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Wine-ewer, inlaid in reverse *sanggam* technique (ground inlaid with white slip), celadon glaze. Height: 34.4 cm. Koryo (mid-12th century A.D.). National Museum of Korea, Seoul (from the exhibition *Treasures from Korea*, British Museum, London, 16th Feb.– 3rd May 1984, cat. 156).

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"The village boys poke the Bodhisattva in the ears".
From the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra.* Courtesy Wellcome Institute Library, London.
See artical by D. Wujastyk, p. 189 and fig. 4).

Dominik Wujastyk

THE SPIKES IN THE EARS OF THE ASCETIC: AN ILLUSTRATED TALE IN BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

THE period of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) witnessed the flowering in western India of a distinctive school of miniature painting amongst the Jainas. A relatively large number of paper manuscripts has survived from the mid-14th century onwards, containing paintings which illustrate the lives of the Tīrthaṅkaras, founders of Jainism, and other saints and teachers of the Jaina faith, as well as some more secular tales.[1] Perhaps the best known cycle of paintings is that associated with the *Kalpasūtra*, a canonical hagiography and monastic rule, which starts with an account of the life of Mahāvīra. He was the promulgator of Jainism for the present age, whose birth is traditionally placed in 599 B.C. at Kundagrāma, near the modern Patna. A series of extraordinary tales is told of his birth and early life. After the death of his parents, Mahāvīra renounced the householder's life and sought spiritual realization. In the course of his wanderings and meditations prior to enlightenment, he excited both hostility and kindness from those who encountered him, and these incidents are indulgently portrayed in the paintings which accompany the text. One particularly bizarre tale, implicit in the *Kalpasūtra*,[2] but told at length by the 11th-century scholar-monk Hemacandra in his *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, runs as follows:

> The Blessed One went to the village named Sanmani and stood outside in kāyotsarga [a rigid vertical posture], absorbed in meditatiôn. At that time the feeling-karma, which was acquired in the Lord's incarnation as Viṣṇu, resulting from the hot tin poured into the chamberlain's ears, matured.
>
> The chamberlain's soul had become a cowherd there. He turned loose the bulls in the Master's presence and went away to milk the cows, et cetera.
>
> The bulls, roaming at will, entered the forest. In a moment the cowherd came and, not seeing the bulls, said to the Lord: "Devārya, where are my bulls? Why do you not speak, miserable muni? Do you not hear what I say or are your ear-cavities useless"?
>
> When the Lord did not speak, he became extremely angry and threw spears of kāśa-grass into the cavities of the Master's ears. He drove the sprigs so that they joined together and formed one unbroken spear. Evil-minded by disposition, the cowherd cut off the outside part of the pegs with the idea, "May no one draw out these pegs", and went away.
>
> Though he had the spears of deceit, false belief, et cetera destroyed, having the spears in his ears, unshaken from pure meditation, he (the Lord) went to Apāpā in the middle country. There the Lord went to the merchant Siddhārtha's house and he gave food to the Blessed One with devotion. A friend of Siddhārtha, named Kharaka, a physician, had come there earlier. When he saw the Lord, he, having an acute intellect, said: "Indeed, the Blessed One's form is covered with all the favourable signs, but it is evident from its faded condition that it has some foreign substance".
>
> Siddhārtha said hurriedly,"If that is so, look carefully at the Blessed One's body to see where the foreign substance is".
>
> The physician looked skillfully at the Master's whole body and saw the pegs in his ears and showed them to Siddhārtha.
>
> Siddhārtha said: "Who, unafraid of censure, not afraid of hell even, has done this cruel deed? But enough of talk about the villain. Friend, exert yourself in removing the Lord's foreign object, noble sir. I have great pain because of the object in the Master's ears. I can not endure delay. My wealth can go in this matter. If the objects here are removed from the ears of the Lord of the Universe, I think we shall be saved from the ocean of births".
>
> The physician said: "This Lord, enduring destruction for the protection of all, is indifferent to injury for the sake of the destruction of karma, not from lack of power. How can he, indifferent to the body, be cured who, eager to wear away karma, thinks pain a good thing"?
>
> Siddhārtha said: "What is the use of this talk of yours now? There is no time for this talk. The Blessed One must certainly be cured".
>
> While they were talking in this way, the Lord, indifferent, went away and stood in the garden outside, absorbed in pure meditation. Siddhārtha and Kharaka took remedies, et cetera and, hastening, approached the Lord in the garden. After

placing the Lord in a tub of oil and rubbing him with oil, they had him massaged by very strong masseurs. When the Lord's joints had been relaxed from the rubbing by strong men, the pegs in the ears were pulled out with pincers at the same time. The two

Fig. 1. *The spikes are removed from Mahāvīra's ears.* From the *Kalpasūtra*, dated saṃ 1569, A.D. 1512. Shelved at γ453. Courtesy of the Wellcome Institute Library, London.

bloody pegs left the ear-cavities, like the Lord's remaining feeling-karma in person. The pain from pulling out the pegs was such that the Lord uttered a terrible cry, like a mountain struck by a thunderbolt. The earth did not burst from the cry because of the Master's power. Even in distress the arhats [perfected souls] do not cause calamities to others. After healing his ears with a healing herb and bowing to the Lord and asking his forgiveness (for any fault), Siddhārtha and Kharaka went to their house.

Since they had caused the Lord pain with pure hearts, they became recipients of glory in heaven. But the cowherd had caused pain to the Master with an evil heart and he became the recipient of the pains of the seventh hell. From the Master's terrible cry, the garden was called Mahābhairava and the people made a temple in it.[3]

This incident is portrayed in some illuminated manuscripts of the *Kalpasūtra*,[4] and is illustrated here from two previously unpublished manuscripts in the collection of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.[5]

The first painting (Fig. 1) shows Mahāvīra in the *kāyotsarga* posture, staring resolutely ahead. On either side of him are two figures, Siddhārtha and the physician Kharaka, pulling the spikes out of Mahāvīra's ears. It is not clear whether they are using pincers as described, or just pulling the spikes themselves. Above their heads are dark blooms, suggesting the location in the garden. Below Mahāvīra's right hand is a pot, the "tub of oil" from the story. The cobra and the tiger are creatures from other stories of Mahāvīra's fortitude during meditation, the latter being one of the plagues sent by the jealous god Saṅgamaka.[6]

The next painting (Fig. 2) again shows a spike being removed from Mahāvīra's left ear; here it looks more as if pincers are being used. The figure on Mahāvīra's right appears to be touching his shoulder: this is probably meant to suggest the massage. The two

Fig. 2. *A spike is removed from Mahāvīra's ear.* From the same *Kalpasūtra* MS as figure 1. Courtesy of the Wellcome Institute Library, London.

smaller figures above are beating Mahāvīra with sticks. This relates to an incident during his journey through the country of Lāḍhā (i.e. Rāḍhā in modern West Bengal[7]) where the locals were singularly unfriendly. In the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, another canonical description of Mahāvīra's life, it is said that:

When he who is free from desires approached the village [in Lāḍhā], the inhabitants met him on the outside, and attacked him, saying "Get away from here".

He was struck with a stick, the fist, a lance, hit with a fruit, a clod, a potsherd. Beating him again and again, many cried.

When he once (sat) without moving his body, they cut his flesh, tore his hair under pains, or covered him with dust.

Throwing him up, they let him fall, or disturbed him in his religious postures; abandoning the care of his body, the Venerable One humbled himself and bore pain, free from desire.[8]

We shall return below to the significance of the fact that the themes of being beaten and pelted with dust, and of the spikes in the ears, are combined pictorially though separated textually.

Mahāvīra is seated on a green cushion, but the nature of the black, crescent shaped object below him is not entirely clear: it may indicate that he is seated in the tub of oil. The two smaller figures below may be masseurs, but this is not certain.

The last of the Jaina miniatures shown (Fig. 3) is another artist's interpretation of the same incident.[9] The figures of Siddhārtha, Kharaka, and pot, tiger and snake are now familiar. The deer above him seem to represent wildlife. The scorpion on the right is another of the plagues sent by Saṅgamaka. The creature in the bottom right hand corner is a dog; another stands by Mahāvīra's right elbow. These aggresive dogs were also part of the unpleasantness of the Lāḍhā region. Most people carried sticks for fending them off, but not so Mahāvīra. Furthermore, when he was attacked, the locals, far from helping, joined in by hitting the monk, urging the dogs on and making them bite him![10]

From these early 16th-century western Indian miniatures we now travel back in time over five centuries to a painting in a completely different tradition. In another previously unpublished manuscript, of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, we find the miniature shown in Fig. 4 (also colour frontispiece). The scribe of this Pāla Buddhist manuscript did give the date of copying, but unfortunately the figures are now lost. He does, however, name the reigning monarch Vigrahapāla. This is most likely, on palaeographical and stylistic grounds, to be the third king of that name, who ruled *c.* 1054–1072.[11] This manuscript is thus of some importance, since dated illuminated manuscripts from the Pāla school of north eastern India are rare. It is only the second manuscript from the reign of Vigrahapāla known to us.[12]

The manuscript contains 18 miniatures which are the usual cycle for the *Prajñāpāramitā*, showing the Jinas, or transcendant Buddhas, scenes from the life of the Buddha, and the divinities Tārā and Avolokiteśvara.[13] The scene shown in Fig. 4, however, seems to be unique. It is not known from other Pāla manuscripts, even the lavishly illustrated copy of the British Library (Or. 12461), which contains 69 miniatures.[14]

The interpretation of the painting was problematic until the connection was made with the ear-spike incident.[15] This story occurs, in a less elaborate form, in the Buddhist canon. Thus in the Pāli *Mahāsīhanāda-sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* we read:

I made a bed for myself in a cemetery, with a corpse's bones for a pillow, O Sāriputta. The cowherds came up to me, Sāriputta, spat and peed on

Fig. 3. *The spikes are removed from Mahāvīra's ears.* From the *Kalpasūtra*, dated saṃ 1560, A.D. 1503. Shelved at γ3. Courtesy of the Wellcome Institute Library, London.

me, covered me with dust, and stuck spikes into my earholes. But let me tell you, I did not experience the arising of any sinful thought about them. That is how detached I was in my behaviour.[16]

The incident is repeated in the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara*, in an odd variant:

Then the village boys and girls, cowherds and animal keepers, grass and wood gatherers and collectors of cowdung came along. They thought to themselves that the Bodhisattva was a dust-goblin (*pāṃśupiśāca*). They played with him, and covered him with dust. In the course of these six years the Bodhisattva's body became so rough, debilitated and weak that putting a sprig of grass into his earhole it came out of his nostril; putting it into his nostril it came out of his earhole; putting it into his earhole it

came out through his mouth; putting it in through his mouth it came out of his earholes and nostrils; and putting it into his nostrils it came out of his earholes, nostrils and through his mouth.[17]

Finally, a third version of the tale is recorded in one of the manuscripts which were accidentally found in a stupa mound in Gilgit, in Northern Pakistan, in 1931. It is part of the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, of the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins;

At that time, the village boys and girls came along and pushed spikes in and out of both his earholes. And into both ears they said, "Hey, we are looking at a dust-goblin! Hey, that's what we're looking at, a dust-goblin"! And then they threw dust, earth and gravel. But the Bodhisattva did not experience the arising of any evil thought about those village boys and girls, nor any sinful words.[18]

Clearly, this is closely related to the *Majjhimanikāya* version of the tale.

In the light of these passages we may now interpret the painting as the Buddha, before his enlightenment, sitting on a lotus in undisturbed meditation while the small figure on his left pokes him in the ear with a stick. The figure on his right may be hitting him or throwing dust, but more probably the poking-stick has just not been drawn in. Both the attackers are moustachioed and dressed in simple loincloths.

One more step back in time brings us to the famous caves at Ajaṇṭā, which contain some of the earliest surviving paintings in South Asia. In cave sixteen we find the scene shown in Fig. 5, and traced in Fig. 6. Of course having now familiarized ourselves with the ear-spike story and its portrayal in Jaina and Buddhist illuminated manuscripts, we see at once that we have the same incident here at Ajaṇṭā. The cows look on intelligently and most charmingly suggest the rural setting. The two attackers, as in the Pāla manuscript, wear simple loin-cloths and have long hair and moustaches. However, it is only very recently that this identification has been made.[19] In his standard reference work on Ajaṇṭā, Yazdani (following Foucher) fails to notice that the Buddha is being poked in the ears, and tentatively describes the scene as, "the merchants Trapusha and Bhallika of the legend, who offered honey and rice-cakes to the Buddha after his seven weeks' trance following the enlightenment".[20] Given the poor state of the wall painting and the obscurity of the tale in Buddhist tradition, we may not attach any blame to this mistake, the more so as until now the scene was not known anywhere else, and the link with the Jaina tale had not been made. Naturally, it is the Buddhist texts which primarily confirm for us the meaning of the scene. However, parallel treatment of the same theme by the Jainas provides a remarkable cross cultural confirmation. And we may be sure that the two traditions are truly connected, and not independent creations, because of the beating and dust-pelting episode. As we have seen, in the Jaina texts this survives as a separate story from that of the ear-spikes. Yet the two themes are combined pictorially (Fig. 2). In the Buddhist tradition the two incidents are always connected in the texts, but not in the paintings. This interweaving of themes points to a definite community of tradition. What is notable is that this community existed across such great barriers of time, space,

Fig. 4. *The village boys poke the Bodhisattva in the ears.* From the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, reign of Vigrahapāla (*c.* 1054–1072). Shelved at ε1. Courtesy of the Wellcome Institute Library, London.

religion and language. The artists portraying the episode are from Gujarat in the extreme west, the Deccan to the south, and Bengal a thousand miles away in the extreme east. They span more than a millennium in time and are exponents of different religions, whose texts preserve the story in three languages, Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākrit.

The nature of the connection between the different periods of Indian art is one of the standing problems of the subject. The art of Ajaṇṭā was created between about 200 B.C. and A.D. 600, and our image in cave sixteen is datable to either 464–470 or 477–479.[21] The Pāla school is thought to have ended in the second half of the 12th century, while the Jaina tradition of

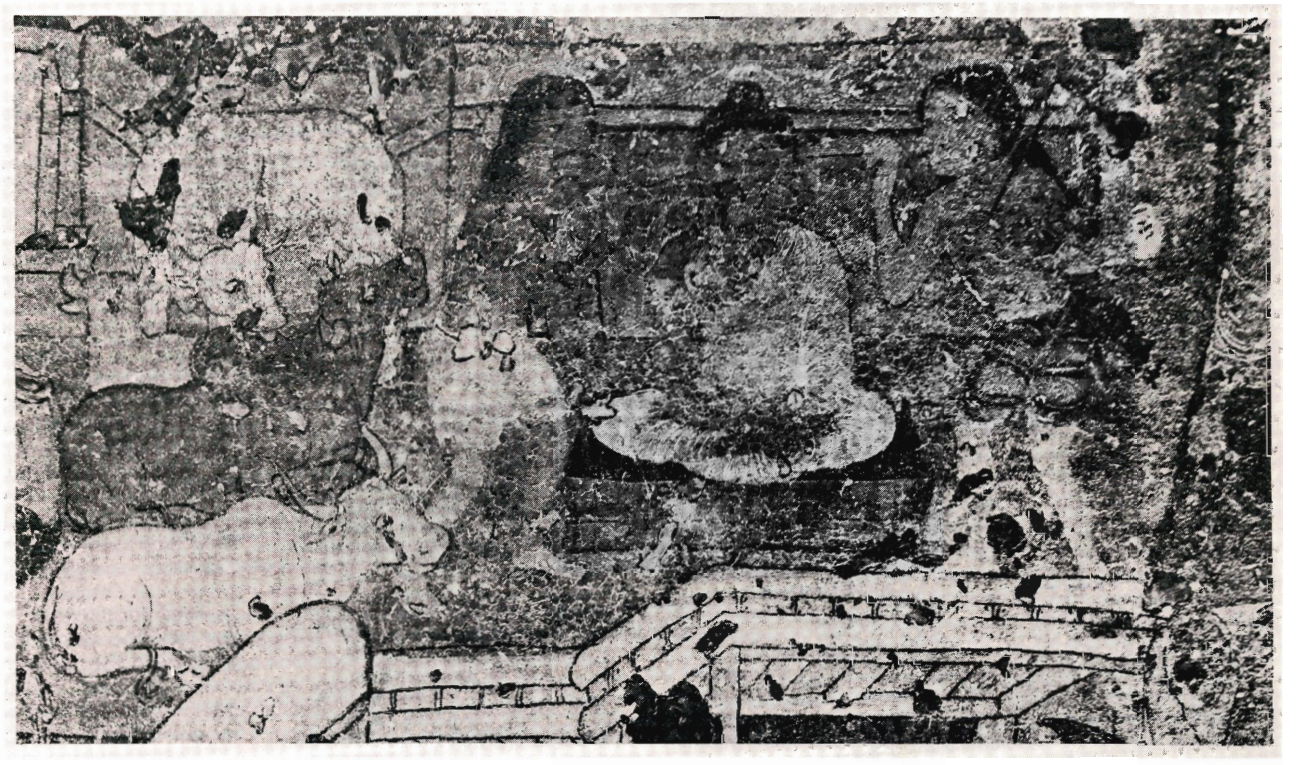

Fig. 5. *The village boys poke the Bodhisattva in the ears.* Ajaṇṭā, Cave 16 (*c.* 464–470 or 477–479). Reproduced from G. Yazdani, *Ajanta* (Oxford, 1946), pl. LIX.

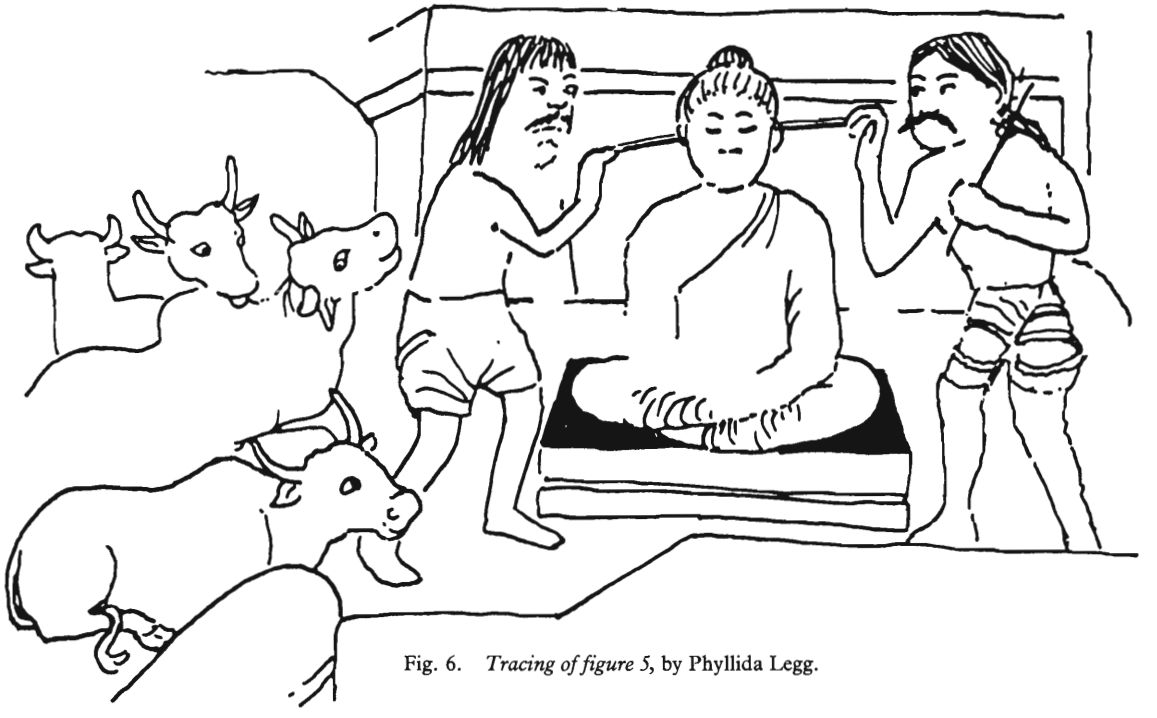

Fig. 6. *Tracing of figure 5,* by Phyllida Legg.

manuscript illustration is believed to have begun in the mid-11th century on palm leaf, while most paper manuscripts are from the 14th century onwards.[22]

The persistence of our theme from one tradition to the other across all these periods suggests that there was no complete break between them.[23] The full explanation for this persistence of tradition, and its mechanism, remains an open question.

NOTES

[1]This tradition can be traced, through a small surviving group of illustrated palm leaf manuscripts, as far back as the 11th century. Amongst the most important surveys and discussions of these miniatures are those of W. Norman Brown. For the present article see his *A descriptive and illustrated catalogue of miniature paintings of the Jaina Kalpasūtra as executed in the early western style* (Washington, 1934). See also Moti Chandra, *Jain miniature paintings from western India* (Ahmedebad, 1949); Sarabhai M. Nawab, *Masterpieces of the Kalpasutra paintings* (Ahmedebad, 1956); Moti Chandra and Karl J. Khandalavala, *New documents of Indian painting—a reappraisal* (Bombay, 1969). For up to date bibliography and many perceptive remarks see Jeremiah P. Losty, "Some illustrated Jaina manuscripts", *British Library Journal* (1975), 145–162, and *The art of the book in India* (London, 1982).

[2] *The Kalpasūtra of Bhadrabāha*, edited by Hermann Jacobi, (Leipzig, 1879), nos. 117–119. Translated by H. Jacobi in *Jaina Sūtras*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 22 (Oxford, 1884; reprint: Delhi, 1980), part 1, 259–262.

[3] *Triṣaṣtiśalākāpuruṣacaritra or the lives of sixty-three illustrious persons* by Ācārya Śrī Hemacandra, translated by Helen M. Johnson (Baroda, 1962), Vol. 6, 120–122.

[4]Brown, pp. 36–38; Chandra, *Jain miniature paintings*, pl. 159 and pp. 160f.

[5]For a survey of the extraordinarily rich oriental holidings in the Wellcome Institute see Nigel M. W. Allan, "The oriental collections in the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1981), 10–25.

[6]Brown, pp. 35–36.

[7]Cf. R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 25.

[8] *The Āyāramga Sutta of the Çvetambara Jains*, edited by J. Jacobi (London, 1882), pp. 45f., verses 9–12. Translated by H. Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, p. 85.

[9]The artist gives his name (on f. 235r) as Śubhaśīlagaṇi. It is extremely rare to have this information. If he is to be identified with the author Śubhaśīlagaṇi who composed works between 1452 and 1464 (see Maurice Winternitz, *A history of Indian Literature*, 2nd English edition, 3 vols (Delhi, 1972), II, 544) then the present manuscript, copied in 1503, would have been a pious work of his extreme old age. It is unlikely, however that a monk would himself paint.

[10]Jacobi, *Āyāramga Sutta*, pp. 44f. Translated by Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, p. 84.

[11]This date for Vigrahapāla is Majumdar's. H. C. Ray, *The dynastic history of northern India*, 2 vols (Calcutta, 1931), II, chapter 6, prefers a reign of 26 years: *c.* 1055–1081. Majumdar, p. 163, has argued that we cannot decide whether documents such as ours belong to the reign of Vigrahapāla II (*r. c.* 960--986) or Vigrahapāla III, since they ruled within a century of one another, making palaeographical judgements unsure. However, we believe the later monarch to be the one intended for two reasons. First the *Bhujmoli* script used in the manuscript is best known from the 12th century onwards (see Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1883), pp. xxiif., xxvi–xxxii). And although Losty, *Art of the book*, p. 30 has recently shown attestations of a formative *Bhujmoli* as early as 1015, a date any earlier than this is highly unlikely. Secondly, the new iconographical criteria evolved by Losty, pp. 25ff., for dating Pāla paintings, using stylistic innovations such as double halos and tilted throne-backs, would suggest a period after 1057 for our manuscript which has two double halos and one slightly tilted throne-back.

[12]The other is a *Pañcarakṣā* (BL Or. 3346), assigned by Majumdar, p. 163, to Vigrahapāla II. For a list of most of the known *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* manuscripts, see H. J. Stooke, "An XI century illuminated palm-leaf MS", *Oriental Art* 1 (1948), 5–8.

[13]See Losty, *Art of the book*, p. 20.

[14]See Losty, *Art of the book*, p. 33. Mr Losty has recently drawn the author's attention to two wooden manuscript covers newly acquired by the British Library which bear paintings of the spikes incident. Both are from the 12th century. Or. 14034 is Nepalese, Or. 14142 is from eastern India.

[15]I am grateful to Professor Oscar von Hinüber for pointing this out, and for forwarding to me valuable text references assembled by Professor D. Schlingloff, to whom I am also indebted.

[16] *The Majjhima-nikāya*, edited by V. Trenckner (London, 1935), Vol. 1, p. 79. My translation.

[17] *Lalita-vistara*, edited by P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga, 1958), pp. 187f. (Cf. also verses 32, 33, p. 189). My translation.

[18] *The Gilgit manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu. . .*, edited by Raniero Gnoli, with the assistance of T. Venkatacharya (Rome, 1977), part 1, p. 107. My translation.

[19]This identification is due to Prof. D. Schlingloff and will shortly be published in the *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*.

[20]G. Yazdani, *Ajanta, the colour & monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, part III, text* (Oxford, 1946), p. 62. For the reproduction see the folder of plates to part III, pl. LIX.

[21]Walter M. Spink, "Ajantā's chronology: The crucial cave", *Ars Orientalis*, 10 (1975), 144–170.

[22]Losty, *Art of the book*, pp. 22, 33, 43.

[23]Chandra and Khandalavala, *New documents*, pp.1f. have argued that the Pāla manuscript illustrators were not aware of the late Ajaṇṭā tradition, and had no influence on the later tradition of western India.