abandoned is without doubt: within Cave 1 are several areas where individual figures within scenes half left in red crayon outline and half painted.

to maintain the Dharma and saṅgha at that time of crisis.