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Images of devotion and power in South & Southeast Bengal

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Introduction

The importance of Buddhist art in Eastern India from the 8th up to the 12th century has been recognized since the late 19th century as a major source of inspiration for the arts of Tibet and Southeast Asia. This artistic period has been associated with ‘esoteric’ practices and rituals and shows aspects which can differ from region to region over the centuries. As a matter of fact, Eastern India is a vast geographical area which includes Bangladesh and the modern Indian States of Bihar, Jharkand, Orissa and West Bengal. Bengal (Bangladesh and the State of West Bengal) and Orissa stretch along the Bay of Bengal, and the former region – in particular South and Southeast Bengal, an area which extends from the South of Dhaka up to Chittagong – was instrumental as the source of various aspects of esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

This art is usually labelled as ‘esoteric’ or ‘tantric’ and belonging to the Vajrayāna, and in inscriptions which mention them or in colophons of manuscripts which they had ordered to be produced, the Buddhists of Eastern India defined themselves as followers of the ‘excellent Mahāyāna’ (pravaramahāyāna)(see below). The creation and development of a rich pantheon of characters, male and female, from the 6th century onwards, culminated in 12th-century Eastern India. But how was it really perceived and viewed? What were its functions? And were all its different types of production, i.e. stone, terracotta, stucco or cast images, manuscript illuminations, cloth-paintings or murals, regarded in the same way, without forgetting that images could also be visualized? It is beyond the scope of this paper to try to answer these questions, which have already been assessed by authors in various different ways: for a long period, a major interpretation was the sectarian view according to which the images are seen as reflecting a conflict between the Buddhist community and brahmanical or Hindu society. More recently, ROB LINROTHE has put them in a new perspective, as reflecting or symbolizing philosophical or religious experiences. This should however not lead us to abandon completely the perhaps more basic interpretation of some of these images as in fact picturing deep tensions occurring between the different faiths existing in the region and which could surface and find expression in the art – thus acting as propaganda or helping to easing off the pressure.

If images could be appreciated from different perspectives depending on the social position of the viewer, they also most probably

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1 I am thankful to Christian WEDEMEYER and other colleagues for having replied to my query on the use of this term in the H-Buddhism Log for March 2012 (http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=h-buddhism&user=&pw=&month=1203); see also WEDEMEYER 2013, pp. 9-10.
2 Read LINROTHE 1999 for an in-depth study of the development of the iconography of wrathful deities and its subsequent periods.
3 LINROTHE 1990 summarizes previous views on the topic.
reflect on the situation of the monks’ community within the society. Due to the extremely rich amount of material, we shall confine our attention here to the material images.

From its very early period, the Buddhist community had entertained close relations with the royal power – as can already be surmised from the biography of the Buddha as recounted in the sources. This connection survived through all the periods and found echoes in the imagery which emerged and developed as a language not only used within the Buddhist community but also fundamentally aimed at the laity. In the course of time, this visual language probably acted as intermediary between the different social groups: for instance, the image of the Buddha seated in bhadrāsana commonly met with on the façades of excavated monuments in Maharashtra in the 5th and 6th centuries could convey different meanings when conceived, ordered to be done, and seen by monks and when seen by lay people. For the first ones it referred to the Sermon on Mount Meru – where the Buddha taught while seated on the throne of Indra, king of the divine universe, signifying the Buddha as a universal and divine king ruler over all gods of the brahmanical pantheon, and hence also his power over human rulers. For the latter it was an image showing the Buddha teaching, thus dispensing his wisdom to humans like them. I doubt that lay people could consciously have read more into such an image. However it is true that such iconographic features, i.e. a major character seated in bhadrāsana on a lion throne, date back to the early centuries of our era, when it was used in depictions of Kushan rulers; it is thus possible to argue that these features remained lying in the collective unconscious as partaking to the iconography of a ruler.

Images thus bear multiple purposes and meanings; understanding of them is at different levels, some conscious, which I would qualify as ‘exoteric’, some unconscious and to a certain degree ‘esoteric’. What is exoteric here is the immediate perception of the depiction of the Buddha, seated on a lion throne, with hands joined in a specific gesture in front of the breast, which leads to the equally immediate identification of the Buddha as teacher. What would be esoteric here is the unconscious knowledge that this image is an one of royal power. But what would be definitely esoteric is the perception of this as an image of a saintly man having become ruler of the universe since he could sit at the top of the universe, occupying the throne there, as we have seen, of the king of the gods. This, I would add, is an understanding of the image which was willingly used by the Buddhist community on the façades of their monuments in order to transmit a message of power to lay society at a certain period and in certain regions. This is not only the Buddha as a teacher, but it is the Buddha at the centre of the universe and thus teaching to the whole of society. This is of course not the use which is traditionally made of the term ‘esotericism’ in scholarly research, and one could argue that this interpretation actually concerns the symbolic message of the image. As a matter of fact, going beyond the materiality of the images – and this is the aspect with which we shall mainly be concerned here – a mental, non material, conception of the image emerges: the initiate creates an image which is part of an evanescent continuity and with which he identifies (sādhanā), or constructs a maṇḍala. Such spiritual practices have been described in texts, like the Śādhanamālā or the Niśpannayogāvalī: the rich iconographic material which they contain can help to identify, i.e. to name, images actually cast, carved or painted but we should never forget that these texts describe another, purely visual, category of images.

4 Verardi 2011, pp. 284-293 analyses for instance images of Cāmūndā clearly betraying features of aggression towards the Buddhists.
These texts were aimed at practitioners involved in spiritual practices and not at serving as user manuals for artists.

Turning to Eastern India, and in particular to Bengal, and thinking of the mainstream Buddhism which flourished in the 11th and 12th centuries in the region, we cannot ignore the particular position of the region, traversed by monks not necessarily adept in the Mahāyāna, not to speak of its late esoteric phase. This throws a different light on the point of convergence of all monks visiting Eastern India, i.e. Bodhgaya which was and still is today a place where Buddhists from all Asia meet. The main image of the temple was and still is venerated by Buddhists of every obedience, which implies that it bears different layers of interpretation, it can be Śākyamuni but it can also be Vairocana. And this may lead us to wonder about the context in which images of the Buddha noted in South Bengal were produced and worshipped – and above all is by whom (see below).

Buddhists excelled in the production of images of power. Images are basically of a material nature. They can, however, also be immaterial, such as those described in sādhanas, being created mentally and imbued with deep magical energy. These images have left no material traces, but being ‘esoteric’ par excellence were created by monks during their meditation. More than any material icon, a visualized image allows the monk to identify with the deity evoked,

Material images likewise become active when brought to life through specific rituals performed after being carved or cast by artists. Images, i.e. material images, thus always bear a grey area, an aura which is not materially perceptible but is nonetheless existent. Some images are more powerful than others; such are the cult images which are the objects of regularly performed rituals. Other images, e.g. those distributed on the facades of monuments, do not undergo similar treatment and their meaning is altogether of a different nature – they can, for instance, illustrate various aspects of the deity, i.e. of the Buddha in a Buddhist context; they help in defining the sanctuary as place inhabited by the Buddha, or/and contribute to reflecting the universal presence of the Buddha.

Bengal, an international region

There are different ways of approaching the vast topic which is the presence of similar Buddhist images in the countries bordering on the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. The relations between images and monuments dating back to the 8th century and later from Indonesia, mainly Java, but also Sumatra or Borneo, and the homeland of Buddhism were noted a long time ago, Bihar – more precisely the old Magadha – being considered to lie at the source of the ‘esoteric’ iconography noted in the South Seas. Recent research

6 BAUTZE-PICRON 2010a, pp. 33, 37-38 and passim.
7 Such was the case of the temple at Bodhgaya: before its massive restoration in the 19th century, stucco images of the Buddha – more rarely of Bodhisattvas (Mañjuśrī) – were distributed in the niches now occupied by stone images (CUNNINGHAM 1892, pls. XII-B, XIV-XV). Monument 1 in Nalanda also had its facades with niches containing stucco images not only of the Buddha, but also of Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, and this major difference between the two monuments (and sites) can be accounted for with the fact that the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgaya is the “house” of Śākyamuni par excellence; Mañjuśrī being an integral part of the Buddha iconography at Bodhgaya (see below), his presence among the stucco images is not out of place.
has, however, contributed to a more discerning appraisal of the situation during this fairly long period. Land routes within the Indian Subcontinent connected different regions and maritime routes crossed the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea in all directions.\(^8\)

Bengal is a vast region located at the convergence of different routes, from Assam and Yunnan in the East, Bagan and Arakan in Southeast, Orissa in Southwest, Bihar in the West, and Nepal and Tibet in the North and Northwest. It is also a region of transition between sea and dry land, between South and Southeast Asia, with inland ways leading to harbours like Tamluk or Chittagong which were connected with maritime routes along which merchants and monks travelled back and forth.\(^9\) Monks came from abroad to join the Mahāvihāras and participate in the teachings which were dispensed there,\(^10\) but also to go on pilgrimage to the places visited by the Buddha. They came from all over Asia but relations between the Himalayan range, Bihar and North Bengal were particularly intensive in the 11\(^{th}\) and 12\(^{th}\) century.\(^11\)

In this context, monks from various countries and sects converged in particular at Bodhgaya, which was at the centre of a centripetal movement.\(^12\) Conflicts between monks originating from Sri Lanka and from the Himalaya are evoked in Tibetan historical sources, reflecting conflicts between Theravāda and esoteric Buddhism.\(^13\) Similar conflicts seem to have arisen in Bagan during the early phase of the Bagan kingdom\(^14\) but from the second half of the 11\(^{th}\) century on, Theravāda definitely grew stronger than Mahāyāna there.\(^15\) The Bagan rulers took deep interest in the Bodhi tree and the attached temple, sending missions to Bodhgaya to preserve and restore the monument.\(^16\) In the reverse direction and as a final stately gesture vouching for the depth of the relation between the two sites, a copy of the Mahābodhi temple was erected most probably during

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\(^8\) See **Pande/Pandya Dhar** 2004 which include a number of papers dealing with various cultural, in particular iconographic, aspects shared by South and Southeast Asia.

\(^9\) **Mukherjee** 2011 constitutes an in-depth study of the position of Bengal within the Asian network.

\(^10\) Besides monks from Tibet – as one could expect – others from Sri Lanka professed their faith in Mahāyāna, i.e. esotericism; such was the case of Jayabhadra who came to study at Vikramaśila, for instance (CHATTOPADHYAYA 1980, p. 325). See also **FRASCH** 1998, pp. 76-77.

\(^11\) Some inscriptions inform about the movements of monks; see for instance the 9\(^{th}\)-century Ghosravan inscription mentioning the monk Vīradeva who originated from North-West India (SASTRI 1942/1989, pp. 89-91; **Bautze-Picorn** 2013 (in press), p. 163 note 4 for detailed references), the Bodhgaya inscription of Viryendra, native of Samatata (Southeast Bengal) and monk from Somapura (Paharpur)(DUTT 1962, pp. 375-6 with further references), the 12\(^{th}\)-century Nalanda inscription of Vipulasrīmitra, related to monks from Somapura (SASTRI 1942/1986, pp. 103-5; DUTT 1962, p. 376). For a study of the Bodhgaya inscriptions and of the international presence at the site, see **LEOSHKO** 1987, pp. 26-75.

\(^12\) **Leoshko** 1987, pp. 40-56.

\(^13\) Thus, the site was also visited and inhabited by monks originating from Sri Lanka; the existence of a Theravādin monastery in the close vicinity of the Bodhi temple is attested from the 4\(^{th}\) century up to the 12\(^{th}\) century (FRASCH 2000, p. 58 note 7; **FRASCH** 1998, pp. 73-74). The Tibetan monk Dharmasvāmin who visited the site in the 13\(^{th}\) century tells how he was advised by a śrāvaka to throw the manuscript of the Asaśāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā which he carried into the river and not to worship images of Avalokiteśvara or the Tārā (Roerich 1959, pp. 73-74). And Tārānātha records how ‘a large silver-image of Heruka … [was] smashed … into pieces … used … as ordinary money’ (D. CHATTOPADHYAYA 1980, p. 279).

\(^14\) **FRASCH** 1998, p. 78.

\(^15\) This does not mean that esoteric Buddhist monks were altogether absent from Bagan, but they did not hold a major function in the site.

\(^16\) As **FRASCH** 1998, pp. 78-79, reminds us, there were three such missions during the Bagan period; see also FRASCH 2000b, pp. 41-43.
the reign of King Nadaungmya (r. AD 1211-ca. 1231). Travelling all the way from Bagan up to Bodhgaya, pilgrims had to cross Bengal, leaving artistic evidence of various natures: bronzes cast in Eastern India were discovered at Bagan, and stone images of the Buddha discovered in Bengal illustrate an iconographic programme encountered in the murals of Bagan as well as sharing stylistic similarities with the 11th and 12th-century stone carvings from this site.

Beside this intense relation with nearby Burma, which is attested by various sorts of evidence, the region’s contacts extended beyond the seas. As mentioned below, Atiśa left his homeland to study in Suvarṇadvīpa where he remained twelve years before returning to the continent and pursuing his brilliant career; and in the 11th-12th century the worship of Heruka, so important in the Delta, found direct continuation at Padang Lawas, a Buddhist site in North Sumatra. Likewise, east Java established itself as heir to iconographic topics illustrated in Bengal in the 13th century.

The presence of Buddhism in the region is well-documented with sources of different natures, all showing how Eastern India in general, and Bengal in particular, held a fundamental position in the development of Buddhism around that period: many names of scholars survived in the Buddhist canon and the rich poetic work of the Mahāsiddhas was not only preserved in old Bengali but also translated into Tibetan. Concerned with the history of Buddhism, Tibetan authors furnish ample information about Bengali scholars and the monasteries built in the region, as well as the local rulers who sponsored donations made to the Buddhist community or were instrumental in fostering the foundation of monasteries.

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17 Frasch 1998, pp. 79-80; Frasch 2000b, p. 41.
19 Leoshko 1990; Allinger 2002; Lee 2009, figs. 24, 74, 82-83, 90; Huntington 1984, fig. 222-223; A. Sengupta 1993, figs. 54-55.
20 With regard to the names Hevajra and Heruka, see our note 15 in Bautze-Picron 2014 (in press). Mallmann 1986, pp. 182-186 considers the names as being interchangeable when applied to some images, including the one encountered in Southeast Bengal; Linrothe p. 250, and following him Lee 2009, prefers retaining the name ‘Heruka’ for the images under consideration, underlining that the name refers to a ‘type’ but also to the ‘ultimate krodha-vighnantaka’ depicted by these images. For sake of easiness, but not necessarily being correct in view of Linrothe’s analysis, I shall here retain here the name ‘Hevajra’ as in my previous study of the Padang Lawas material (Bautze-Picron 2014(in press)), aware that more attention should be devoted to the topic.
22 Shahidullah 1928; Moudud 1992; Dasgupta 1976, pp. 3-109; Jackson 2004 (with numerous references); Bagchi 1982, pp. 64-75. Mahāsiddhas whose iconography is well-developed in Tibet (Robinson 1979; von Schroeder 2006; Linrothe 2006) found only a (timid) echo in the artistic representation of the region; for an example showing Savaripa and probably from North Bengal or East Bihar, see Bautze-Picron 2007, p. 85 & pl. 10.9; for an individual portrait, probably from Lakhi Sarai: Bautze-Picron 1991/92, fig. 34 and Linrothe 2006, cat. 4 pp. 188-189. Siddhas could also be depicted on the outer surface of petals of lotus manḍalas for instance, see, for instance, Huntington/Bangdell 2003, cat. 68; Linrothe 2006, cat. 5 pp. 190-193; Weissénborn 2012b, pl. 52); emaciated ascetics, possibly situated in a rocky landscape, can be found in some stone images (for instance, see Fig. 4), a situation which might be related to the tradition of the Mahāsiddhas and of the Aris in Bagan (S. Bhattacharya 1994). An isolated and distant group of low-reliefs showing Siddhas and carved on the façade of caves is to be seen at Panhāle Kājī in Maharasthra (Deshpande 1986 & 1989).
23 See in particular Tāranātha (Chimpa/Chattopadhyaya 1980) and Sumpa (Das 1908).
As a matter of fact, and although these sources with caution must always be approached gingerly, they do fortunately provide information which is not available from the Indian side, characterized, rather, by a scarcity of written historical information. Due to the nature of the available documents – royal copper-plates ratifying donations of lands revenues – no details are indeed given concerning the real function or position of Buddhist monks at the court, or the genuine spiritual beliefs of the rulers. Data collected from local archaeology, epigraphy and art history, will be summarized here with a view to reappraising this part of the material, in placing it within its geographical and historical contexts.

**Political landscape**

Numerous inscribed copper-plates have been recovered throughout Bihar and Bengal; the information which they contain is manifold and brings light to bear on various aspects of the regional history, their main purpose being to record donation of land. They mention kings and their genealogy, name the recipient, and describe the land which is given. While naming the ruler who authorizes the donation, the text also mentions his religious affiliation: the Pāla, mainly ruling in Bihar, West and North Bengal from the 8th up to the 12th century, and the Candra rulers ruling in Southeast Bengal from the 10th c. up to c. AD 1050 are two dynasties who officially claimed to be Buddhist, the king being described as paramasaugata and the seal affixed at the top of the copper-plate bearing the Buddhist symbol of the wheel flanked by two deer above the name of the ruler.

**The Pālas** – However, when considering the recipients of the donation which these copper-plates record, it should be noted that they are very rarely mentioned as being Buddhist: of all the official inscriptions of the Pāla rulers, only five out of twenty-two concern a donation made to a Buddhist institution, all the others referring to donations towards Brahmins or brahmanical temples dedicated to Viṣṇu or Śiva. These five donations which were made during the reigns of the early Pālas (8th-9th centuries) are recorded in the two Nalanda inscriptions of Dharmapāla and his son Devapāla respectively, the so-called Murshidabad inscription of the first ruler, the Jagjivanpur inscription of his grandson Mahendrapāla, and the Mohipur inscription of Gopāla II, son...

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24 The presence of the Buddhist seal at the top of the copper-plates of the Pāla rulers and the fact that they label themselves as paramasaugata cannot be considered to be definite evidence of the affiliation of the kings to the last esoteric phase of Buddhism. As seen in the inscriptions also, the recipients or donators respect the “excellent Mahāyāna” (see below), and this is perhaps how they really felt. No local information is preserved which would vouch for the interference of monks in the royal function. Quite to the contrary, I would suggest that, at least in South Bengal – in the region of Vikrampur-Mainamati – these were the Brahmins who might have held a major position in specific rituals: remains of only one Hindu temple were recovered on the Devapavata, i.e. Mainamati, which recalls the situation encountered at Bagan from the 11th century on where we know that the Brahmans were involved in rituals related for instance to the foundation of the royal palace (see BAUTZE-PICRON 2009b, p. 434). An important piece of information is however given in a biography of Śākyasrībhadra (1140s-1225) who acted “as chaplain to the king of Jayanagara for some time” (Jackson 1990, p. 11; and p. 18 note 1 on Śākyasrībhadra’s date of birth) and had visions of Maitreya while at court (ibid., p. 10), Jayanagara being most probably the village of Jaynagar located South of Lakhi Sarai where 12th-century Buddhist images were recovered in large numbers (BAUTZE-PICRON 1991/92, pp. 239-41).

25 G. BHATTACHARYA 2000, pp. 441-442 lists 19 inscriptions. See the following note for the inscriptions regarding donations to the Buddhist community and which might have been discovered after the publication of BHATTACHARYA’s paper. See also SEN MAJUMDAR 1983, pp. 144-150.
of Śūrapāla, the second son of Devapāla – all donations thus made in Bihar and North Bengal. 26 Already in that period, the rulers might also have recognised donations made towards Brahmins or a brahmanical temple, a practice which was to be preserved by their descendants. At the same time, Brahmins also appear as lay Buddhist donors responsible for the production of manuscripts as shown by JINAH KIM.27

The official inscriptions of the first Pāla rulers reflect a continuous tradition of donations made to the samgha by the king but also by his subjects, the sovereign ratifying the donation of land-revenues for the upkeep of the institution while his subjects had provided the funds for the initial donation; Tibetan sources, however, mention that Dharmapāla had been involved in the establishment of the great monasteries of Vikramaśīla and Somapura (Paharpur, North Bengal),28 and seals were discovered in situ at Paharpur naming the monastery śrī-somapure-śrī-dharmapāladeva-mahāvihāriyārya-bhikṣu-samghāsya.29 The recent discovery of a copper-plate inscribed in the year 26 of the ruler’s reign confirms this link in referring to a donation of land plots for the upkeep of a community of monks at the Somapura-Mahāvihāra.30

Even though the eulogy may start with the evocation to the Buddha and the ruler mentioned as paramasaugata, its text reveals that the world of Hindu gods was an integral part of the ruler’s culture.31 In the case of the official inscriptions of the Pāla and Candra rulers, who acknowledge their Buddhist faith through the seal fixed at the top of the copper plates and this label as paramasaugata, we hardly find any mention of female or male characters of the Vajrayāna. This does not imply that the individuals involved in the act of donation were not aware of this form of Buddhism: Mahendrapāla’s army chief who had the monastery built for which the donation was made is named Vajradeva for


27 KIM 2013, pp. 236-47. It is perhaps within this context that one should consider the contents of tortoise-shell inscriptions discovered at Vajrayogini (Vikrampur): both the Buddha and Vāsudeva, i.e. Viṣṇu, are praised side by side (SIRCAR 1949; BISWAS 1995, p. 58). See also PRASAD 2011, p. 130, noting that in Southeast Bengal, donations were made to Brahmins rather than to Buddhist monasteries and that donations made to the monasteries had been done in a specific limited area; and PRASAD 2010 for a study of donors of images in Southeast Bengal who rightly remarks p. 34 ‘a general absence of donation of any Buddhist deity by any member of society in early medieval Comilla, Sylhet, Noakhali and adjoining parts of Tripura’.


30 G. BHATTACHARYA 1994 & 2000, p. 442 (quote after 2000). See FURUI 2011 for a reading of the plate and for discussion of the find-spot (p. 145): this was initially thought to be in the Murshidabad district but the author suggests that – considering the information given in the inscription – it must have originated further North (South Dinajpur district in West Bengal; Dinajpur or Bogra districts in Bangladesh).

31 Let us briefly observe that, as one could expect (see BAUTZE-PICRON 2010a, p. 39 note 91), it is the Vaiśnava mythology which is predominant in all inscriptions, with numerous analogies being drawn between the king and the god. The transition from one belief to the other at this “official” level is made during the rule of the Candras in South Bengal (see below).
instance.\textsuperscript{32} In the Devapāla Nalanda, the Mahendrapāla Jagjivanpur and the Gopāla II Mohipur inscriptions, the donations were similarly made “for the worship, copying etc. accordingly of the lord Buddha-bhaṭṭaraka, of the abode of all the leading virtues like the prajñāpāramitā etc., of the multitude of the noble Avaivarttika Bodhisattvas, (and) for garments, food, lying and sitting accommodation, meditation and personal belongings etc. of the community of noble Buddhist monks (belonging to the) Eight classes of great personages (and) for repairing work (of the monastery) when damaged and broken…”\textsuperscript{33}

Southeast Bengal – Turning, now, to the inscriptions from Southeast Bengal, from the 35 which Swapna Bhattacharya had collected in 1985 in her study of the epigraphic material from Bengal and Bihar\textsuperscript{34} and which were found in this region – from Faridpur district up to Chittagong, most having been discovered in Mainamati and the area of Vikramapur –, only nine refer to a Buddhist recipient, all other beneficiaries being Brahmins.\textsuperscript{35} As mentioned above, the Candras who ruled from Vikramapur in the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} centuries\textsuperscript{36} claimed to be paramasaǔgata and had the Buddhist seal affixed at the top of their copper-plates with their names inscribed on it below the dharmacakra flanked

\textsuperscript{32} G. Bhattacharya 2000, p. 436.

\textsuperscript{33} G. Bhattacharya 2000, p. 444-445 who remarks how similar the formulation is between the Nalanda and Jagjivanpur texts. Bhattacharya translates with “noble Buddhist monks (belonging to the) Eight classes of great personages” aṣṭamahāpurusapudgalāryaḥbhikṣu samghasya. See also Mukherji 1992, p. 172 (but correct his translation). Furui 2008, p. 70 writes: “… making the grant …. To the Buddha, the abode (sthāna) of all Dharmanetrīs beginning with the Prajñāpāramitā, a group (gana) of non-returning (avaivarttika) Bodhisattvas, and to the bhikṣu-samgha as an embodiment of the eight great persons (aṣṭa-ārya-purusa)… according to their ranks. This was for the following purpose: worship, offerings and rituals…” I wish to quote here an e-mail by Peter Skilling, dated March 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2009 replying to a question formulated by myself: “Avaivartaka is a quality of a bodhisattva, usually connected with the eighth stage (bhūmi) - a significant point because he cannot turn back, but must go on to full awakening … One interesting thing about the inscriptions - only a handful, which belong to the Pāla period in Eastern India - is that they seem to take us from the ideal world of the texts - in which the ascent though the bhūmis takes many lifetimes - to the “real world” community of the monks, the samgha. Usually the inscriptions record donations to the “mahāyaniaka-avaivartaka-bhikṣu-samgha” - the community of avaivartaka Mahāyāna monks. In at least one case, the compound is preceded by the “eight noble individuals” (aṣṭa-ārya-pudgala) or similar terminology of Śrāvakā attainments (sorry, I do not have the inscriptions to hand). The question is: were the monks of the viharas in question actually regarded as having these attainments? Did they so proclaim themselves? Usually Buddhist tradition is discreet - or in some contexts restrained by Vinaya - about proclaiming one’s spiritual achievements. Or is the phrase simply a rhetoric that expresses the perceived worthiness of the recipients of dāna by the donor(s), or, more properly, by the eulogist(s)? In any case the term does not mean “the Mahāyāna Avaivartaka Buddhist sect” as it has sometimes been translated. In fact, the inscription(s) that mention the āryapudgala and the avaivartaka in the same breath are good examples for the fact that Śrāvakayāna (Hinayāna, if one likes) and Mahāyāna lived under the same monastic roof and shared the same ideological bed. Again the idea of “sect” is quite inappropriate.”

\textsuperscript{34} S. Bhattacharya 1985, pp. 150-161. More copper-plates have been discovered since S. Bhattacharya submitted her Ph.D., but their content does not invalidate the observations based on her list. Importance is to be attributed to the content of the mid-9\textsuperscript{th} c. inscription discovered at Jagjivanpur, a site located in Malda district, West Bengal: it records a donation made towards the Nandadīrghika Udṛanga Mahaviḥāra by Mahendrapāla’s general Vajradeva for the worship of (Buddhist) deities, the performance of rituals including the copying of manuscripts (G. Bhattacharya 1992).

\textsuperscript{35} Furui 2013 for a study of the position of the Brahmins in Bengal. However, this is not decisive with regard to the situation of Buddhism among the society: Brahmins could also be Buddhist and commission the production of manuscripts, see Kim 2013, pp. 238-240.

\textsuperscript{36} See S. Bhattacharya 1985, pp. 125-6 & 154-6, inscriptions n° 38-50. See also Biswas 1995, pp. 11-26 for a presentation of the history of the region.
by the deer.\textsuperscript{37} All inscriptions of Śrīcandra start with devotion being paid to the Jina, i.e. the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha,\textsuperscript{38} whereas his grandson Laḍahacandra (1000-1020) claims his affiliation to Viṣṇu although preserving the Buddhist seal affixed on his copper-plates.\textsuperscript{39} As to Laḍahacandra’s successor, Govindacandra, he also preserves the seal and is named paramasaugata, but the content of his inscription is completely brahmanical.\textsuperscript{40} From around the middle of the eleventh century, the Candras were followed by the paramavaṅnava Varmans who also ruled from Vikramapura\textsuperscript{41} and at a still later period, the site became the capital of the Senas, themselves devotees of Sadāśiva.

A clear shift in the religious affiliation of the rulers thus took place towards 1050 in the region.\textsuperscript{42} The Buddhist community could still, however, enjoy a royal support in the region of Comilla at a later period: an inscription dated 1141 Śaka, i.e. AD 1219, was incised in the 17\textsuperscript{th} regnal year of Rānavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva who claimed to be Buddhist; the inscription confirms the donation of land for the upkeep of a vihāra erected in the city of Paṭṭikerā and dedicated to Durgottārā.\textsuperscript{35} As a matter of fact and although no major donation to the Buddhist community can be anymore ascribed to a ruler afterwards, Buddhism remained present in Paṭṭikerā, a region which entertained close contacts with nearby Bagan.\textsuperscript{44} And in an inscription dated 1158 Śaka, i.e. AD 1236, Gautamadatta, minister of the vaiṣṇava ruler Dāmodaradeva, was “said to be ‘devoted to the feet of Śrī-Gautama’”.\textsuperscript{45}

As we will see below, even in the absence of royal patronage, the Buddhist community was active in the region, with manuscripts being produced around the beginning of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century (Figs. 18-20). Political relations and trade with the neighbouring kingdom of Bagan also characterize this period,\textsuperscript{46} these connections being part of a wider network linking Bagan to Bodhgaya where the Burmese undertook restorations of the temple.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{Lay practitioners and their manuscripts}

From the numerous manuscripts produced during this period, many are richly illustrated with images of male and female characters, many described in texts such as the Sādhanamālā. Few colophons give any information as to the place of production; when given, this site is often said to be Nalanda whereas a number of manuscripts were

\begin{flushleft}
37 \textsc{Sircar} 1973, pp. 20, 51.  
38 Idem, p. 51.  
40 \textsc{Sircar} 1969-1970, p. 199; \textsc{Sircar} 1973, pp. 49-51, 54-55; S. \textsc{Ghosh} 2008-2009, pp. 112-113; \textsc{Prasad} 2011, p. 129 suggests ‘a gradual loss of Buddhist hegemony in Samatata’ in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century.  
41 \textsc{Majumdar} 1971, pp. 197-204.  
42 For a survey on the ‘Religious condition of Vanga and Samatata’, see \textsc{Biswa}s 1995, pp. 51-60.  
43 \textsc{D.C. Bhattacharya} 1933, pp. 233-4. The region, kingdom or city, known as Paṭṭikerā was part of the region of Samatata and is already mentioned in inscriptions of the Candras from Ladahacandra’s reign; it was located east from Comilla in Tripura district (old Tippera)\textsuperscript{(S. \textsc{Bhattacharya} 1985, p. 264; see also \textsc{D.C. Bhattacharya} 1933, pp. 285-6)}.  
44 \textsc{Bautze-Picron} 2014\textsuperscript{(in press)}; on this kingdom and it s location, see \textsc{Majumdar} 1971, pp. 257-9.  
45 \textsc{Dani} 1954, pp. 186 & 187 (line 16).  
46 \textsc{Bautze-Picron} \textsuperscript{(in press)}.  
47 \textsc{Frasch} 2000, p. 41-42.  
\end{flushleft}
produced in very different sites, and as Jinah Kim’s research shows, most manuscripts produced in the twelfth century reflect a dramatic change in the nature of the donors, henceforth lay practitioners. The production still, however, seems to be important in Bihar and probably North Bengal; and although no indication of the site of production is given for them, a small number of manuscripts can be considered to have been produced in the region of Vikramapura-Mainamati since their colophons refer to rulers of Southeast Bengal (Figs. 18-20).

A manuscript was probably produced at Vikramapura during the reign of Govindacandra while three others survived, donated during the reign of Harivarman, two being illustrated and dated in the regnal years 8 and 19 respectively whereas the third, not illustrated, bears the date of 39. The first reproduces the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and has for donor “Rāmadeva who is said to be a follower of the excellent Mahāyāna (Figs. 18-20). The writing of the MS. was completed in the eighth year of the prosperous reign of Mahārājadhirāja Parameśvara, Paramabhāttāraka, Paramavaṣnava Śrīmad Harivarma Deva in the month of Kārttika, on the twelfth day of the moon, on Wednesday in the constellation of Uttarāphālgunī.”

The second, preserved in the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi, contains the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. As to the third, preserved in the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Kolkata, it includes the *Vimalaprabhā*, a commentary on the Śrī Kālacakra.

A further illustrated manuscript donated in the regnal year 47 of Lakṣmanasena was possibly produced in this part of Bengal, considering the fact that the ruler was then reigning from Vikramapura. The same can be said of an illuminated manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*; although no precise date or location are given in the colophon, the style of the paintings include features noted in the manuscripts of Harivarman’s reign and the subdued colours profoundly differ from vibrancy reflected by the manuscripts produced at Nalanda for instance. Two basic features seem to characterize the paintings of South Bengal: stylistically, line clearly prevails over the volume, i.e. the surfaces are flat and covered with plain colours, and, as far as iconography is concerned, we observe a tendency towards a narrative rendering rather than the clear iconic images seen in manuscripts from Bihar or North Bengal. This is particularly well illustrated in a manuscript – the present location of which is unfortunately unknown, but which was

48 See WEISSENBORN 2012a: the site is unrecorded in 33 manuscripts; it is given as Nalanda in 7 cases and various other sites in 10 further examples, among which a manuscript may have been produced at Somapura as suggested by J. Losty 1989b (as quoted with references by WEISSENBORN 2012a, p. 298 n° 26).

49 WEISSENBORN 2012a, p. 308 n° 43 for further references.


51 See MAJUMDAR 1971, note 1 p. 201 for a discussion concerning the two dates given in this third manuscript, which would imply that Harivarman ruled at least 46 years, starting his reign in 1073-1074.

52 B. BHATTACHARYYA 1944, p. 18.

53 SIDDHANTA 1979, pp. 383-4 where it is dated in the 19th regnal year; the six paintings are reproduced in Bautze-Picron 1999, pls. 13.32-35 & 40-41 & pp. 192-3, see also p. 160 for further references.

54 SHÄSTRI 1917, pp. 79-82; the author supposes that the river “Veng” mentioned in the post-colophon was located in Jessore district (also mentioned by MAJUMDAR 1971, note 1 p. 201).

55 KIM 2013, p. 59: Ms D10; WEISSENBORN 2012a, p. 294, n° 24 (with further references).


photographed in the monastery of Nor in the thirties – which Eva Allinger analysed, concluding that it is to be related to the art of Bagan and eastern Bengal.  

Depicted in the pedestals of images of the Tārā, Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī (Figs. 5, 7, 14) carved in the region is the worship of the manuscript which lies on a stand, beside which sits a monk wearing a ‘pointed cap’ and holding the two classical attributes of the ritual, i.e. the bell and the vajra. From comparison of images of Mañjuśrī in North (Fig. 3) and Southeast Bengal (Fig. 5) it immediately emerges that this double motif, i.e. the manuscript on stand and the monk with pointed cap, is not only repeatedly encountered in the art of the region, but also occupies a predominant place in the ornamentation of the pedestal. The manuscript is also one of the Bodhisattva’s major attributes from an early period on; besides, Mañjuśrī is one of the Bodhisattvas encountered by Sudhanakumāra in his quest for wisdom and knowledge. He is thus clearly an image reflecting the fundamental importance attributed to this quest gained through the production, reading, and worship of manuscripts.

**Geography & the archaeology of monasteries**

**North Bengal** - Major Buddhist sites are located in North Bengal: Paharpur or Somapura as known from inscriptions and written sources as a monastery is said to have been founded in the second half of the 8th century by Dharmapāla, probably on the remains of an earlier religious structure. East from Paharpur, Mahasthangarh was a major city in the region for a very long period. Though apparently occupied up to quite a late period, none of these sites seem to have taken a very active part in the late phase of esoteric Buddhism, embodied in Paharpur by the fragment of a small image of Hevajra embracing his Prajñā. Besides Somapura, another ‘Great monastery’ (Mahāvihāra) was located at Jagaddala (Jagadala), the foundation of which is attributed to Rāmapāla in the second half of the 11th century. Its precise location in North Bengal had long remained uncertain; however, excavations led at Jagdal in Naogaon District, North Bangladesh, a site situated some 20 km from Paharpur, revealed Buddhist remains, including a very delicately carved small image of Hevajra and his Prajñā embracing each other, which might support the identification of the site with the famous monastery (Fig. 1).  

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58 ALLINGER 2010, pp. 36-38 & fig. 6. Two narrative texts which were illustrated in the region and in Nepal are the Kāraṇḍavyūhaśūtra and the Gaṇḍavyūhaśūtra, e.g. (WEISSENBORN 2012a, pp. 310-311; ALLINGER 2008).

59 BAUTZE-PICRON 1995, pp. 61-62 & figs. 5-7, 10-11, 17, 22; for illustrations, see LEE 2009, figs. 16, 19, 27, 31, 95 & 96; fig. 80 shows the monk alone with no depiction of the manuscript, this is also a rare example of this iconographic motif at the bottom of a Buddha image.

60 NIYOGI 1980, pp. 50-61 for a survey of the monasteries in North Bengal; see ibidem, pp. 61-65 for the monasteries in West Bengal. To her survey, one will add the monastery discovered and excavated recently at Jagjivanpur (ROY 2002). See also DUTT 1962, pp. 328-80 for a survey of the Mahāvihāras and the monasteries during the Pāla period. RANJUSRI GHOSH carried intensive fieldwork in South and North Dinajpur districts (R.GHOSH 2006-2007, 2008-2009, 2012).

61 See LEFÈVRE 2012, pp. 239-240 for a summary of the various hypotheses; the author himself suggests that the Buddhist monument was built on the remains of a brahmanical temple.


63 NIYOGI 1980, pp. 59-60.

64 ZAKARIAH 1994; MIAH 2003, pl. 11.6 p. 153; see also NAZIMUDDIN AHMED in Banglapedia.
Large 11th and 12th-centuries images of Mañjuśrī teaching (Fig. 3), of the Tārā and of Mārīcī (Figs. 1-2) were recovered in a vast area which roughly coincides with the Division of Rajshahi and the Dinajpur District in Bangladesh, the districts of South Dinajpur (Dakshin Dinajpur) and Malda in the Indian State of West Bengal. West from this wide region, was located the monastery of Vikramaśāla (today: Antichak, on the south bank of Ganga River, Bhagalpur District, State of Bihar), foundation of which is also attributed to Dharmapāla and which opens the way to Magadha and its fundamental sites of learning, like Nalanda for instance, or to the pilgrimage route connecting all sites visited by the Buddha. As revealed by a very large number of stone images carved in the 12th century and found around the city of Lakh Sarai, a place situated on the route between the Mahāvihāras of Nalanda and Vikramaśāla, the area held a crucial role in the region during this period. One of the villages located in the southern suburbs of the town is Jaynagar where important images were recovered, and which might well be the old Jayanagara where once stood the royal palace of a Pāla ruler at the court of whom the Kashmiri scholar Śākyaśrībhadra resided for some time in the second half of the 12th century.

As neighbouring regions, North Bengal and Bihar are closely related. In the 11th and 12th centuries the Buddhist artistic production of both regions shared profound aesthetic similarities which are clearly distinguished from the artistic trend characterizing the production in South Bengal. The iconography is also directly in the circle of influence of Bihar whereas specific iconic formulations emerge in the southern regions.

South & Southeast Bengal - South of Dhaka, the site of Bikrampur, i.e. Vikramapura (also named Vikramapurī), covers a very large area over which some 17 or 18 villages are scattered and which is limited by the Dhaleshvari River to the North and the Meghna to the East. The village of Vajrayogini is said to be the birth-place of Atiśa (982-1054) who belonged to a royal family. Atiśa, also known as Dīpamkaraśrījñāna, left Bengal, probably in 1012 AD, to study under Dharmakīrti ‘of Suvarnadvīpa’ often identified with Sumatra although this was recently interpreted as a ‘general name for the region of South East Asia’. He returned to Bengal in AD 1025, having spent twelve years under the

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66 Above note 28.
67 BAUTZE-PICRON 1991/92.
68 To the references listed in my paper published in 1991/92, is to be added the recently published paper by J. KIM 2012 on the nun who donated an Avalokiteśvara image (1991/92, p. 256: A.9).
69 Above note 24.
70 NIYOGI 1980, pp. 65-86 for a survey of the monasteries located in the region.
71 As mentioned and described by A.M. CHOWDHURY in Banglapedia, the area has greatly suffered and much transformed in the course of centuries through the evolution of the rivers, mainly the Padma, which runs south of the area (see also ABU MUSA 2000, pp. 1-4).
72 ABU MUSA 2000, pp. 11-12; on Atiśa, see EIMER 1979, pp. 182-96 and CHATTOPADHYAYA 1981, pp. 56-66.
73 EIMER 1979, pp. 182-96, CHATTOPADHYAYA 198, pp. 84-96; COEDÈS 1964, pp. 259 & 264. See SKILLING 1997, p. 188 for his and WHEATLEY’s opinions concerning the location of Suvarnadvīpa. For the traditional views on the location, see BAUTZE-PICRON 2014 (in press) note 79. ‘Śrīvijayapura (or Vijayanagara) of Suvarnadvīpa’, where Dharmakīrti lived can thus be tentatively located in South Sumatra.
guidance of Dharmakīrti in the kingdom of the ruler Cuḍāmaṇivarmanadeva who is also remembered for having had a monastery built in Nagapattinam during the reign of Rājarāja around AD 1005.\textsuperscript{74}

Vikramapura was the capital of various Hindu kings who ruled in the region. The initial centre of power of the Candras who ruled in the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} centuries was located on the Devaparvata, i.e. Mainamati, before Vikramapura became their administrative seat during Śrīcandra’s reign (c. AD 930-975). They were followed by the Varmans who ruled in the 11\textsuperscript{th} and the first half of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century from Vikramapura, before being ousted by the Senas who reigned till the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.

Throughout this period, from the middle of the 10\textsuperscript{th} up to the beginning of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the site proves to have been a very intensive Hindu place: numerous images of Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Śiva, mainly as a dancing god, were produced then, all reflecting very high aesthetic quality. No major architectural remains similar to those uncovered at Mainamati or Paharpur for instance could, however, be recovered, which is basically due to the changing landscape of the region provoked by its rich and intricate water system.\textsuperscript{75}

Going east from Vikramapura in the direction of Comilla, one is struck by the Devaparvata (today Mainamati), a hill which rises out of the flat country and reveals abundant archaeological remains.\textsuperscript{76} Besides numerous architectural structures adorned with terracotta panels, a large number of small cast images and some, very rare, of large dimensions, were recovered during the excavations; stone images were not found in abundance at the top of the hill but some were discovered in the countryside from here as far as the region of Chittagong, where a large group of 9\textsuperscript{th}-century bronzes was recovered at Jhewari – now preserved in the Indian Museum – whereas an equally important stone 12\textsuperscript{th}-century image of the Buddha was found at Betagi where it is now worshipped. Tibetan authors mention the existence of a monastery, the Piṇḍa or Paṇḍita-vihāra in or near Chittagong: the monastery owes its fame to the debate which saw Buddhists and Brahmins opposed and to the victory of the former after putting on ‘pointed caps’, which have since remained part of the clothing of monks, especially in Tibet.\textsuperscript{77} As recalled by PUSPA NİYOGI, the mahāsiddha Tilopa (988-1069)\textsuperscript{78} and at a later period, Vanaratna (1384-1468), the teacher of Tāranātha, were also native to the region.\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{75} Excavations revealed however recently a monastery at Dholagaon: http://bangladeshunlocked.blogspot.de/2012/05/atish-dipankars-vihara-dholagaon.html; http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2013/03/23/ancient-buddhist-vihara-found-in-munshiganj; http://www.daily-sun.com/details_yes_24-03-2013_1000-year-old-Buddha-Bihar-found-in-Munshiganj_447_1_9_1_2.html#UYXMcTEmhbo.facebook

\textsuperscript{76} See BHUIYAN 2008-2009 for a small site located Northwest of Comilla.


\textsuperscript{78} NİYOGI 1980, p. 69

\textsuperscript{79} PAL 1989; NİYOGI 1988, p. 44. Like most monks, Vanaratna was widely travelled, going to study in Sri Lanka where he stayed six years before returning to India and Tibet.
Iconography and the function of the images

From the immensely rich world of images which emerged within Vajrayāna in Eastern India and which was inherited and further developed by the Tibetans, only specific characters found their way into the visual iconography of Southeast Asia. While this phenomenon has yet to be rightly appreciated or even studied, we may suggest that the creation of such a rich iconography and the extremely abundant production of images in the monasteries of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa might have partly resulted from the presence of Tibetan monks and their probable involvement in the transformations which the iconography underwent. A second aspect which the study of iconography brings to light is the geographical distribution of the images: not all ‘gods’ and ‘goddesses’ were represented evenly everywhere. This observation helps in localizing the specific South Asian geographical area where images carved or cast in Southeast Asia had the source of their inspiration. The iconography is closely intermingled with the way of depicting these characters, i.e. with ‘style’: as demonstrated by Pauline Lunsingh-Scheurleer, the earliest so-called Javanese bronze images were in fact cast in Southeast Bangladesh, and more particularly in the region of Mainamati.80

Mainamati was at the centre of an active Mahāyāna community from the post-Gupta period onwards. Stone images were rarely produced whereas the production of metal images seems to have been very important, numerous small bronzes from an early period (late 7th up to 9th century) depicting the main Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī or the Tārā among others having been recovered in the site and the region.81 The advance of Vajrayāna can be appreciated thanks to the discovery of a human-size bronze of Vajrasattva. Most of this material should be dated prior to the ninth century and is contemporary with images from the region exported to Java where they would inspire a rich production of cast images in the subsequent centuries.82

Studies of iconography rely heavily on textual sources. However, the visual iconography often presents features which find no echo in the texts. Producing an image is a creative process not locked in dogma and meets very specific religious or spiritual needs at the time of its fabrication; monasteries were not entities withdrawn from the world, but were interacting with the space around them, and they were also open to monks coming from at times far-away countries. The fact that the monasteries of Bihar and Bengal were engaged in extremely dynamic religious and spiritual activities may also have overshadowed the fact that they might have been influenced by developments which had taken in other countries. Clear evidence is, for instance, provided by the representation of Sudhanakumāra standing or seated near the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in images from Bihar and Bengal dated from the 10th century and onwards (Fig. 4).83 Sudhanakumāra is no god and no image of him alone has, to the best of my knowledge, ever been produced: he is an attendant to the Bodhisattva forming a pair with Hayagrīva whereas the Tārā is paired with the Bhṛkuṭī. Likewise, he can attend on Mañjuśrī on the latter’s images.84 But he is the main character of a spiritual quest which leads him to

80 See note 82 below.
81 LEE 2009, figs. 127 to 162 reproduces such early bronzes discovered at Mainamati or in the region.
83 BAUTZE-PICRON 2013 (in press), pp. 99-100 (with further references).
84 BAUTZE-PICRON 1993, pp. 152 & 153; CASEY 1985, cat. 22.
Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī and which is narrated in the *Gandavyūhasūtra*.\(^8^5\) The text was illustrated in the ninth century on the Borobudur in Java and later versions are known from murals at Tabo (Western Himalayas), dated before 1042 or from a Nepalese manuscript tentatively dated around the mid-twelfth century or slightly later.\(^8^6\) There is no doubt that the text was known in Bihar and Bengal as it was in these regions bordering India, but the main character was here singled out of the narrative and introduced as attendant to the two major Bodhisattvas to be worshipped in Bihar and Bengal, where he becomes a figure of knowledge, his main and sole attribute being the manuscript which he holds clasped under his left armpit, both hands joined in the gesture of veneration in front of his chest. We cannot exclude the possibility that the importance of the text at Java – which cannot be doubted, considering the fact that it is illustrated through 460 panels on the Borobudur –\(^8^7\) stretched out to Eastern India and beyond. In India, it is included in the iconography of two Bodhisattvas of different but to some extent complementary functions, although in both cases the fact that this young man in search of wisdom carries the manuscript symbolizing the spiritual knowledge which he accumulates through his encounters with wise men and Bodhisattvas may show how fundamental the book cult was within the monastery itself, but also beyond its limits, among the lay community.\(^8^8\)

The eighth and ninth centuries constitute a major period in the history of Buddhism in Java, marked notably by large constructions like the Borobudur and the Candi Sewu. Around the middle of the ninth century, Bālaputradeva, a Śailendra ruler, had a monastery built in Nalanda for monks originating from Java, and as a diplomatic gesture of good will, the Pāla ruler of the time Devapāla had the revenue from land and villages donated for the upkeep of this institution.\(^8^9\) The years around AD 830 have been considered by J. Dumarcay as pivotal between two phases of development of Javanese architecture, showing a “new cultural impulse” which originates from India and brings new architectural techniques, and which is characterized by the creation of major construction sites.\(^9^0\) For different but complementary reasons, Marijke Klokke reached the same conclusion.\(^9^1\) In this context we should mention the dedication of an image of Mañjuśrī made by a monk from Bengal or ‘Gauḍīdvīpa’ in the year 782 at Kelurak,\(^9^2\) i.e. in the vicinity of the Candi Sewu, a monument whose date is much debated, but can be roughly dated between the second half of the 8\(^{th}\) and the first part of the 9\(^{th}\) c.\(^9^3\) An inscription found in the compound of the Candi Sewu mentions the enlargement in 792 of a ‘mañjuśrīgrha’, which could very likely be the Candi Sewu.\(^9^4\) The Candi Sewu, like the


\(^{8^6}\) Allinger 2008, pp. 153 (date of the manuscript as proposed by Jerry Losty) and 154; Klimburg-Salter 1997, pp. 120-124. For a comparison of the narrative in Tabo and on the Borobudur, see Kimmet 2012, pp. 98-99. For other iconographic similarities between Java and Western Himalaya, see Chandra/Sevi Singh 1999.

\(^{8^7}\) Soekmono 1976, p. 20.

\(^{8^8}\) Kim 2013, pp. 223-224, 236-250.

\(^{8^9}\) Furui 2011, p. 155 note 25 for the references.

\(^{9^0}\) After Klokke 2006, p. 51.

\(^{9^1}\) Klokke 2006, p. 52.

\(^{9^2}\) Miksik 2006, pp. 188-190; Klokke 2006, pp. 53-54.

\(^{9^3}\) Klokke 2006, pp. 53-54 (with further references)

\(^{9^4}\) Klokke 2006, ibid.
Borobudur, offers a majestic three-dimensional illustration of a topic generalized in the sculpture and the painted manuscripts of Eastern India from the 9th century on, i.e. the depiction of the five Tathāgatas, which was favoured mainly in the iconographies of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and the Tārā. As we will see below, the motif of the five Tathāgatas saw a particular treatment in the iconography of the Potala mountain on which the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara resides (Fig. 4); this iconography is encountered in particular after the 9th century in Bihar and South Bengal, which suggests that the visual concept ‘Mountain cum Tathāgatas’ might have been inspired by the impressive Javanese monuments.

Images of specific deities were more favoured than others and may not have found the same degree of religious fervour everywhere. Thus, we witness a radical change in the 11th and 12th centuries in the regions of Vikrampur and Mainamati, when large stone images of Mañjuśrī and Heruka/Hevajra are produced (Figs. 5-7, 8-9). This period follows a phase where the monastery of Nalanda seems to have exerted a major function: images outstanding in terms of iconography and aesthetic quality have been recovered in the area of Vikrampur which clearly relate on the evidence of their style to the ateliers located around Nalanda/Ghosravan/Tetravan in Bihar. Such is the case of a unique depiction of a specific aspect of Mārici (fig. 12) or a representation of Avalokiteśvara seated on the Potala (Fig. 4). Moreover, a 9th-century bronze image of Mahāpratisārā found at Kurkihar in Bihar is a clear product of the ateliers located around Mainamati (Fig. 15).

The importance of Heruka under different aspects in Bengal (Hevajra; Śāmyāra; Cakrasamvara; Buddhakapāla; Fig. 24) reminds us that Atiśa who originates from the region of Vikrampur ‘had the visions of Tārā, Avalokiteśvara, Trisamvaravyūha (?) and Hevajra’. Hevajra/Heruka as seen in Southeast Bengal (Figs. 8-9), i.e. dancing and at

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95 But not exclusively; it crowned, for instance, the tall image of the Buddha standing at Jagdishpur, near Nalanda (BAUTZE-PICRON 2010a, fig. 125a).
96 One of the most accomplished examples was found at Kurkihar (Bihar) and can be dated to the late 9th or 10th century, see BAUTZE-PICRON 2013 (in press), fig. 110.
97 CASEY 1985, cats 22, 33; M. MITRA 1999c; LEE 2009, figs. 95-96.
99 BAUTZE-PICRON 2001, pp. 272-275 on the Mārici found at Bhavanipur; see also: BHATTASALI 1929, pl. XIX & pp. 54-56; HUNTINGTON 1984, fig. 206; SAMSUL ALAM 1985, fig. 69; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pl. 518 & p. 131; LEE 2009, fig. 51 & pp. 168-181. Two further images of the elephant god Ganeśa found in Southeast Bengal and dated through inscriptions in the 10th century could likewise have been ‘imported’ from Bihar (BAUTZE-PICRON 2013 (in press), chapitre VI, notes 15-17); it is most interesting to read that the donors of these two images and of a third one, of Viṣṇu, also sharing features with the art of Bihar, were donated by merchants who might indeed have been travelling between Southeast Bengal and Bihar (PRASAD 2010, pp. 31-33 . BAUTZE-PICRON 1991/92, pp. 249-250 on similarities shared by the image of the Bodhisattva on the Potala and sculptures from Bihar; see also: BHATTASALI 1929, pl. VIIa & pp. 27-28; SARASWATI 1977, fig.59; SHAMSUL ALAM 1985, fig. 78; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pl. 512 & p. 129; LEE 2009, figs. 54-55 & pp. 54-55, 179-190.
100 BAUTZE-PICRON 2013 (in press), fig. XXX, p. 18 and chapitre IV, note 358 for further references. See MEVISSEN 1999 for a study of this iconography in Bengal and abroad.
101 CHATTOPADHYAYA 1981, p. 378 and EIMER 1979, p. 92: ‘Als Dipamkaraśriññāna studierte..., sah er im Traum Heruka vor sich am Himmel und hörte ihn sagen ... er solle Mönch werden und viele Schüler anleiten.’
times trampling on a corpse, alone or at the centre of a circle of eight yoginīs, was also worshipped in North Sumatra (Padang Lawas) and Cambodia. Other similar isolated images are found scattered in various sites of Bihar and Orissa, like Nalanda or Ratnagiri, and the deity can also be depicted with even more frightful aspects known as Saṃvara or Cakrasaṃvara, which seem to have been favoured in North Bengal with images showing twelve or sixteen arms, four faces and embracing the Prajñā (Vajravārāhī).

Veneration of Hevajra/Heruka and Mahākāla, another major wrathful male deity present in Bengal and Bihar, extended far beyond the South Asian Subcontinent; Mahākāla was protector of the State in the Dali kingdom and under the Yuan, and is also present in East Java and Sumatra. Hevajra was worshipped in North Sumatra and was a major deity in Cambodia, while his image found at Padang Lawas in North Sumatra is evidently based on those carved in the region of Vikramapura, another evident element of contact between the Buddhist centres of these countries. A still enigmatic three-faced wrathful god standing in the victory posture and trampling corpses was found in the region of Vikrampur (Fig. 10): although doubt remains as to the proper identification of the wrathful three-headed image, this is evidently visually related to the more ‘classical’ image of Mahākāla as found for instance in Lakh Gūrāi but also in Vikrampur, or to further images of Yamāntaka and Krodhas from Bihar. Both gods, Hevajra and Mahākāla, are physically very different: Hevajra/Heruka, in his images found in South and Southeast Bengal, has a beautiful well-proportioned human body although he frowns and has fangs. This is not the case of Mahākāla and the wrathful image from Vikrampur: they are pot-bellied, have bulging eyes, have a heavy body with short legs and do not display the lightness of movement which the dancing Hevajra shows. Other aspects of Heruka, like Cakrasaṃvara, found more particularly in North Bengal, partakes of the same type of image with heavy body and which expresses violence and aggressiveness whose obvious aim is to frighten.

Images exported by monks evidently reflected concepts developed in Eastern India, but they merged with local Southeast Asian spiritual and political considerations. Clearly, Hevajra, like Mahākāla, were images of political power in regions outside the Indian

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102 They were apparently to be found everywhere, but seem to have remained isolated in the sites where they were discovered (D. Mitra 1989, D. Mitra 1997-1998). We also know of a silver image of the deity which must have stood at Bodhgaya (above note 13).

103 Weissenborn 2012b, figs. 51-55 & pp. 69-76 on this iconography (also illustrated in manuscripts, ibid., figs. 41a, 42c, 45a, 47-48). See Donaldson 2002, pp. 206-211 & Herrmann-Pfandt 2006-2007 on the Cakrasaṃvara-manḍala, assimilated with Jambudvīpa and showing the universal power of the god over all Hindu, mainly Śaiva deities and sites of pilgrimage.

104 Lee 2007, figs. 70-71 & pp. 204-208 on two examples found in the Vikramapur area; the presence of a tiny Buddha image at the top of the slab, probably Amoghasiddhi (as recognized by Lee whereas the author in Haque/Gail 2008 sees here Amitābha) makes it a Buddhist and not Śaiva image (also reproduced by Haque/Gail 2008, plate 45 & p.163 and by Rahman 1998, cat. 72 & pl. 46).


106 See Bautze-Picron 2014 (in press) with further references on both gods in Sumatra and beyond.

107 Bautze-Picron 1991/92, figs. 16, 25 & 17 for a Krodha (Lakh Gūrāi). For Yamāntaka: see Linrothe pp. 162-176. For the Vikramapur image, see Lee 2007, fig. 71 & pp. 204-208: the presence of a tiny Buddha image at the top of the slab, probably Amoghasiddhi (as recognized by Lee whereas the authors in Haque/Gail 2008 sees here Amitābha) makes it a Buddhist and not Śaiva image (also reproduced by Saraswati 1977, ill. 179; Haque/Gail 2008, plate 45 & p.163 and by Rahman 1998, cat. 72 & pl. 46).
Subcontinent, symbolizing the duty of the ruler to protect the country by destroying its enemies (Mahākāla), while illustrating the presence of the political power as universal (Hevajra/Heruka standing at the centre of a mandala) and destructive of negative forces (Hevajra/Heruka dancing on corpses). One may thus wonder whether, in India as was the case in Southeast Asia or China, they had the leading position of protecting the State; there is no clear evidence that the rulers of Eastern India ever placed themselves and their States under the protection of Mahākāla or Hevajra. Taking this into consideration leads us to surmise that these gods had to protect the samgha: the monastery becomes the mandala on which Hevajra rules.

How are we to assess the function of these images in their historical context? Can we approach the stone and cast images, and indeed the illuminations inserted in manuscripts alike? Probably not, since their basic function, which justifies their creation, differs. Large stone or cast images are to be displayed publicly, even if only to the monks, whereas small images can be carried, be they private belongings of monks or donated to the monastery by monks and lay people. Small objects could easily be transported, which makes their study rather difficult: were they produced in the site where they were discovered? Were they carried away from another site? Were they part of a set of images? Studying them thus means taking on many doubts and unknowns.

The production of a manuscript reflects a completely different situation. When the eye and the mind focus on a material image – for simple worship or identification with it –, the movement is centripetal, going from outside (the viewer) towards one single object. But opening and reading a manuscript open cosmic dimensions with the eye wandering through many different divine images and the mind following the spatial directions in which the deities depicted in the manuscript are distributed. The creation of a rich illuminated manuscript allows inserting practically as many images as desired; these male and female characters show a wide range of physical features known from their descriptions in sādhanas and can even be rarely shown in stone (Figs. 21-24). Their insertion all through a manuscript transforms this one into a frame to these images most often unrelated to the text, usually of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā. In short, they do not illustrate the text, or too rarely only in the case of narrative texts or of the Pañcarakṣā text.

One manuscript of the Pañcavinśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā donated in the early period of Harivarman’s reign as seen above has a rich and peculiar iconography where Avalokiteśvara appears as a major Bodhisattva, showing many different aspects (Figs. 18-19); this importance is consistent with the attention paid to different types of images of the Bodhisattva, for instance residing on his mountain, the Potala, found in the region (Fig. 4). The motif of the mountain quite naturally enhances the divine position of the

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108 To which remark one should add the observation made by B.N. Prasad on the absence of inscriptions on images which would refer to a donor (here note 27).
110 See Jinah Kim’s book (2013), which offers a range of new and challenging considerations regarding such manuscripts.
111 For Kim 2013, pp. 104-6 the folios preserved in Baroda and those kept in different Western collections, private and public, do not belong to the same manuscript whereas for Weissenborn 2012a, pp. 301-2 (n° 33), they all belong to one single manuscript.
112 See above note 99. Lee 2009, fig. 59 is related to this iconography, a trefoil arch being the only reminder of the niche within the mountain where the Bodhisattva sits; Bautze-Picron 1999, pp. 183-5.
Bodhisattva, this being also the place of residence of a major god like Śiva and becoming also the seat of the Tārā in a unique and outstanding carving found around Mainamati. In this image, the Tārā preaches, evoking the ‘Potalake Bhagav[at]ī Tārā’ depicted in two Nepalese manuscripts of the 11th century. The fact is that these manuscripts, like the illustrated Kārandaavyūhasūtra kept in the British Library, take part in the very same iconographic tradition reflected by the manuscript dated in the regnal year 8 of Harivarman, i.e. they depict ‘famous’ images of the entire Buddhist world, with images of deities located in far-away countries like China, Java, Sri Lanka, or the Maharashtra to quote only a few whereas the images in the Harivarman manuscript are those of many aspects of Avalokiteśvara, the Tārā or Mārīcī for instance.

Looking back at the history of the Buddhist community in South Asia, more particularly at its carved artistic production, it is obvious that the dividing line which one would wish to draw between the community and the non-Buddhist society within which the sangha was evolving was never deeply anchored: Buddhist were well aware of the existence of Hindu gods and goddesses, introducing them in their own artistic imagery but having of them a perception which could thoroughly change over the centuries. Thus, Brahmā and Śakra (Indra) are present from the very beginning, appearing as peaceful characters fully submitted to the Buddha, an aspect which they preserve up to the 13th century. But from perhaps the late 10th century and onwards, they also appear as demons belonging to Māra’s army, thus suffering the fate of deities like Gaṇeśa/Gaṇapati, Śiva, Pārvatī and others who were perceived as malevolent characters and hence could be trodden by frightful Buddhist characters whose major function was to destroy them. Going through the centuries, one attends thus a permanent encounter between the Buddhist and the brahmanical (Hindu) imaginary worlds which finds its visual expression in a Buddhist context.

When considering ‘Buddhist’ images, one tends too easily to forget that they were conceived in a context where the religious imagery was not exclusively Buddhist. Quite on the contrary, Buddhist monasteries were surrounded by a landscape which was fundamentally inhabited by ‘Hindu’ gods and goddesses and which might have felt as dangerous if not threatening. In a wide movement which swept over Bihar and Bengal as from the 10th century, Hindu deities were considered to belong to Māra’s army where


113 LEE 2009, fig. 64.

114 LEE 2009, fig. 65 & p. 190. For other images of the goddess in the region, see: BHATTASALI 1929, pls. XX-XXII & pp. 56-58; SHAMSUL ALAM 1985, figs. 49, 65; BISWAS 1995, pl. 28 & pp. 32, 35; NIYOGI 2001, fig. 50; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pl. 46 & pp. 146-147; LEE 2009, figs. 15, 17-19 & pp. 96-99, 105-112.

115 FOUCHER 1900, p. 192 n° 16, p. 210 n° 18 & pl. VII.16


118 LANCASTER 1991, p. 278 mentions a fifth century Chinese translation of a text referring to him as Vināyaka, an ill-intentioned character “who keeps the practitioners from progressing and is thus a negative force that must be overcome”.

119 This is not to say that the Hindu side was unaware of the existence of the Buddhists, but the main, if not only, character who was shown in a demeaning position was the Buddha, see VERARDI 2011, passim.
they held a leading position, replacing the traditional monsters of the army, and having possibly their outer appearance modified, Brahmā becoming for instance a threatening character showing fangs. This perception of the Hindu pantheon apparently arose in the 10th century, an outstanding example being the image of Jagdishpur, a site located in the direct vicinity of Nalanda. From there, it is found up to Bagan in Burma, following a line which crosses Lakhi Sarai in East Bihar and the entire Delta (Figs. 16-17; below: The Buddha).

Images are not only carriers of religious or spiritual values, they also deeply reflect daily concerns; images could be conceived as an answer to images which were produced by men of different beliefs and as such could be acting as echo to them. Images were clearly part of a ‘campaign’ which was aimed against those belonging to the ‘other’ side. Some examples can be here given, drawn from various parts of Eastern India and belonging to different periods: images of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī produced in Magadha in the 7th to 9th century, more particularly in the region of Bodhgaya, clearly borrow elements from Skanda images, such as the necklace and the hair-dress whereas the lion serving as vāhana was probably borrowed from Durgā’s iconography. At a later date, the 12th century, outstanding images of Mahākāla resembling closely contemporary images of Bhairava were carved in the area of Lakhi Sarai.

And, turning to South Bengal in the 11th and 12th centuries, it is probably no chance that most Hevajra images (Fig. 8-9) were produced in this region where the cult of Śiva Natarāja was particularly important, or that Avalokiteśvara shows various ‘Śaiva’ aspects in the manuscripts of the region, notably the rare form of Padmanarīśvara. Another factor might lie in the proximity of Assam, more particularly of the Kāmākhyā-pīṭha located north of the area here considered, and in the vicinity of which ‘a cemetery called Heruka’ would be located according to the Kālikā-purāṇa. Hevajra images receive a fighting stamp in being a wrathful character sharing features with the frightful Hindu goddess Cāmuṇḍā whereas images of this goddess and of Śiva Bhairava can also convey a strong message of violence towards the Buddhist community, wearing for instance a long garland of Buddha’s heads or trampling on a bowl full of similar heads.

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120 Bautze-Picron 1996; Bautze-Picron 2010b, pp. 111-116.
121 Bautze-Picron 1996, pp. 126-127 & fig. 20.
123 Not forgetting that Skanda is chief of the divine armies and that Durgā is a fighting goddess; Bautze-Picron 1989b, figs. 1, 4-15, 18. Bautze-Picron 1993, pp. 151-2 (on the lion).
124 Mahākāla: Bautze-Picron 1991/1992, figs. 16 & 35; Bhairava: Kumar 2011, figs. 15a-b. On the similarities, see Lee 2009, pp. 206-207. However, Davidson (2002, pp. 211-217) relates Heruka to Bhairava, ‘Heruka [being] formed in imitation of Maheśvara’, and Heruka being a ‘divinity of a cremation ground’: the situation is indeed very complex as the author also notes p. 214. It is indeed likely that the (Buddhist) cult of a god named Heruka owes a lot to the (tribal and Hindu) tantric tradition which had emerged in Assam (ibid.).
125 Bautze-Picron 1999, p. 184. As Saṃvara, Heruka rules over the universe from Mount Meru, reminding, as mentioned by Davidson (2002, p. 210) that this image echoes the motif of Śiva on Mount Kailash, but it also echoes the presence of the Buddha on Mount Meru where he teaches the Dharma to his mother and the gods (Bautze-Picron 2010, pp. 28-35).
126 Davidson 2002, p. 213 mentions that the cemetery is today named Bhairava.
127 As shown by G. Verardi 2011, visual language was a major vector of propaganda and can reflect deep conflicts which were tearing the society. And in the ‘Buddhist camp’, this goddess was really perceived as
Also Mañjuśrī is armed with a sword and represented in the gesture of using it, holding it high above his head.\textsuperscript{128} The development of the Bodhisattva iconography at Nalanda in the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries found an echo in his importance in Java in the late 8\textsuperscript{th} century. As seen in an earlier paper,\textsuperscript{129} his function is to teach when Śākyamuni becomes Buddha, which makes the two iconographies – of the Buddha’s enlightenment and of the Bodhisattva teaching – profoundly complementary.\textsuperscript{130} Mañjuśrī possesses the sword with which darkness is slit and light (of the Bodhi) pervades the mind: such a major image used to stand at Bodhgaya till it was stolen from the site,\textsuperscript{131} and the very characteristic gesture of holding the sword above the head as if going to be used occurs in three outstanding sculptures from Southeast Bengal.\textsuperscript{132} These include a rare depiction of Arapacana Mañjuśrī (Fig. 6)\textsuperscript{133} which foreshadows a 13\textsuperscript{th}-century image of the same iconography carved in East Java,\textsuperscript{134} and two images of the also very rarely illustrated Mañjuvajra (Fig. 7) where the Bodhisattva is three-faced and six-handed, and has attributes which illustrate his function as slayer of ignorance – a main attribute being the manuscript – and as bestowing his compassion.\textsuperscript{135}

The Bodhisattva is not the only character who makes a reference to Bodhgaya and the Bodhi. A major goddess is then Mārīcī whose numerous images were found all through the region (Fig. 13)\textsuperscript{136} and hardly differ from those worshipped in Bihar or North Bengal. This is not a peaceful deity; she carries weapons in her eight hands, presenting the \textit{vajra}

\textsuperscript{128} BAUTZE-PICRON 1999, figs. 1, 9-10. The weapon can be symbolic of destroying ignorance and darkness, opening the way to wisdom and light, but it might also be considered at a more basic level, being a visual rendering intended for non-Buddhists; the same can be said on the sword being held by Mārīcī (and other deities) whereas in the opposite camp, it is Cāmuṇḍā who is depicted in an even more aggressive mood (above notes 4 & 120)

\textsuperscript{129} BAUTZE-PICRON 1993 (& 1989).

\textsuperscript{130} It is worth noting that the Mañjuśrī illustrated in Fig. 5 is accompanied by Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, reproducing thus partly the triad so often encountered in Bihar of having the Buddha flanked by these two Bodhisattvas (BAUTZE-PICRON 2010, p. 77).

\textsuperscript{131} BAUTZE-PICRON 2013 (in press), pp. 117-8 & p. 214, n° 170 (see also fig. 170)

\textsuperscript{132} LEE 2009, pp. 239-53 & figs. 95-96 & 101.

\textsuperscript{133} BHATTASALI 1929, pl. VIIb & pp. 28-29; SARASWATI 1977, ill. 27; SHAMSUL ALAM 1985, fig. 89; A. SENGUPTA 1993, fig. 62; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pl. 491 & p. 132; LEE 2009, fig. 191 & pp. 248-253.

\textsuperscript{134} As rightly suggested by PAULINE LUNSINGH-SCHEURLEER: see BAUTZE-PICRON 2014 (in press) note 30 for further references.

\textsuperscript{135} LEE 2009, figs. 95-96 & pp. 239-248. An even more rare depiction of the Bodhisattva as Nāmasaṅgīti has been discovered in the Vikrampur area; the particular feature of this image is that it is the real female Nāmasaṅgīti who is depicted and not the usually seen male one (AKMAN 1999; BAUTZE-PICRON 2000, pp. 108-111; LEE 2009, fig. 37 & pp. 145-155).

\textsuperscript{136} See my paper of 2001 for a study of the iconography of the goddess in Eastern India and in particularly, for the images produced in Southeast Bengal, see pp. 268-9 &288-9: n° 39-47; add two images in the Khulna Museum published by MEVISSEN 2009 and LEE 2009, pp. 155-168. The image reproduced here was stolen from the Mainamati Museum (for further references, see MEVISSEN 2009, p. 280) and reappeared on the Belgian Art Market in 2006-2007 (\textit{52\textdegree Foire des Antiquaires de Belgique}, p. 209 where the provenance is said to be a “private English collection”); I myself saw it with the art-dealer K. Grusenmeyer (Sablons, Brussels). See also: BHATTASALI 1929, pls. XIIIb-XIV & pp. 43-45; HUNTINGTON 1984, fig. 217; A. SENGUPTA 1993, figs. 27, 67-68; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pls. 519, 523-525 & pp. 146, 172-273, 282-283; LEE 2009, figs. 23, 42-49 & pp. 155-168.
in the upper right hand;\textsuperscript{137} four sow-faced female deities surround her. All of them form thus a \textit{mandala}, a structure which is encountered in more than one iconographic type, see for instance the images of Arapacana Mañjuśrī, Mañjuvajra (Figs. 6-7), Hevajra (Fig. 8), the five Tathāgatas, and the Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā (Fig. 14)\textsuperscript{138} or even of the Buddha’s life (see below). She symbolizes the sun light which penetrates the entire universe when Śākyamuni becomes Buddha; with her position of victory and her numerous armed hands, she is depicted as a warrior-goddess chasing away the darkness, i.e. the ignorance. The very fact also that she stands within the womb of a stūpa is there to prove that light resides in the bosom of the Buddhist monastery. Her numerous images testify also to the importance of the female element as a dynamic, creative force.

Movement is what opposed her to the images of the Tārā but brings her close to depictions of Parnaśabarī (Fig. 11),\textsuperscript{139} a frightful goddess of folk origin, clad with leaves, who protects from deceases but also dispels hindrances to the spiritual quest, and having the \textit{vajra} and the \textit{anikusa} as weapons. Her images are rare but they are the reflection of the way chosen by the Mahāsiddhas, drawing their inspiration from non-canonical literature, refusing to be part of the ‘official’ Buddhist community, opting for a freedom of mind which they found in the solitude of the forest.\textsuperscript{140} As far as one can surmise from the existing material remains, Buddhism in this part of Bengal was not solely confined to the monasteries where monks were mainly active: as JINAH Kim’s research recently demonstrated, the lay-practitioners were more and more active notably in the production and worship of the book; besides, the Mahāsiddhas were also much active as ‘independent’ spiritual seekers throwing a critical look on the ‘official’ Buddhist way. Lay-practitioners and these ascetics reflect two further aspects of Buddhism, the study of which is more difficult to grasp, but which had to be taken into consideration by the \textit{samgha}, hence also the existence of these large images of Parnaśabarī in what was the capital, i.e. Vikramapura, where many other images were collected, side by side with those of Śūrya, Viśṇu or dancing Śiva, and where, let us remind it, the political power was openly brahmanical. The community was evidently outnumbered and this severely reduced position might also explain the multiplication of Māricī images; emerging as seen above in the womb of a stūpa, but also belonging to the \textit{kula} of Vairocana, it is the monument as body of the latter which is here standing, but it is also the monument as symbol par excellence of the Buddhist way, and thus of the community, which is here depicted.

**The Buddha** – Considering the rich pantheon which we just shortly surveyed and which developed during nearly two centuries, it must be noted that the iconography of the Buddha is rather uniform, depicting him touching the earth, i.e. at the very moment of his enlightenment. However, details added this model can vary from image to image, and features can be inserted which are not encountered in Bihar, for instance the protome of

\textsuperscript{137} Where in Bihar, she can present the sword (BAUTZE-PICRON 2001, figs. 6, 9, 14-15).

\textsuperscript{138} BHAṬTASALI 1929, pl. XXI & pp. 56-57; B. BHATTACHARYYA 1958, fig. 375; SARASWATI 1977, ill. 103; GHOSH 1980, ill. 11 & p. 42; SHAMSUL ALAM 1985, fig. 90; SENGUPTA 1993, fig. 31; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pl. 530 & p. 146; LEE 2009, fig. 16 & pp. 99-105.

\textsuperscript{139} BHAṬTASALI 1929, pls. XXIIIa-b & pp. 58-61; B. BHATTACHARYYA 1958, figs. 173-174; SARASWATI 1977, ills. 188-189; HUNTINGTON 1984, fig. 210; A. SENGUPTA 1993, fig. 70; HAQUE/GAIL 2008, pls. 541 & p. 147; LEE 2009, figs. 33-34 & pp. 129-144; see also M. MITRA 2000.

\textsuperscript{140} On the Siddhas, see DAVIDSON 2002, pp. 169ff.
an elephant below the Buddha. The main image remained, however, the one of Śākyamuni at Bodhgaya, i.e. evoking the earth-goddess while touching the soil with the fingers of his right hand, and as such, it could be venerated by any monk.

A very specific iconographic program depicted on book-covers and in a series of illuminations traditionally distributed at the beginning and the end of the text echoes the narrative rendering of the Buddha’s life which is carved in the lower part of images produced in the region in the 12th and 13th c. and which reflect a boundary between the ‘eight scenes’ model encountered in Bihar and the detailed rendering of the biography painted in various temples of Bagan. As also observed by EVA ALLINGER, this iconographic model is also illustrated in early cloth-paintings which have been preserved in Tibetan monasteries. Even if one surmises that the carving of the images is posterior to some murals at Bagan, I personally do not think that their presence in the lower part of stone images from the Delta specifically reflects a Burmese influence but illustrates a conscious choice of presenting the biography.

The model retained is based on a composition which was elaborated in Magadha around the 9th century and which shows that the life of the Buddha reached its peak at Bodhgaya, there where the Bodhisattva became Buddha: this is the moment from where there is no return possible (Figs. 16-17). Around the central large image, seven scenes are distributed following a very specific visual pattern, i.e. the scenes are paired according to their iconography and not in a chronological order. All scenes are depicted as if being icons on their own and not as part of a continuous narrative and all, apart from the final decease, are depicted as if images standing on their own in their own shrines. Now, the motif of the shrine is typical of the art of Southeast Bengal, but the profile of the tower does not belong to any temple, but to the Bodhgaya temple and only particular figures sit within such a structure, i.e. the Buddha and Mañjuśrī. In these images also, only the central Buddha sits in a niche supporting this particular type of spire whereas the secondary scenes are distributed in niches having their arch fully inserted in a series of flat and broad recesses which support an āmalaka, a structure well-known in manuscript illuminations and which has been there considered to be motif of (northern) Bengali origin. The spire of the Bodhgaya temple being only noted above images of the Buddha and Mañjuśrī is a consistent feature since, as mentioned above, the Bodhisattva holds a major position in the iconography of the enlightenment. Not only does the presence of

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142 ALLINGER 2010 wrote a detailed analysis of the question.

143 BISWAS 2002, pp. 222-223 (with further references).

144 BUTCHER 1995/96. The place of manufacture of these cloth-paintings is still a matter of debate; I personally tend to consider the thangkas reproduced by EVA ALLINGER, figs. 5-6 as of Bengali origin but made for a Tibetan patron (the painting of fig. 5 includes the depiction of heavily clad characters and monks).

145 Moreover, these two images of the Bodhisattva also include depiction of the Seven Jewels of the Cakravarti, a topic which was well-favoured at Bodhgaya (HSU 2008 for the topic).
a tower transform the image into a shrine but through the presence of four subsidiary shrines distributed around the spire the sculpture illustrates a _mandala._

The secondary scenes can also be seen as reflecting specific aspects of the Buddha since apart from the Birth scene – always depicted in the lower part, all refer to Śākyamuni as a Buddha. The Birth scene is symmetric to the offering of Madhu by the monkey which took place at Vaiśālī; in the particular setting where they are distributed, both scenes in fact conclude the Bodhisattva’s life – the Birth scene being the last one of this phase to be seen here – and the Buddha’s life – since Śākyamuni took in Vaiśālī the decision to definitively depart from this life. 147 Similarly, the first sermon held at Sarnath illustrates a ‘real’ event whereas the sermon at Śrāvasti reflects the magic powers possessed by the Buddha (and it is also there that the Buddha takes the decision to go on Mount Meru where he will teach his mother and the gods). 148 The Parinirvāṇa scene topping the composition indicates that the Buddha is now out of reach, in undefined realms.

Now, the ‘perfect’ life which is here illustrated rests upon a high basis covered with scenes carved in low-relief; what is depicted in the lower part of the image, being in contact with the soil beneath it, is located at a human level and thus is per se of a lower essence than the divine world seen above which it has also for function to support. 149 As a matter of fact, the scenes carved in the lower part of the image mostly shows Śākyamuni still as a Bodhisattva, with his father presenting the newly born to Asita as starting scene followed by the great departure, the cutting of hair, the long period of asceticism up to the moment where Muclinda protects the meditating monk, further scenes being possibly inserted. Now, what could appear to be a ‘simple’ narrative depiction of this phase of the Buddha’s life hides or reveals specific aspects of the Buddha’s personality. As seen in a previously published paper, 150 the depictions of the emaciated Buddha and of the Buddha being sheltered by Muclinda refer in fact to two contradictory but complementary aspects of the Buddha’s personality which have been exemplified since the beginning of our era in Gandhara, i.e. the Buddha as master of fire and water. In small images carved in the so-called andagu stone and which were mainly, but not exclusively, discovered in Burma, these two scenes are symmetrically distributed below the main cycle of eight events, and in cloth-paintings or on painted book-covers, they are usually seen side by side. 151

The image of the Buddha, being elaborated as it is, i.e. including the canonical topic of the ‘Eight great events’, seven being distributed around the main one, and adding to it further moments of this biography, is addressed to any Buddhist; thus this ‘perfect’ life finds its conclusion in the imperceptible moment of the enlightenment, which is the aim to be reached by the devotee, even through radically different ways, but it narrates also the initial phase of the Buddhist way; in some way, such images, more than any other one, speak for the eternity of the Dharma.

_The five Tathāgatas and the _mandala_ – _The motif of the five Buddhas is commonly encountered topping the images of the Buddha (whoever he is), Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and the Tārā. It occurs however irregularly in the images just considered which depict_
the biography of Śākyamuni where it is the set of the seven Buddhas of the past joined by Maitreya which always crowns the image. The depiction of the five Buddhas is also seen in illuminated manuscripts or/and on their book-covers. The distribution of their five images all through the manuscript transforms the linear text in a three-dimensional structure. Their presence crowning stone images allows achieving the same result, in particular when carved in a rock-like landscape which symbolizes the Potala Mountain on which Avalokiteśvara resides; they constitute the basic mandala, four of them marking the four cardinal points around the fifth one located at the centre. However, one should mention that nowhere in Eastern India, architectural compositions such as those achieved in Central Java in the 8th and 9th centuries were ever created.

The concept of the mandala was well-known in the region; it is observed numerous images: Mārici, the Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā, Arapacana Mañjuśrī, Mañjūvajra, or Hevajra, as mentioned above. Even, the topic of the Buddha’s life has been reproduced on such a model which refers to Bodhgaya, centre of the Buddhist universe, there where Śākyamuni became buddha, a place and moment in time which shows the start of a new beginning and the emergence of a new spiritual thought; this model also integrates all around this fundamental scene smaller depictions of major events of Śākyamuni’s life. What is here shown is a pilgrimage which can be done through visualization. The idea of the non-dual universe with images emerging out of its centre found a particular achieved form in cast lotus mandalas, found from the Faridpur district in Southeast Bangladesh up to Bihar and where the deity presiding over the mandala can be Hevajra, Vajratārā, Cakrasaṃvara or the Buddha, for instance. And beyond Bengal, this type of object was also produced in Bagan with the central image is the Buddha, a stūpa or the spire of the Mahabodhi temple bearing depiction of the eight great events while monks are distributed on the eight petals. Now, while this is the perfect embodiment of the oneness of the universe with its central point out of which all peripheral deities emerge and these images of gods and goddesses offer each in their way a subtle version of such a symbolic vision, the mandala is also in a more prosaic manner the monastery; such images are then subdued ways of expressing visually this spiritual stranglehold which the monastery pretends to possess. Certain deities can be magically invoked or worshipped.

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154 Even if there are only three, they still suffice to create a direction, i.e. a three-dimensional volume: Bautze-Picron 1999, pp. 186-7.
155 See Kim 2013, pp. 132-148 on the three-dimensional space which painted images confer to the manuscript (besides the fact that the very act of handling the manuscript transforms the flat two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional space).
156 Lee 2009, pp. 340-344 & figs. 192-194 (Hevajra, Vajratārā); Kim 2013, pp. 65-68 & fig.2-6 p. 67 (Vajratārā, Buddha surrounded by eight Bodhisattvas); Weissenborn 2012a, fig. 52; Huntington/Bangdell 2003, cat. 68; Linrothe 2006, cat. 5 pp. 190-193 (Cakrasaṃvara).
157 Luce 1969-1970, pls. 425-428. Although it might appear difficult to consider these cast lotuses as being ‘esoteric’ or ‘mandalas’; the fact is that the main topic which is depicted within the inner space shows the eight great events drawn from the Buddha’s life either distributed around a central shrine or fixed on the eight petals around a central stūpa. Thus it would be as if these various aspects of the Buddha either irradiate out of the central shrine or all merge into the central and final monument.
158 Davidson 2002, pp. 206-211 & Herrmann-Pfandt pp. 206-211 study the Cakrasaṃvara-mandala which includes deities linked to specific pilgrimage sites distributed all over India and which are not specifically Buddhist but mainly Śāiva or Śākta, a particular way of ‘assimilating’ the world of the other, of ‘magically reCLAIMING THE WHOLE OF INDIA FOR BUDDHISM’ (Herrmann-Pfandt 2006-2007, p. 16).
within this context, having for function to protect from any danger, like the Pañcarakṣā goddesses, from dramatic situations encountered while travelling like the Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā who had inherited this function from Avalokiteśvara or to protect from deceases, like some aspect of Avalokiteśvara (Fig. 14). Asserting such powers, declaring its own vision of the universe – thought to be merged with the Buddhist community – were a necessary reaction in a surrounding where highly powerful Hindu images were created in the 11th and 12th century, reflecting the strength of the brahmanical temple sustained by the political power.

Conclusion
The production in Bihar fits within a long artistic tradition; ateliers were numerous and very active; they were closely related to the monasteries and sites of pilgrimages. This presence might account for stronger and stricter iconographic rules. The situation differs in the Delta: there is no site of pilgrimage and the monasteries do not seem to have played the same intensive ‘cultural’ role of drawing monks from abroad to remain and study there. Rather, the region seems to have been the place of the last ramifications of esoteric Buddhism as strongly practiced in and originating from Bihar and North Bengal. This Buddhism underwent in Bengal deep transformations, allowing the lay-society to perform rituals with the production of manuscripts, and being confronted with anti-establishment way of life as advocated by the Mahāsiddhas. Moreover, being an area to pass through when going to Bihar when coming from Burma, it was thus visited by Theravādin monks and not exclusively by those advocating Mahāyāna. As we may surmise from the short survey presented here, this late (and last) phase of Buddhist art in Bengal reflects a deep intricacy which makes the study of its iconography difficult but also stimulating: Whereas images of Māricī and Maṇjuśrī relate to the Bodhi and thus to the homeland of Buddhism, i.e. old Magadha or Bihar, the history of the wrathful representations of Heruka is deeply interwoven with the iconographies of Śiva and Cāmuṇḍā as they emerged in Bengal and Assam, and the iconography of the Buddha’s life betrays deep similarities with its representation in Burma and Tibet. This chapter of the history of Buddhist art would undoubtedly deserve to be written anew.

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When researching on the late Buddhist art of South & Southeast Bengal, one is confronted with an abundance of publications which address various different topics;

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159 See MEVISSEN 1999. For an image found in the Vikrampur area, see: BHATTASALI 1929, pl. XXIX & pp. 61-62; B. BHATTACHARYYA 1958, fig. 185; NIYOGI 2001, fig. 80; HAUQ/GAIL 2008, pl. 5 & p. 131; LEE 2009, fig. 36 & pp. 112-113, 143-145.

160 ALLINGER 2000; BAUTZE-PICRON 2004, p. 239 & note 105 for further references.

161 IM 2012, p. 210

162 For instance, the images of Viṣṇu generally show the god surrounded by tiny images of his avatāras, and those of Śūrya present him with similar images of the Grahas or of the Ādityas: these three models illustrate the gods as a power which is eternal (the avatāras) or who rules throughout the universe (the Grahas) (see MEVISSEN 2006 & 2010; BAUTZE-PICRON 1985, pp. 473-474; BAUTZE-PICRON 2007, p. 101). Śiva is worshipped in the region mainly as dancing, displaying his power to destroy the universe which he achieved through this action.
hence this classified bibliography, necessarily incomplete, which can be understood as being simultaneously a reflection on past studies and a tool for further research. This bibliography may, as a result, also include papers or publications which deal with the late Buddhist art in Bihar or Southeast Asia when relevant to or quoted in the present paper. Among the publications listed below, special attention should be paid to the Ph.D. Thesis presented in 2009 at the University of Texas, Austin by EUN-SU LEE whose life tragically ended too prematurely. Exhaustive bibliographies on illuminated manuscripts are included in the works of KAREN WEISSENBORN (2012b) and JINAH KIM (2013); outstanding bibliographies on the topic of Esoteric Buddhist art have been prepared by ULRICH VON SCHROEDER in his publications of 1981 and 2001, to which one will add UTPAL CHAKRABORTY’S book:


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Legends to the pictures

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1. Tārā (Jagdal, Naogaon District; Paharpur site Museum)
2. Mārīcī (Narikelbaria, Paba, Rajshahi District; Varendra Rersearch Museum)
3. Mañjuśrī (Niyamatpur, Rajshahi District; National Museum of Bangladesh)
4. Avalokiteśvara (Mahakali, Vikrampur area; National Museum of Bangladesh)
5. Mañjuśrī (Chandimura, Lalmai, Comilla District; Rammala Library, Comilla)
6. Arapacana Mañjuśrī (Jalkundi, Northeast of Vikrampur area; National Museum of Bangladesh)
7. Mañjuvara (probably from Southeast Bangladesh; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)
8. Hevajra (Lajjair, Comilla District; National Museum of Bangladesh)
9. Hevajra (Barkanta, Comilla District; National Museum of Bangladesh)
10. Wrathful three-headed male deity (Paschimpara, Vikrampur area; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi), photo courtesy of G.J.R. Mevissen.
11. Parṇaśabarī (Naynanda, Vikrampur area; National Museum of Bangladesh)
12. Mārīcī (Bhavanipur, Vikrampur area; National Museum of Bangladesh)
13. Mārīcī (Salban vihara, Mainamati; formerly at the Mainamati Museum, present location unknown)
14. Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā (Sompara, Vajrayogini, Vikrampur area; National Museum of Bangladesh)
15. Mahāpratisarā (Kurkihar, Bihar; Patna Museum)
16. Buddha and his life (Betagi, Chittagong District; Ratnankur Vihar, Betagi)
17. Buddha and his life (Sibbari, Khulna District; Kamalapur Buddhist Monastery, Dhaka)
18. Avalokiteśvara (Harivarman’s regnal year 8; private collection)
19. Twelve-armed Avalokiteśvara (Harivarman’s regnal year 8; Baroda Museum inv. E.G. 122), photo courtesy of Brigit Breitkopf
20. Mañjuśrī as Dharmadhātu Vāgīśvara (Harivarman’s regnal year 8; Baroda Museum inv. E.G.121), photo courtesy of Brigit Breitkopf.
21. Īkārī (Manuscript dated N.S. 393 or 1273 AD, folio 401a; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi)

22. Eight-armed red goddess (Manuscript dated N.S. 393 or 1273 AD, folio 297a; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi)

23. Eleven-armed blue goddess (Manuscript dated N.S. 393 or 1273 AD, folio 173b; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi)

24. Four-armed blue god (Hevajra?) (Manuscript dated N.S. 393 or 1273 AD, folio 388b; Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi)