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The Techniques of the Narrative Representations in Old India

This paper aims to present the most specific characteristics of the narrative representations in old India with special reference to art in the kingdom of the Sātavāhanas, a dynasty which ruled in central and southern India between the 1st c. BCE and the 3rd c. CE, and had vibrant trade relations with Rome. In the final section new and little-known archaeological material will be presented.

The narrative representations produced in the territories of the Sātavāhana Empire were so well-designed and developed that some scholars have considered them to be models for Roman art.¹ This idea, which initially seems strange, is certainly worthy of further deliberation since the multi-scene Indian representations predate the Pompeian paintings and Trajan's Column. The exchange between Rome and India was certainly reciprocal: Roman bronzes have been discovered in the territory of the Sātavāhana Kingdom, and the 'Casa della Statuetta Indiana' in Pompeii owes its name to an ivory statue from there.² The narrative art of old India certainly deserves to be better known by the scholars of classical antiquity.

Buddhist art is much younger than the religion; similar statements can also be made about other religions of India. The reasons for the long absence of pictorial representations are not known so we can only presume that there was, initially, a preference for only mental visualizations. But even when the pictorial representations had been created and artists had developed great skills and could depict persons, animals, buildings and landscapes, some sort of difficult-to-define religious timidity still prevented them representing the Buddha. This continued until about the beginning of the 2nd c. CE; before that the image of the Buddha was replaced by symbols or by the sophisticated presentation of "empty space", where the viewer must visualize the image for himself (**Fig. 1**).³

¹ Ippel 1929; Wheeler 1969, 176 and references in fn. 86, cf. Schlingloff 1987, 242.

² Cf. e.g. Begley and De Puma 1991; Cimino 1994; Parker 2008 (with references to his previous research).

³ Fig. 1: Amaravati, 2nd c. CE, Chennai Government Museum, no. 20, illus. e.g. in: Stern and

For this artistic (or perhaps, rather, religious) phenomenon the term “aniconic art” is often used. The Buddha was apparently “too holy” to be given a shape. Interestingly, it is in Buddhism, which adopted Brahmanical gods as worshippers of the Buddha, that Brahma, Indra and other gods of the Indian orthodoxy were shown in art for the first time; it seems they were they were minor enough to be embodied. They appear at the side of the still undepicted Buddha.

Buddhism, unlike Brahmanism or Jainism, developed the cult of relics of the enlightened persons and the tumuli-like monuments, the so-called *stūpas*, in which the relics were enshrined needed to be embellished. The deeds of the Buddha in his last life and in his previous lives, the so-called *jātaka* stories in which he could appear as animal, god or human of a variety social statuses – everything that had lead him to attain enlightenment, demanded pictorial depiction. Producing illustrations was a quite demanding task, especially given that the range of narrative topics was so wide. The result was that Buddhist art developed very fast and took a leading role in the creation of narrative representations in India.

The earliest surviving narrative representations date from the 2nd c. BCE, the time of the Śuṅga dynasty, the predecessors of the Sātavāhanas. The well-developed representations, based on conventionalised rules, lead us to assume that the custom of illustrating the narratives was practised earlier but using media that have not survived. The best example from Śuṅga art appears in a medallion relief from the railing in Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh), today in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, inscribed as “the *jātaka* of the quail” (**Fig. 2**):⁴ it illustrates the following story. A mother quail appeals to an elephant not to trample upon her chicks and the elephant (the Buddha in a previous life) and his herd refrain from damaging the nest. The good elephant, however, lets it be known that a lone, unattached elephant is coming along behind the herd. When this one arrives, the mother quail appeals to him too to leave her young unhurt but he tramples the nest. This induces the revenge of the nearby small animals: a crow pecks out his eyes and a fly lays eggs in the wounds, poisoning his blood and making him sick with a fever. As the elephant wanders around, plagued by thirst, a frog settles itself on the edge of a high cliff and croaks. Thinking the croaking comes from the direction of water, the blind elephant goes over the cliff and plunges to his death.

In a masterly way the ancient artist was able to represent the entire narrative: the elephant on the lower right is the good elephant wandering with his herd,

Bénisti 1961, pl. 30a–c; Dehejia 1997, fig. 39; Gupta 2008, pl. 8; Miyaji 2010, pl. 9; photo Wojtek Oczkowski.

⁴ Fig. 2: Bharhut, 2nd c. BCE, Indian Museum, Kolkata, illus. e.g. in: Cunningham 1879, pl. 26,5; Coomaraswamy 1956, pl. 29, fig. 75; Schlingloff 1987, fig. 11 (drawing); Dehejia 1997, fig. 20 (drawing); photo Gudrun Melzer.



Fig. 1: Amaravati, 2nd c. CE, Chennai Government Museum, no. 20 (Photo: Wojtek Oczkowski).

shown behind him. The elephant on the left is the bad one; he is shown twice in the depiction. At the top we see him plunging to his death from the cliff and, below, the events that led to his death. The figure of the elephant is surrounded by the protagonists of four different episodes: under his back foot we see the bird he trampled upon, on his head the crow and the fly and, further up, on the cliff, the frog. The elephant is shown here once to represent four successive episodes of the story. The medallion represents altogether no less than eight episodes; it is a really impressive achievement, indicating not only the skills of the artists but also the ability of those who viewed the work.

They would comprehend the refined pictorial conventions being used, in which, although a person or animal was represented just once, he/it is understood, from the totality of what is depicted there, to appear several times. The early methods of



Fig. 2: Bharhut, 2nd c. BCE, Kolkata, Indian Museum (Photo: Gudrun Melzer).

pictorial representations on Śūṅga monuments were to be developed further under the Sātavāhanas in reliefs in Sanchi and Amaravati as well as in old paintings in Ajanta, and flourished also under the Ikṣvāku (3rd – 4th c.) in Nagarjunakonda and Phanigiri. The high point of the narrative representations in India are the paintings in Ajanta of the 5th c., the time of the Vākāṭakas and Guptas. In Ajanta, influences of Sātavāhana and Ikṣvāku art are clearly observable and the techniques of the narrative representations must be understood as a continuation of the developments of the earliest times.

Very few studies have had as their subject the theoretical discussion of early Buddhist narrative art. Two examples of note are Dieter Schlingloff's 1987 essay *Narrative Art in Europe and India*, the English translation of his *Erzählung und Bild. Die Darstellungsformen von Handlungsabläufen in der Europäischen und Indischen Kunst* published in 1981 and *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art. Visual*

Narratives of India by Vidya Dehejia, 1997, which is based on her 1990 paper *Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art*.

Dehejia's book, in which many of Schlingloff's examples and drawings are used, is the most comprehensive and systematic work on the subject; the examples are given in a pleasing chronological way and linked to archaeological sites, thus offering a thorough insight into the development of the narrative modes in India. Schlingloff orders his examples by reference to their similarities with representations from the prehistoric, Babylonian, Mediterranean and later European art, thereby working out the paths of the narrative depictions common to these very different regions and pointing out the peculiarities and characteristic that apply only to Indian art.

Dehejia lists seven modes of visual narrations: 1) monoscenic, 2) continuous, 3) commencing in *medias res*, 4) sequential, 5) synoptic, 6) conflated, and 7) the narrative networks. Schlingloff does not offer any organized list of modes but his descriptions of particular representations are often quite similar to Dehejia's. The terminology of both scholars is sometimes different but they often refer to the same phenomena; e.g., the mode of depiction of the bad elephant in our Fig. 2, which Schlingloff calls a 'completing way of representation' ("komplettierende Darstellungsart");⁵ while Dehejia uses the term "conflated mode of representation".

It is, though, worth pointing out here the differences between Dehejia's and Schlingloff's understandings of the narrative representations, as they seem to touch on the very fundamental nature of the Indian narrative art. The differences between these scholars' interpretations seem to result from their different starting points: while Dehejia analyses pictures, Schlingloff analyses stories (which are based on the principle of time). These different approaches lead to different explanations, as we can demonstrate by looking at what they make of the same illustrations, for example the relief showing the *Mahābodhi-jātaka* in Bharhut (**Fig. 3**).⁶

The story⁷ relates how the ascetic who, after staying for a longer time at the court of the king, notices the change of attitude toward him caused by the hostile intrigues of the king's ministers. He decides to leave when one day even the king's dog, who had always been friendly, barks at him. The relief shows the ascetic equipped for the journey, the barking dog and the royal couple trying to stop the ascetic. Dehejia⁸ sees the representation as a monoscenic mode of depiction;

⁵ In this case Schlingloff follows the terminology of Wickhoff 1912.

⁶ Fig. 3: Bharhut, Kolkata, Indian Museum, illus.: in Cunningham 1879, pl. 27.14; Bachhofer 1929, pl. 29.4; Coomaraswamy 1956, pl. 41, fig. 137; 1987, fig. 26 (drawing); Dehejia 1997, fig. 6 (drawing); photo Gudrun Melzer.

⁷ The relief was identified by Hultzsch 1912, 399; the story shows the *Mahābodhijātaka*, *Jātaka* no. 528, ed. vol. 5, 227–246; trans. vol. 5, 116–126.

⁸ Dehejia 1997, 10.



Fig. 3: Bharhut, 2nd c. BCE, Kolkata, Indian Museum (Photo: Gudrun Melzer).

genuinely taking what the relief shows: it is one picture. For Schlingloff⁹ the relief illustrates different episodes (“courses of action”, *Handlungsabläufe*), since time elapsed between the barking of the dog, which simply prompted the ascetic’s decision and his being on his feet, ready for the journey.

Other examples of the same principle are that for Schlingloff the representation of the stairs showing the descent of the Buddha from heaven depicts different “courses of action” since there is Buddha’s foot-print on both the top and the bottom steps and, similarly, in the story of the conversion of the ogre *Ātavika*, since the boy whose life the Buddha saved is represented in the relief twice: before the ogre took him and when he brings him back. For Dehejia¹⁰ both of these representations are “monoscenic”. For Schlingloff Indian narrative art is hardly ever “monoscenic” in the way that Dehejia’s understands it, because the narrative plot, being based on laps of time, is immanent in the representations.

The differences between the two scholars are also evident in their explanations of the pictorial principles of the multiscenic paintings in Ajanta of the 5th c., which

⁹ Schlingloff 1987, 248.

¹⁰ Dehejia 1997, figs. 8 and 166.

Dehejia terms the “narrative networks”. Dehejia¹¹ writes of one of the paintings that its “action moves across the 45 feet of wall in an unpredictable manner”,¹² even while accepting Schlingloff’s explanation of the paintings as being arranged according to the organizing principle of “spatial geography”.

Schlingloff’s elucidation of the principle of the arrangement of episodes according to their location¹³ deserves special attention and represents his outstanding contribution to knowledge in the field. When we understand this principle, the scenes do not in any way move “in an unpredictable manner” but appear where the viewer – who knows this principle – expects them to appear. The scenes are arranged not chronologically but grouped in units according to where the action took place; thus events from different stages in the development of the story can be depicted side by side as they belong to the same location. Schlingloff has demonstrated the principle on several Ajanta paintings and also on earlier representations which had led to it. Since the elucidation of even a single Ajanta painting, of around thirty scenes, would go beyond the scope of the present paper, a less complicated representation from the Sātavāhana time will be offered here to illustrate the principle of the locale of action. For the western viewer used to the chronological arrangements of the episodes the most surprising observation is when the events from the beginning and the end of the story are placed together. This can be observed, for example, in the old painting in Ajanta (1st c. BCE) depicting the legend of the Elephant Six Tusk (*Ṣaḍḍanta-jātaka*), where the scene showing the hunters being dispatched to the woods to bring the tusks of the elephant and the one in which they bring the tusks to the palace (**Fig. 4**)¹⁴ are represented unmediated next to each other.

The collocating of these two episodes is a good example of the principle: they are placed together because they both happen in the same locality, at the king’s court. For Dehejia¹⁵ the representation of the story of the Elephant Six Tusk (**Fig. 5**)¹⁶ is a particular mode of narrative representation which leads the viewer (who during the circumambulation of the cave must have started to see the painting from the left side) into the “*medias res*” of the narrative.

¹¹ Dehejia 1997, 27–30, 213–333.

¹² Dehejia 1997, 29.

¹³ Schlingloff 1987, 255–265; cf. also Schlingloff 2006 and its English translation in Schlingloff 2013, ch. 3, 91–96.

¹⁴ Fig. 4: Ajanta X, right-hand side wall, copy Griffiths no. 10A; illus. in: Griffiths 1896–1897, vol. 1, pl. 41; Yazdani 1930–1955, vol. 3, pls. 30–34.

¹⁵ Dehejia 1997, 18–19.

¹⁶ Ajanta X, cf. fn. 14; for the representation in Ajanta, a description, and its literary tradition, cf. Schlingloff 2000/2013, no. 7, vol. 1, 35–38 and in Ajanta XVII, Schlingloff 2000/2013, no. 28, 127–135, for drawings of the comparative representations in art cf. vol. 2, 21–23.



Fig. 4: Ajanta X, right-hand side wall, 1st c. BCE (after Yazdani 1930–1955, vol. 3, pl. 30).

Schlingloff analyses the arrangement of the scenes solely according to the locales of action and concludes that they fully correspond with the principle of spatial location of the “courses of action”, that is that the entire painting is arranged into two main units according to the spatial principle. On the right are represented events taking part in the palace and next to it, on the left, is the scene illustrating the journey of the hunter to the woods, and then the scenes played out there. The scenes are arranged in settings characteristic for the palace and for the woods, with no divisions such as frames or columns etc.: the episodes are indicated simply by the groupings of people and animals. One example from the developed Sātavāhana art (2nd c. CE, ca. 150 years after the Śaḍdanta paintings) can be given here (Fig. 5),¹⁷ without reference to the content of the narrative, in order to demonstrate to the viewer the typical use of these characteristics.

The newly excavated and still very little known reliefs from Kanaganahalli (Karnataka, dist. Gulbarga) give us several interesting examples of the techniques for representing of narratives in early Buddhist art. The reliefs of the *stūpa*, which was apparently abandoned after being destroyed by an earthquake, have been broken into pieces but are quite well preserved, in many cases in their entirety. The *stūpa* was covered with two rows of slabs decorated with reliefs of mostly narrative character: the lower row of ca. 1,5 m height was panelling on the drum; above the drum were positioned 60 uniformly made slabs of nearly 3 m height which covered the dome. Each of these huge slabs contain two narrative panels placed one above

¹⁷ Fig. 5: Amaravati, 2nd c. CE, Chennai Government Museum, no. 124, illus. e.g. in: Burgess 1887, pl. 8.2; Bachhofer 1929, pl. 113.1; Sivaramamurti 1942, pl. 32.1; Stern and Bénisti 1961, pl. 36b; photo Gudrun Melzer.



Fig. 5: Amaravati, 2nd c. CE, Chennai Government Museum, no. 124 (Photo: Gudrun Melzer).

the other, separated by appealing friezes with standing or flying geese; on their sides, the slabs have pretty pilasters overlapping the junction with the neighbour slab. Below both narrative panels inscriptions are inscribed, labelling the narratives depicted above. Sometimes one story is represented in several panels on up to three slabs, sometimes only on one panel, i.e. there are two narratives on one slab. The inscriptions use sometimes the word *upari* (above), refining which panel is meant. Unfortunately, even with the help of inscriptions, not all representations could be explained so far.

The slabs in Kanaganahalli, which were produced successively over a period of around 150 years from about the middle of the 1st c. BCE, include depictions that have counterparts in representations in other sites – mostly in roughly contemporary paintings in early Ajanta and reliefs in Sanchi and Amaravati – but they also contain really extraordinary topics, never again represented in Buddhist art. In this category are the inscribed depictions of the historical Sātavāhana kings.

The Sātavāhanas had their sanctuary in a cave at the Nanaghat Pass (Maharashtra, Western Ghats) where the inscribed statues of nine family members were discovered (today only the feet are preserved). From the inscriptions it is clear that the dynasty practiced the Brahmanical religion, so it is not obvious why we should see representations of these kings on a Buddhist *stūpa*. However, it can be taken for granted that the Sātavāhana supported Buddhism since the biggest Buddhist

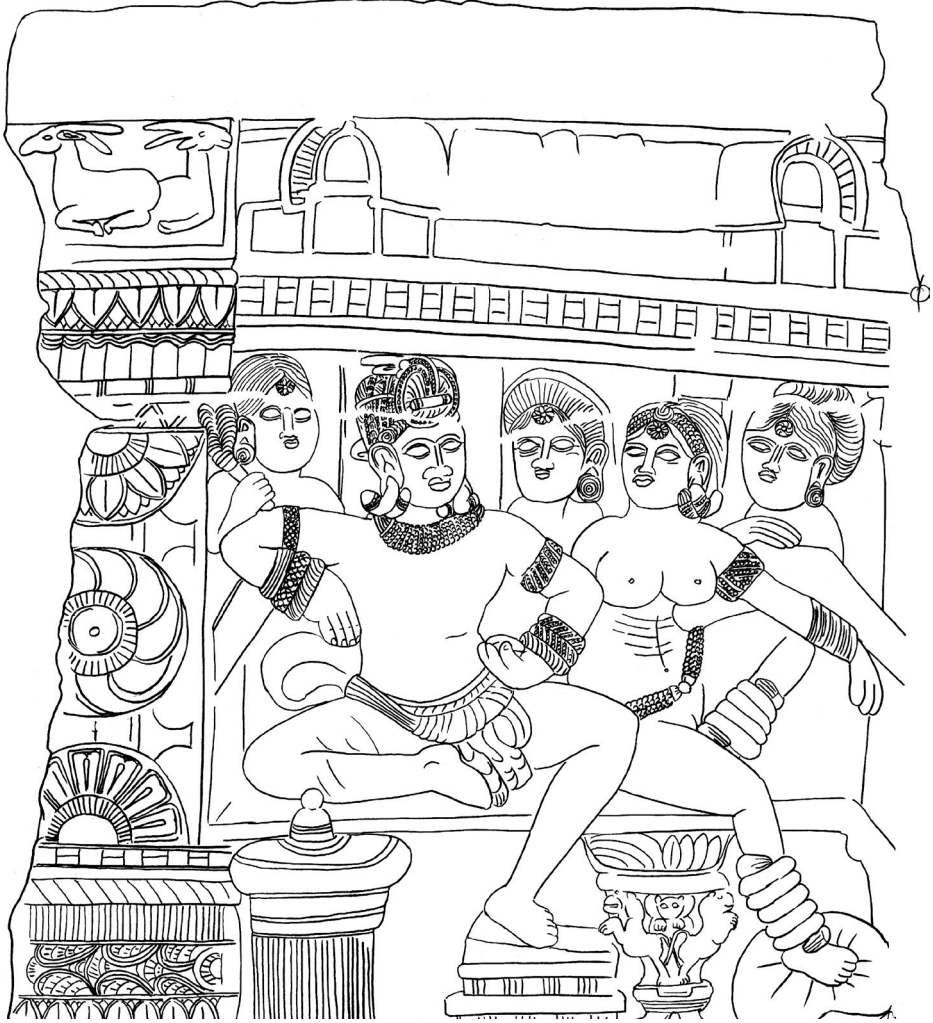


Fig. 6: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 58, upper part, in situ, 1st c. BCE (drawing: author).

sanctuary in their kingdom, the *stūpa* known today as “Amaravati”, which gave its name to the entire artistic school, was situated close to the capital of the kingdom, Dharaṇikoṭa (Andhra Pradesh, dist. Guntur). We can only speculate whether the Sātavāhanas supported Buddhism in a spirit of religious tolerance or of economical calculation, since the traders there were by and large Buddhist. It might well be that the representations of historical kings in Kanaganahalli among typical episodes from the life-story of the Buddha and the *jātakas* has something to do with the protective and auspicious role of the kings,¹⁸ but it is also possible that

¹⁸ Zin 2012.

the role of such depictions is not yet recognized. It is in one old Amaravati relief¹⁹ where on the side of two inscribed, multiscenic representations of episodes from the Buddha's life (the donation of the *jetavana* park in the city of Śrāvastī and a series of episodes illustrating final weeks before Buddha's death) that the city of Dharaṇīkoṭa is represented with inscribed names of public buildings. It appears conceivable that the inclusion of representations of historical kings was prompted by the wish to bring mythological events into the here and now. Whatever the motive, five of the kings are represented in Kanaganahalli, among them the founder of the dynasty, Śrī Chimukha Sātavāhana (**Fig. 6**).²⁰ One detail on the relief is especially important: the tiny stool with rampant lions has chair-legs; the piece of furniture has no equivalent in Indian art and the object is certainly of Roman origin. It is important when trying to understand the reliefs in Kanaganahalli to consider their original sequence on the monument.

The order in which the slabs appear can reveal their full content;²¹ and on several occasions the separate panels (not entire slabs) correlate horizontally with neighbouring panels. Unfortunately the Archaeological Survey of India is no longer aware of the original sequence of the slabs. In their official publication by Poonacha the slabs are ordered according to their content (*jātakas*, events from the Buddha's life-story in chronological succession, kings etc.). That this was not the original order is often evident from the simple fact that the slabs were always separated by one pilaster only (the slabs have pilasters on the right or on the left side and there are four "switching" slabs, two without any pilaster and two with pilasters on both sides); the slabs illustrating the events from the life-story of the Buddha ordered chronologically destroy this rule. In fact, the life-story started twice, opposite the southern entrance and at the northern entrance to the *stūpa* enclosure. To reconstruct the original succession of the slabs is extremely difficult; fortunately, it has been possible for the present author to ascertain the original sequence in most cases.

To give an example of their beauty and of the techniques of the narrative representations in Kanaganahalli one slab should be presented here. It is the slab with

¹⁹ Cf. Ghosh and Sarkar 1964–65.

²⁰ Fig. 6: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 58, *in situ*; illus. in: Aramaki et al. 2011, 90; Poonacha 2011, pl. 60A, fig. 48A = fig. 80n (drawing), 108; Zin 2012, fig. 10 (drawing); Zin 2016, fig. 14 (drawing); Zin 2018, no. 10 (10), pl. 6. For inscription cf. Nakanishi and von Hinüber 2014 (I.4, pl. 1), 29: "*rājā siri chimukasādavāhana*" "King Siri Chimuka Sātavāhana".

²¹ As demonstrated in Zin 2016, figs. 1–2 one relief in Amaravati (Chennai Government Museum, no. 160, illus. e.g. in: Burgess 1887, pl. 25.2; Bachhofer 1929, pl. 123.1; Sivaramamurti 1942, pl. 43.1; Dehejia 1997, fig. 136; Schlingloff 2000/2013, vol. 2, 13 [7] (drawing); Zin 2018, fig. 85) repeats three slabs from Kanaganahalli (excav. nos. 15, 17, 16, *in situ*, illus. in Aramaki et al. 2011, 65, 71; Poonacha 2011, pls. 95–97; Zin 2018, nos. 7 [22], 8 [23], 9 [24], pls. 12–13 [drawings]).

the excavation number 51.²² Fortunately, its original location and those of the neighbour slabs are absolutely certain; it was placed close to the eastern entrance to the *stūpa* enclosure. The inscription consists of two parts, the left-hand one, mostly destroyed, allows us to read just *kumāra a(?)*..., “Prince A...”; the right-hand part gives us *jātakam senakiyaṃ upari*, “the *jātaka* concerning Senaka above.”²³

The upper panel (**Fig. 7**)²⁴ was identified in 2011 by the present author thanks to a suggestion from Dieter Schlingloff. It appears worth repeating the identification here in order to demonstrate the relationship of the depiction with the textual source and the arrangements of episodes in the relief. The literary source of the representation is the versed part of the *Sattubhastajātaka*,²⁵ “the *jātaka* of the bag (*bhastā*, Sanskrit: *bhastrā*) with barley dish (*sattu*, Sanskrit: *śaktu*)”.²⁶

The relief depicts four persons, two standing, one sitting and one emerging from the foliage of a tree, a snake emerging from a sack and an umbrella. The person coming out of the tree is a tree-spirit, *yakṣa* (Pali: *yakkha*); it was generally known in India that *yakṣa* live in trees. The tree-spirit wears a rich turban and jewellery – this is how the *yakṣa* are represented as cult statues, so there could be not the slightest doubt that the viewer could recognize the *yakṣa* at once. The tree-spirit holds his right hand raised toward a man who is repeating the same gesture: they both are talking. The man is poorly clad; he wears no jewellery, his turban is unpretentious and close fitting. A cord, or rather a rope, is across his chest, resting on the left shoulder. Behind the man is the umbrella on the long stick

²² Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 51, *in situ*, illus. in: Aramaki et al. 2011, 87; Poonacha 2011, pl. 74; Zin 2011, fig. 6 (upper panel); Zin 2018, no. 14 (59), pl. 31 (drawing).

²³ Poonacha 2011 (no. 115), 465: “*Jātakam Senakiyaṃ upari* [I*] Sēnakiya Jātaka above (above here refers to the depiction in the register above).” no. 242 (not illustrated), p. 477: “*Kumāra a... Prince A ... (rindama?)*”, on p. 252 Poonacha gives this reading of the left side of the inscription: “*Kumāra A (rindama?)*”, explaining: “obviously referring to the main character in the Sonaka *Jātaka* narrated in the lower register of the panel”. Nakanishi and von Hinüber 2014 (III.1,1), 86: “*jātakam senakiyaṃ upari* ‘Above: Senaka-jātaka (Sattubhastajātaka).’”; (III.1,18), 91: “*kumār[o] (a)* [‘Prince A[rindama].’” explaining “If the reconstruction is correct, the inscription probably refers to no. 529 *Sonaka-jātaka* (Ja V 247–261) in the Theravāda *Jātaka-atthavaṇṇanā*”.

²⁴ Fig. 7: cf. fn. 22, drawing author.

²⁵ Only the verses (*gathā*) of the *jātaka* are old and belong to the Buddhist canon; the prose is several centuries younger: it was first composed in the Singhalese language and later translated into Pali. In several instances it is observable, however, that the details of the story given in prose are old since they are illustrated in old art. It is by no means certain that the reliefs in Kanaganahalli have the Pali tradition as their literary basis; as a matter of fact it seems not to be the case; the tradition is apparently lost, but many narratives have survived in Pali or Sanskrit sources. The inscriptions in Kanaganahalli label representations of stories which are entirely lost, like the Buddha on the “Khalatika Mountain” (old designation of the Barabar Hills), cf. Zin 2011; Zin 2018, no. 10 (25), pl. 14 (drawing).

²⁶ *Sattubhastajātaka, Jātaka*, no. 402, ed. vol. 3, 341–351; trans. vol. 3, 210–215.



Fig. 7: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 51, upper part, in situ, 1st c. CE (drawing: author).

and the upright standing cobra with open hood emerging from the bag. The poorly dressed man, whom we recognise from his close-fitting turban, appears a second time, with a rope on his left shoulder, wearing no jewellery: here he is talking to the man sitting on a chair, wearing a rich turban and ornaments and listening intently.

To the viewer who has ever heard the story, the representation must have been immediately understandable, as it is also for us after reading five crucial verses of the *Sattubhastā-jātaka*, which go as follows:

Thou art confused in thought, disturbed in sense,
Tears streaming from thine eyes are evidence;
What hast thou lost, or what dost wish to gain
By coming hither? Give me answer plain.

If I go home my wife it is must die,
If I go not, the yakkha said, 'tis I;
That is the thought that pierces cruelly:
Explain the matter, Senaka, to me.

First with many a doubt I deal,
Now my tongue the truth declares;
Brahmin, in your bag of meal
A snake has entered unawares.

Take a stick and beat the sack,
Dumb and double-tongued is he;
Cease your mind with doubts to rack;
Open the sack, the snake you'll see.

Frightened, 'midst the assembled rout,
String of meal-sack he untied;
Angry crept a serpent out,
Hood erect, in all his pride.²⁷

The first verse must be a question from the person named Senaka, the second verse is answer of the Brahmin who is of “confused in thought, disturbed in sense” and who repeats to Senaka the riddle he was told by the *yakṣa*: if he goes home his wife will die, if he does not go he will die himself. The wise Senaka understands the riddle at once: there is a poisonous snake in the man's food bag; if he takes his meal *en route* the snake will bite him, if he does not, the snake will bite his wife when she opens the bag at home. Senaka orders the man to beat the bag with the stick, after which the angry snake appears.

In the chronological order of the events, the dialogue between the tree-spirit and the Brahmin happened earlier; the dialogue of the Brahmin with Senaka later. The scenes are represented in a continuous way; both times the man carries the bag on his back – holding the cord crossing his chest – which means he is carrying the snake. The bag from which the cobra is emerging is, though, the end and culmination of

²⁷ Translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, *Jātaka*, vol. 3, 212–213.

the story “Angry crept a serpent out, Hood erect, in all his pride”. The representation of the snake in the bag is the iconographical signature of the entire story, by which the viewer would recognize it or perhaps it is also the content of the explanatory story given by Senaka to the man, which might also be depicted).²⁸ The role of the umbrella seems to be ambivalent: it apparently indicates that the man is on a journey and it also characterises him as a Brahmin since in reliefs wandering Brahmins are often shown with umbrellas.²⁹ The umbrella’s long handle, next to the bag when the text says “take a stick and beat the sack”, has these immediate connotations. It is entirely possible that such double and triple associations are not only possible but were deliberately used. To express such a phenomenon, which is to be met frequently in Indian art, the term *śleṣa* (literary: fusion, connection) is used which in Sanskrit poetics indicates the equivocality.

The lower panel of our slab (**Fig. 8**)³⁰ is much more difficult to explain: the representation does not include any crucial iconographical characteristics and shows an elegant man with his retinue. The preserved part of the inscription pronounces *kumāra a*, “Prince A...”, the assumption that the prince is Arindaman (cf. fn. 23) is, however, tenuous one.³¹ The man called “prince” in the inscription is adorned with extraordinarily rich jewellery: his earrings have in front protoms of little lions, his opulent necklace consists of three strings of pearls connected by rosettes and hanging chains. His turban is big and covers his ears, and his cloak is large and folded. The prince holds the end of a pretty belt holding his cloak, which he seems to be twiddling round, which gives him quite a nonchalant air. The retinue consists of three men; the tiny turban-wearer standing below somehow repeats the gesture of the prince while holding his right arm akimbo.

An indication of the explanation of the narrative is that all the persons in the panel, the prince and members of his entourage, are facing in one direction, to the viewer’s left.

As said above, the original location of the slab and its neighbouring slabs could be ascertained: to the left, slab no. 47 was placed below the panel containing the depiction of the prince and this helps us with the identification. A lady is depicted,

²⁸ The representations of the parable of the “Man in the Well” (the parable which spread to Europe, cf. Zin 2010) in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda are placed on the side of the scenes depicting the conversion of a king by a monk. The parable must be understood as the substance of the sermon given by the monk.

²⁹ Cf. representations of the Brahmin Jujaka in the Viśvantara narrative in Andhra e.g. in Schlingloff 2000/2013, vol. 2, 38–39.

³⁰ Fig. 8: cf. fn. 22, drawing author.

³¹ It appears that the entire interpretation is based on a confusion of the titles of the *jātakas*, *Senaka* (which is represented above) and *Sonaka-jātaka* in which Arindaman plays a role.

with her retinue (**Fig. 9**).³² Standing on the viewer's right-hand side, she is slightly taller and altogether more richly ornamented than her companions; she wears three garlands of flowers in her hair, fancy earrings, an opulent necklace of eight chains of pearls, her calves are decorated by spirals of six twists, her clothes are shown in big loops.

The ladies on the left, also quite well dressed, are just her companions or servants. One of them is waving a fly-whisk, another holds a luxurious box with a pointed cover. The lady rests holding her right hand upon the head of a pretty female dwarf, which gives her body a laid-back pose. The entire group is oriented to the viewer's right – looking at the “prince” in the neighbour panel. The scenes in the two neighbour panels are matched, the main protagonists holding in mirror-image poses (the position of prince's left hand holding the end of the belt now makes sense) with three attendants each. The inscription calls the lady *Suḍharasākiyānī*.

The term can be explained. The *sākiyānī* (Sanskrit: *śākyāṇī*) denotes a woman from the clan of the Śākya, i.e. the family of the Buddha Śākyamuni, while *suḍhara* apparently derives from *sundara*, beautiful. Sundarī, Beauty, is the name of Buddha's sister-in-law, wife of his half-brother Nanda; she is called in the texts *sākiyānī* and *janapadakalyānī*,³³ (“Śākya-woman, the beauty of the country”).

The story about Nanda and his wife, who will finally overcome their sensual love and become monk and nun, is transmitted in several literary works, including the famous Sanskrit poem *Saundara-Nanda* by the poet Aśvaghoṣa, and represented many times in art, including in Amaravati.³⁴ Possibly all these representations are later than our reliefs in Kanaganahalli. Perhaps this is why the later iconography of the story is not used here, and the narrative is reduced to the form, untypical for India, of images that are unexplainable without inscriptions. The inscription on the panel on the right confirms the explanation of the Śākyānī since Nanda was the prince; he was the crown prince after his brother left the life of this world. If the *a...* after *kumāra* is correct it could have stood for *kumāra ārya-putra*, “prince, the noble heir”, perhaps still with Nanda's personal name after it, or simply *kumāra*

³² Fig. 9: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 47, *in situ*; illus. in: Aramaki et al. 2011, 85; Poonacha 2011, pl. 121; Zin 2018, no. 15 (60), pl. 31 (drawing); drawing author. For inscription cf. Poonacha 2011 (no. 134), 466: “*Suvirā Śākiyānī* Suvirā with her friends (Suvira, the Śākya princess)”; in description and as caption of the picture “Suvira with his retinue”; Poonacha gives as the explanation of the relief a story of Suvira, summoned by Indra to fight against Asuras (after *Pali Proper Names*, vol. 1, p. 1265; Nakanishi and von Hinüber 2014 (III.2,28), 100: “*su(d)arasākiyānī*” “The beautiful Śākya woman.”

³³ *Udāna* III.2, ed. 22; trans. 40.

³⁴ For literary sources with analysis and the pictorial representations cf. Schlingloff 2000/2013, no. 73; Zin 2006a, ch. 9, 167–190, with drawings of all known depictions in art, incl. reliefs in Borobudur, cf. Zin 2006b.

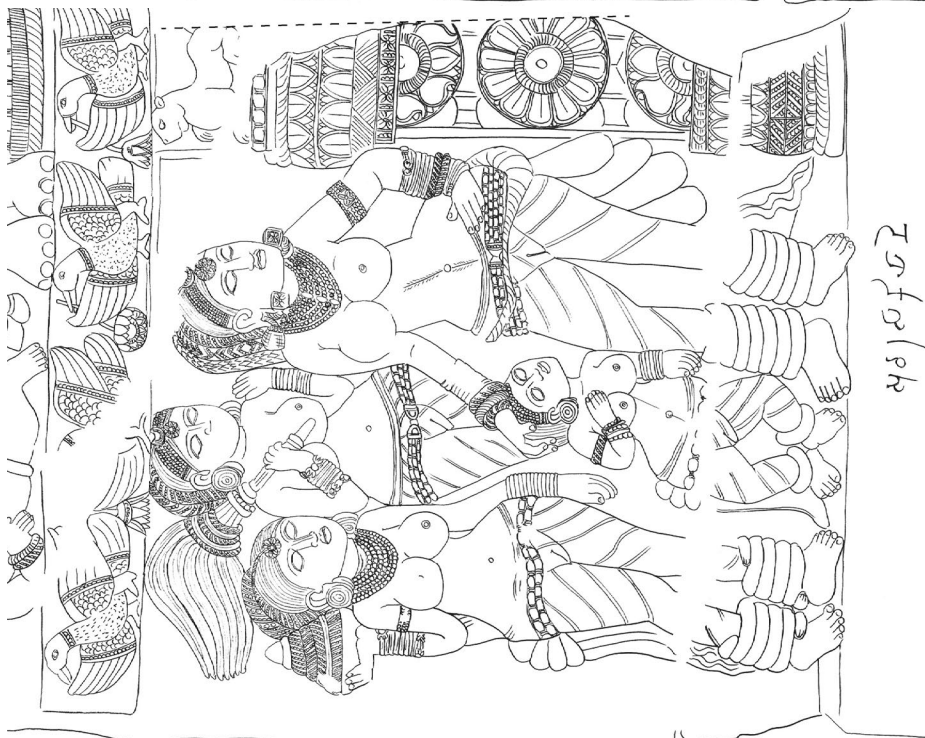


Fig. 9: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 47, lower part, in situ, 1st c. CE (drawing: author);
 Fig. 8: Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 51, lower part, in situ, 1st c. CE (drawing: author).

ārya Nanda, since the venerable monks (here the future monk) are honoured with the predicate *ārya* in Kanaganahalli. This example makes clear how important are the original locations of the slabs on the Kanaganahalli *stūpa*, it is to be hoped the Archaeological Survey of India will try to make use of the original sequence of the reliefs when re-building the monument.

The 60 massive reliefs in Kanaganahalli, as with hundreds of reliefs and paintings from the Sātavāhana time, testify to the developed, highly sophisticated methods and conventions of the narrative representations of the time. The labelling inscriptions are characteristic only of Kanaganahalli and the earliest reliefs; in all other cases it is only the skills and long-tested techniques of the old artists, making the stones tell stories that enable us to identify them.

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