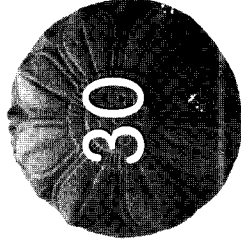


28. The theme of the celestial couple witnessing a dance performance by Gaṇeśa and other attendants of Śiva is described by Kālidāsa in his *Kumārasambhava*; see Pratapaditya Pal, "Umā-Maheśvara Theme in Nepali Sculpture." *Boston Museum Bulletin*, Vol. LXVI, pp. 91-92.
29. Alice N. Heeramanek, *Masterpieces of Indian Sculpture from the Former Collections of Nasli M Heeramanek* (Verona, Italy, 1978), pI. 94.
30. T. Donaldson, *op. cit.* (2007), fig. 1198.
31. *Ibid.*, fig. 121.
32. *Ibid.*, pl. C-149.



Iconography and Text: The Visual Narrative of the Buddhist Book-Cult in the Manuscript of the Ashtaśāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra

Jinah Kim

INTRODUCTION: A TALE OF TWO MANUSCRIPTS

This paper concerns two manuscripts of the *Ashtaśāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Perfection of Wisdom* in *eight thousand lines* (hence forth, *AsP*) one made in eastern India and the other made in Nepal during the mid-twelfth century. They are prepared in completely different regional styles. Their iconographic programs, too, differ considerably. Nonetheless, the study of one could inform our understanding of the other, revealing the nexus of meanings in the manuscript illustrations during this period. The illustrations in the *AsP* manuscripts from South Asia are often considered as having no relation to the text that they accompany. This assumption led previous scholars to dismiss the role of images in understanding the text and vice versa.¹ In this paper, I propose to reconsider this assumption and pursue to explain the relationship between the text and images in two *AsP* manuscripts from eastern India and Nepal with one tale, the story of a Bodhisattva whose selfless devotion to the Prajñāpāramitā epitomizes the essence of the book-cult.

THE NEPALESE *AsP* MANUSCRIPT IN THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF KOLKATA

One of the Buddhist manuscripts in the acclaimed manuscript collection of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, is an illustrated manuscript of the *AsP* prepared in *Nepala Samvat* 268 (1148 CE) during the reign of Ānandadeva in Nepal (G. 4203).² The donor of this manuscript was Tilaka who migrated from Kashmir (*Kāśmīranagara*).³ It measures about 15" by 2". It is considerably more rectangular than eastern Indian ones that are long and narrow, usually measuring about 22" by 2". The manuscript has four illustrations, two on the first two folios, fol. 1 verso and fol. 2 recto, and two on the last two folios, fol. 298 verso and fol. 299 recto.⁴ The first two folios have suffered from physical damages caused by insects and others.

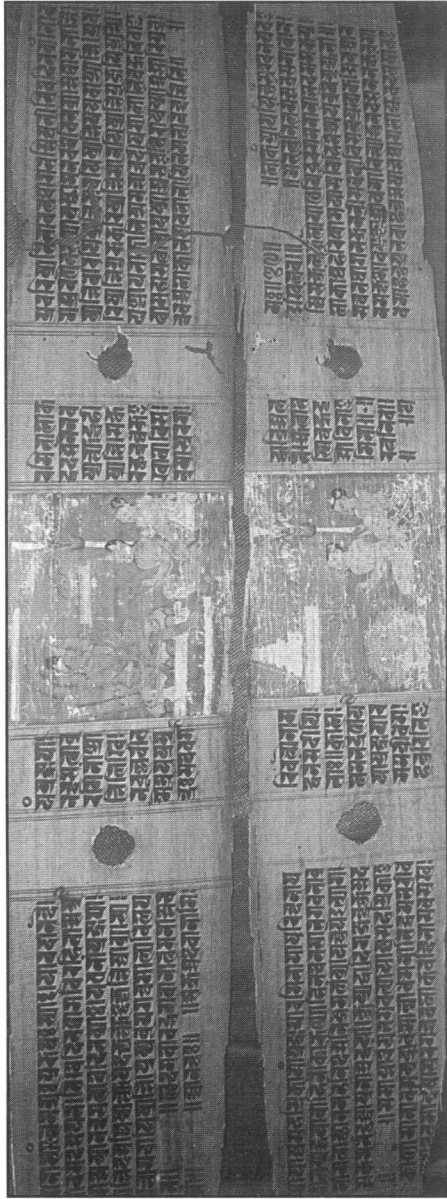


Pl. 30.1. Buddha and
Prajñāpāramitā, folios 1 and
2, *Ashtasāhasrikā*
Prajñāpāramitā sūtra

The difference in writing on the pieces of paper that reinforces the damaged parts suggests that the leaves were salvaged later, most likely in Nepal where this manuscript remained until the late nineteenth century. The paintings on the first two folios also suffered from damage, and lost much of the sumptuous pigments of vermilion orange, blue, yellow, purple, and different hues of green, which, otherwise, would have rendered the paintings stunningly beautiful.

Despite the damage, the iconography of the first two paintings is still discernable. The painting on the first folio represents the Buddha seated under a tree holding the gesture of preaching (*dharmachakra-mudrā*) with two attendants. The context of the book makes it possible to identify this scene of preaching as the opening scene of the *AsP* in which the Buddha begins to teach the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* on the Vulture peak at Rājagṛiha (Rājgir) (Pl. 30.1, top). The attendant on the left is attired in monk's robe. He might be Subhuti, one of the main interlocutors of the *AsP*. The figure on the right wears a tiara and might represent Indra (Śakra in the *AsP*) who is another main interlocutor of the *AsP*, but the damage is too severe to confirm this identification.

The painting on the facing page represents a four-armed female deity with two Bodhisattva figures on either side (Pl. 30.1, bottom).



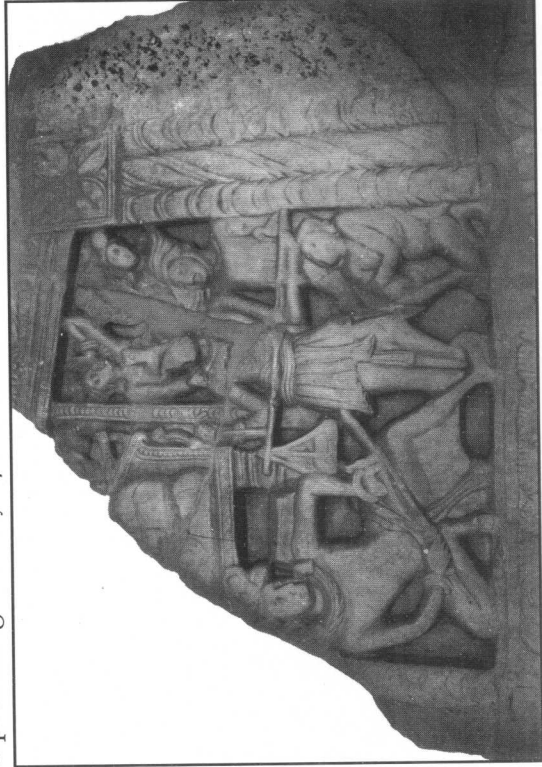
Pl. 30.2. Preaching
Bodhisattva and donors,
folios 298 and 299



She shows the preaching gesture in her main hands and holds a rosary and a book in her two raised hands. This undoubtedly represents Prajñāpāramitā, the personification of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text. These two paintings are meant to be viewed together, and the visual message of the two paintings in sum seems clear: the Buddha preaches the teaching of *Prajñāpāramitā*. The accompanying text to these two paintings is the eulogy to *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Prajñāpāramitānāmastuti*), but as opening images to the entire book, they illustrate the major event of the text rather effectively.

The paintings on the last two folios are fortunately in good condition (Pl. 30.2). Yet the iconography of these two paintings seems not as certain as that of the first set. The painting on folio 298 verso represents a Bodhisattva figure seated to the left showing the gesture of preaching with two figures seated in front of him holding *añjali-mudrā*.⁵ The facing folio shows two donor-like figures, male and female, both in *añjali-mudrā* with a roundel laid out in front of them and a rectangular object on a stand, topped by a stūpa-like structure. These two paintings may simply represent a generic scene of a Bodhisattva preaching the *Prajñāpāramitā* to the donors. But, a careful study of the narrative paintings of another *AsP*

Pl. 30.3. Sadāprarudita cutting his arm, folio 205 v, left panel, *Ashtasāhasrikā*
Prajñāpāramitā sūtra, Eastern India



THE EASTERN INDIAN *AsP*
MANUSCRIPT IN THE MUSEUM OF FINE
ARTS, BOSTON

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston has six illustrated folios, one text folio, and two wooden covers of an *AsP*



Pl. 30.5. Sadāprarudita and merchant's daughter on their way to merchant's house

manuscript (Acc no.20.589) dated to Gopāla's 4th regnal year (c. AD 1147). It is written in *Kuṭīla* (hooked) script. The colophon tells us that it was a pious donation of Kamalapāṇisimha who was the son of Vajrapāṇisimha. Unfortunately, we do not know any more about the donors. The full length royal title and the style of the paintings seem to suggest Varendra (northwestern region of Bengal) as the site of production. According to the museum's acquisition record it was purchased from Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1921.⁶ The record also adds that Coomaraswamy probably acquired the manuscript in India prior to 1917, but this information is yet to be verified. There are total eighteen illustrations, three on each of six illustrated folios. They form a complete set of illustrations placed in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the manuscript, following the convention of placing images in the manuscripts of the *AsP* from eastern India. Studying the entire iconographic program of the illustrations in this set is extremely important in understanding the role of images in the manuscripts of the *AsP* during the twelfth century in the esoteric Buddhist context in eastern India. However, it will require much more space than allowed here. My discussion of this manuscript will be limited to the iconographic program in the last two folios of this manuscript.

VISUAL PRECEDENT OF THE SELF-SACRIFICE STORY: THE ŚĪBI JĀTAKA

Unlike the rest of illustrations in this manuscript where the iconic representations of goddesses and esoteric deities dominate the scene, the six panels on folio 205 verso and folio 206 recto show characters in action, presenting a visual narrative (Pls. 30.3, 30.5-30.9). It has been assumed that the narrative sequence in these six panels represents an unidentified *jātaka* story as the museum record suggests.⁷ The first scene of the narrative on the left side panel of folio 205 verso (Pl. 30.3) does remind us of the famous *jātaka* tale of king Śibi, the *Śibi jātaka*, in which the king cut his own flesh to save a pigeon from a hawk, both of whom were Indra and Agni in disguise.

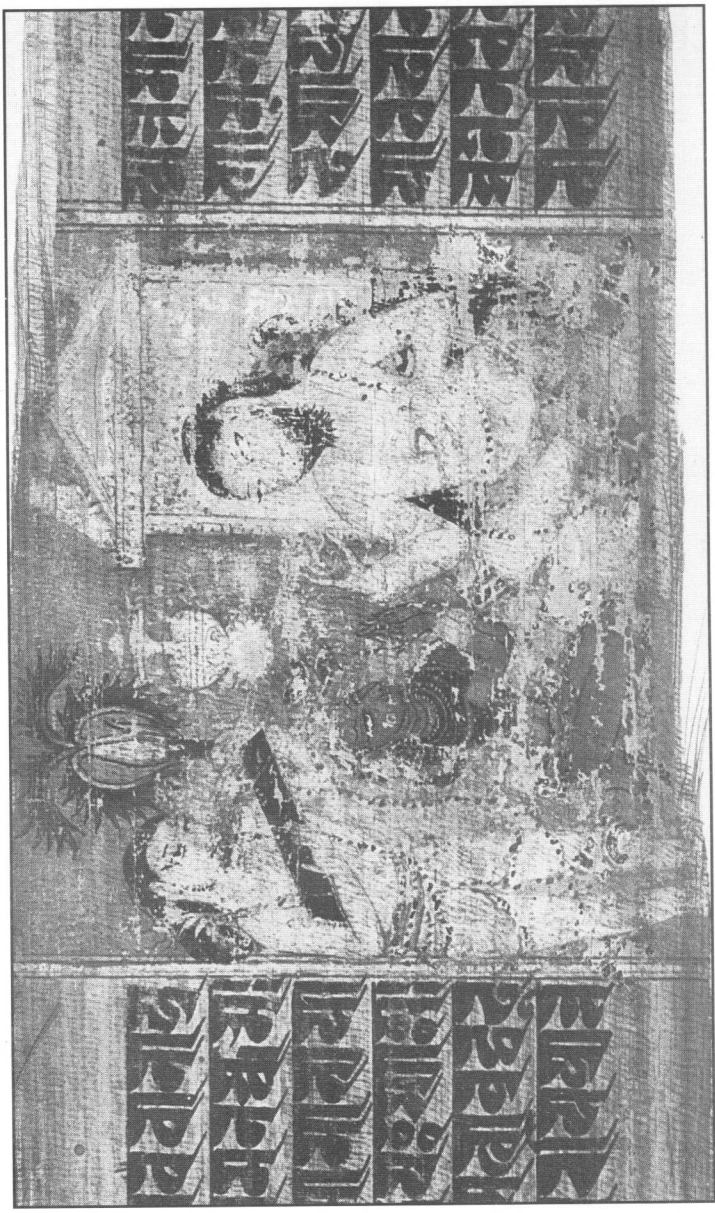
The relief panel now in the Nagarjunakonda ASI Site Museum represents the story of the *Śibi jātaka* rather vividly with the king seated to the left of the panel cutting his own

thigh with a long sword (Pl. 30.4). In the painting of the BMFA manuscript, we see a man standing to the left holding a sword and cutting his own limb (Pl. 30.3). The visual motif of the cutting one's own flesh is similar in these two representations. The protagonists both hold a long sword and show determined expressions and conviction in the manner in which they are executing the cutting. However, the manuscript painting lacks the typical visual clues that help identify the Nagarjunakonda relief as the representation of the *Śibi jātaka*. For example, a scale in front of the king and a bird in one of the attendant's arms in the Nagarjunakonda relief are missing in the painting. Instead, the painting shows a woman and a Brahman conversing with the man cutting his own flesh. The woman and this self-inflicting man appear in subsequent panels, indicating a continuous story line. If it is not the *Śibi jātaka*, what do these narrative paintings in the manuscript represent?

The text of the *AsP* does not appear to be an immediate candidate for the answer for it is a metaphysical treatise that expounds the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness and does not seem to fit the bill for identifying a narrative. However, a close reading of the text in relation to the paintings proves otherwise. Following the text and understanding its content as the makers and users of the manuscript would have done reveals the answer to the above question.

The text accompanying the paintings on folios 205 and 206 is the last section of Chapter 32, the last chapter of the *AsP*, followed by the colophon. In this last chapter, the Buddha entrusts his teaching of the Prajñāpāramitā to Ānanda and reiterates the importance of honouring the Prajñāpāramitā. The paintings do not depict this very event of the transmission of the *dharma*, but they depict the most dramatic narrative of the *AsP* about the selfless devotion of Sadāprarudita (ever-weeping) Bodhisattva to the Prajñāpāramitā and its teacher and his acquisition of the teaching of Prajñāpāramitā as told in Chapters 30 and 31, immediately preceding the illustrated pages. Conze condemns this story to be an *avadāna* (edifying tale) "tucked on at the end" that was subject to much more changes and alteration than any part of the *AsP*.⁸ The theme of cutting one's own flesh may share its root with a number of *jātaka* stories in which self-infliction for the sake of saving other beings is the main theme as in the *Śibi jātaka*.⁹ The source of the story of Sadāprarudita may be a *jātaka* or an *avadāna*, but it does not diminish its importance

Pl. 30.6. Merchant's daughter asking her father for his help



in the text of the *AsP*. The powerful visual representations of this story and their popularity in manuscript illustrations during the twelfth century suggest that it became one of the essential tools to illustrate and promote the book-cult of Prajñāpāramitā.

STORY OF SADĀPRARUDITA: THE TEXT AND THE ICONOGRAPHY

Chapter 30 begins with the Buddha telling Subhūti about Sadāprarudita as the example to follow in one's search for Prajñāpāramitā.¹⁰ The Buddha narrates that Sadāprarudita did not care for his body or his life in his search for Prajñāpāramitā and found himself in a secluded forest where he heard a voice telling him to go east. After focusing his entire thought and mind on how and where to hear Prajñāpāramitā without paying any attention to his physical needs, Sadāprarudita was finally told to go to Gandhavatī. In this beautiful town built of the seven precious things, said the voice, he would find Dharmodgata Bodhisattva who would preach Prajñāpāramitā to him.

The most dramatic event of the story comes when Sadāprarudita, out of his devotion, decided to sell himself to get gifts for Dharmodgata. However, Māra, the evil one, obstructed Sadāprarudita's plan by disposing everyone in town that no one could hear Sadāprarudita's cry for selling himself. Indra who, as in the *Śibi jātakā*, decided to test Sadāprarudita disguised himself as a young Brahman and asked him to sell his heart, blood and marrow of the bones. Sadāprarudita happily agreed to this young man's request, and "took a sharp sword, pierced his right arm, and made the blood flow. He pierced his right thigh, cut the flesh from it, and strode up to the foot of a wall in order to break the bone."¹¹ Witnessing this gruesome event of Sadāprarudita's self-mutilation from her window upstairs, a daughter of a merchant (*śreṣṭhīdārīkā*) ran down to ask the reason for his action. Sadāprarudita explained that he wanted to sell his body to worship Prajñāpāramitā (*prajñāpāramitām pūjayaśīṣyāmī*) and honour Bodhisattva Dharmodgata. This gruesome event that emphasizes the devotion to Prajñāpāramitā is what we see on the left panel of folio 205 verso (Pl. 30.3).

The man standing to the left who is cutting his left arm to bleed is Sadāprarudita. The man who stands to the right appears to be Indra in the guise of a young Brahman, indicated by a strand of long hair on the back of his head. Between them is a green female who seems to have just walked into the encounter of the two men. Her face is turned to the Brahman with a worrisome

Pl. 30.7. Sadāprarudita and merchant's daughter group on their way to Gandhavatī

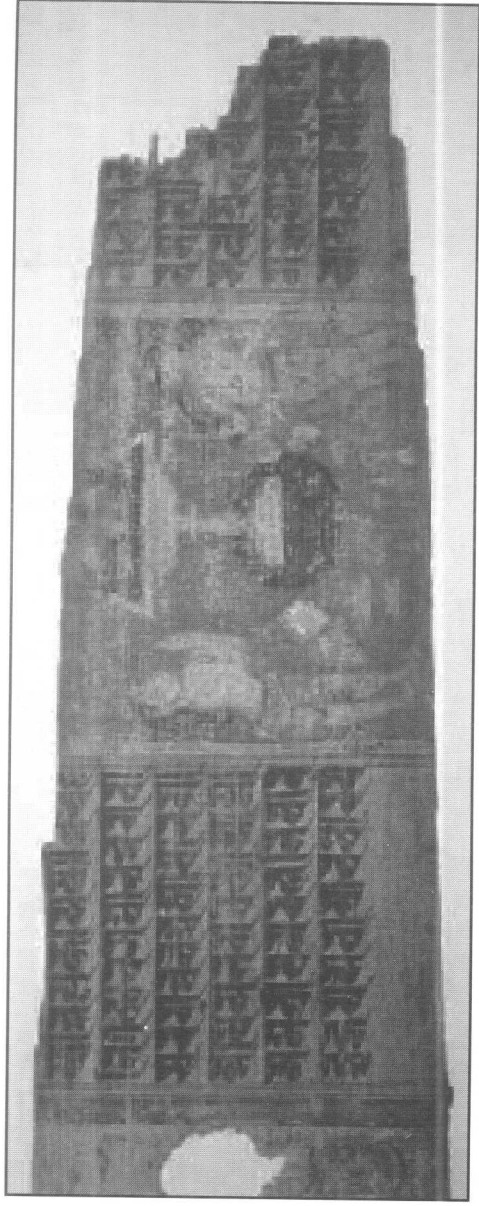


Pl. 30.8. Dharmodgata preaches Prajñāpāramitā expression; her left hand touches her chin and the right hand extended towards Sadāprarudita as if asking for explanation. The Brahman seems to be explaining the action of Sadāprarudita as his hand gesture of explanation suggests.

The gist of the event is conveyed visually with minor differences from the text.¹² The effect of self-mutilation is shown powerfully with the bleeding arm and with the red colour of the background. What sets this story and its representation apart from other stories of self-sacrifice, such as the *Śibi jātakā*, is that his heart, blood, and bone marrow are asked for, the most essential elements of one's life, rather than just one part of the body. The choice of the red colour for the background seems deliberate, setting the tone of the narrative. The powerful colour of blood that flows from Sadāprarudita's arm, which is the corporeal sign of ultimate devotion, dominates the entire sequence of the narrative.

Having heard the noble cause of Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter asked to join him in finding Bodhisattva Dharmodgata. She suggested that they should go to her parents together to ask for money to help them on the way. The next two panels on folio 205 represent this event. The central panel (Pl. 30.5) has the merchant's daughter leading the way followed by a small female figure, possibly an attendant. Sadāprarudita follows them. Instead of the sword in the previous panel, he holds a narrow rectangular object in dark blue colour with red pigments on top, possibly representing the book of Prajñāpāramitā. In the first panel, a rectangular object in dark blue colour on a white cross-legged stand installed on a dark blue round disc is noticeable above the merchant's daughter. This rectangular object must be the book that Sadāprarudita holds in the second panel, and the dark round disc must be a *maṇḍala* marking the sacred ground for the book. It is not clear what the word "Prajñāpāramitā" refers to in the text. But, the illustrations show that "Prajñāpāramitā" in the text is understood as "the book of Prajñāpāramitā," which is to be worshiped and to be preached, hence the importance of Dharmodgata as the *dharmaśāhīnaka*, or the dharma preacher in Sadāprarudita's mission is also explained.

The right side panel shows the daughter pleading to her father to give her a part of his wealth for Sadāprarudita's noble cause (Pl. 30.6). The text narrates that Sadāprarudita stood "at the threshold of the door to their house" while the daughter talked to her parents.¹³ In the painting, he stands behind the kneeling daughter, carefully holding the book of



Pl. 30.9. Sadāprarudita's worship of the book of Prajñāpāramitā

tree and the pot in the background seem to indicate the wealth of the merchant. In the story, the parents not only gave the daughter the permission to go but they also wanted to come with them to honour and worship the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata. So, the entire family set out on a journey together. And this part of the story continues on to the next folio.

The left panel of folio 206 recto shows four figures standing facing to the right (Pl. 30.7). The first two figures must be the parents, followed by the daughter turning back to Sadāprarudita who stands tall holding the book. The text describes the troupe to be preceded by her parents. The painting seems to represent the cues given in the text almost word-by-word. Every one's gesture in this scene suggests that this is not any moment in the middle of the journey but the very moment of discovery of Gandhavatī. The father looks further out to the right. He seems to explain what he sees far out, possibly the amazing city of Gandhavatī with Dharmodgata preaching in the centre, as described in the text. The mother gracefully folds her hands together in front of her chest, paying homage at the news of discovery. The merchant's daughter looks back to Sadāprarudita as if to confirm what her father says is true. Sadāprarudita seems to say yes to the girl's question, holding the book dearly. This scene must depict just the moment of the discovery because they seem to be still on a chariot. The narrow yellow strip crooked inwards right in front of the father's feet must represent the side view of a chariot. Right after this moment of discovery, the text tells us, they all dismounted from their carriage.

The father's gaze leads the viewer to the central panel of the folio (Pl. 30.8). This panel is much damaged, but it is still possible to identify the characters one-by-one. The seated figure facing left who displays preaching gesture must be the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata. In front of him sit the four who have just arrived at Gandhavatī, paying homage to him. The green colour of the female figure seated behind a male figure makes it possible to identify her as the merchant's daughter. Then, the male figure right in front of preaching Dharmodgata must be Sadāprarudita. The two figures represented above them must be the parents. It is unfortunate that this painting is badly damaged because at that time when they approached the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata, he is said to have created a fantastic structure for the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The text gives a detailed description of this high tower like structure:

...at that time, the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata created, for the perfection of wisdom, a pointed (peaked) tower (*kutāgāra*), made of the seven precious substances, adorned with red sandalwood, and encircled by an ornament of pearls. Gems that were placed into the four corners of the

pointed tower, and performed the functions of lamps. Four incense jars made of silver were suspended on its four sides, and pure black aloe wood was burning in them, as a token of worship for the perfection of wisdom. And in the middle of this tower a couch made of the seven precious things was put up, and on it a box made of four large gems. Into that the perfection of wisdom was placed, written with melted *vaidūrya* (lapis lazuli) on golden tablets (leaves). And that pointed tower was adorned with brightly coloured garlands which hung down in strips.¹⁴

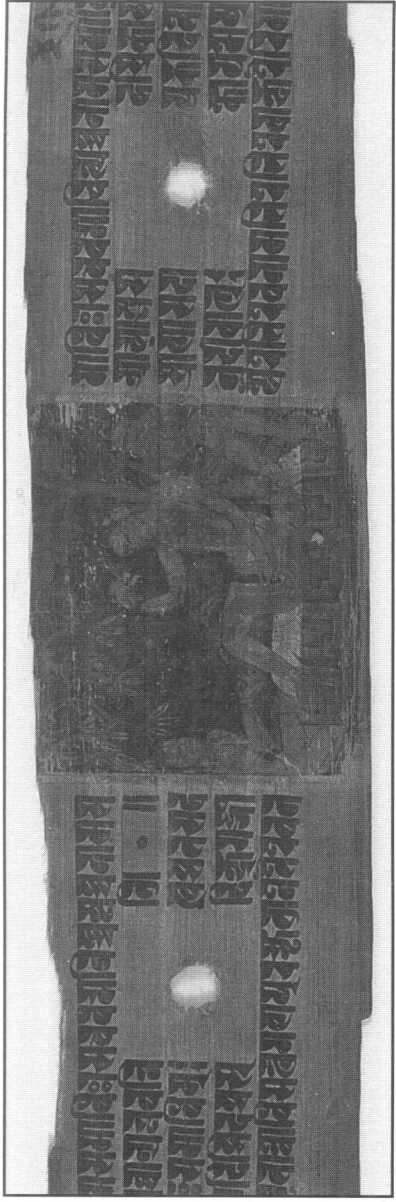
A structure located between the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata and the parents might represent this *kutāgāra* in which the Bodhisattva placed the beautifully written *Prajñāpāramitā*. There is a dark blue rectangular shape in the middle on which stands a narrow yellow structure from which garlands seem to be hanging down. A column or a pedestal on a round shaped object supports this rectangular object.

In case this structure is not understood as what it is, the next painting on the right side panel reveals it as a whole in the centre (Pl. 30.9). Thus, on a dark circle, probably a *maṇḍala* drawn to mark the sacred ground, is erected a yellow pedestal on which the rectangular shaped dark blue object decorated with red and white colours is placed. A narrow yellow pillar rises vertically from this dark blue object. Although the top part of this painting is broken and no more, this whole structure creates a sense of a tall structure. The yellow object on the top must represent the *kutāgāra* of *Prajñāpāramitā*. Two figures stand on either side of it honouring the book. This is not a random depiction of the worship of the book of *Prajñāpāramitā*. It depicts the next section of the text that follows the creation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* tower by the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata.

According to the text, the Sadāprarudita group witnessed Indra and thousands of other gods scattering flowers, sandalwood powder, gold and silver dust over this *kutāgāra*. Sadāprarudita asked Indra the reason for such devotional activities around the *kutāgāra*. Indra answered, "Do you not know the reason, son of good family? This is the perfection of wisdom, the mother and the guide of the Bodhisattvas. When Bodhisattvas train in it, they soon reach the perfection of all qualities, and, consequent on that, all the *dharma*s of a Buddha and the knowledge of all modes."¹⁵ Learning this, Sadāprarudita and the merchant's daughter with their troupe rushed to pay homage to the *Prajñāpāramitā* with "garlands, wreaths, garments, jewels, incense, flags and golden and silvery flowers" placing them in front of it.¹⁶

In the painting (Pl. 30.9), Indra who is identifiable with his distinctive hairdo stands to the right. His hand gesture suggests that he is explaining what the tower means to Sadāprarudita. Sadāprarudita stands to the left, paying homage to the *Prajñāpāramitā* placed high on a pedestal in the centre. All the offerings are laid out in front of this high pedestal. Flowers seem to hang around the narrow yellow object towering over the book. Although it is not the entire troupe with the merchant's daughter and servants paying homage to the *Prajñāpāramitā* as described in the text, the painting represents the story of Sadāprarudita in the text rather closely.

The story continues with Dharmodgata's sermons on various topics and his entering into *samādhi* for seven years. The second part of the story that continues in Chapter 31 has another event of self-inflicting, and this time the merchant's daughter and her five hundred maidens join Sadāprarudita in the action. The situation arose because Māra hid all the water so that Sadāprarudita could not find any water to sprinkle the ground with while preparing for Dharmodgata's seat. Sadāprarudita again "took a sharp sword, pierced his body on every side, and everywhere sprinkled that piece of ground with his own blood."¹⁷ And the women followed his lead. The story of Sadāprarudita ends at the beginning of Chapter 32 with Sadāprarudita's acquisition of the "six million concentration doors" and his seeing the Buddhas of all directions preaching the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The illustrations do not represent this second part of the story and the finale. Yet, the six paintings provide visual clues that



Pl. 30.10. Sadāprarudita's self-mutilation, folio 276v, *Asṭaśāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* follow the text very closely so that they are more than enough to deliver the gist of the story of Sadāprarudita, the selfless devotion to the Prajñāpāramitā and the ultimate reward of having a chance to hear the Prajñāpāramitā and worship the book in person. In addition, the accompanying text of these six paintings reiterates the importance of honouring the book of Prajñāpāramitā. Thus, we may conclude that the six panels closely illustrate the content of the *AsP* text.

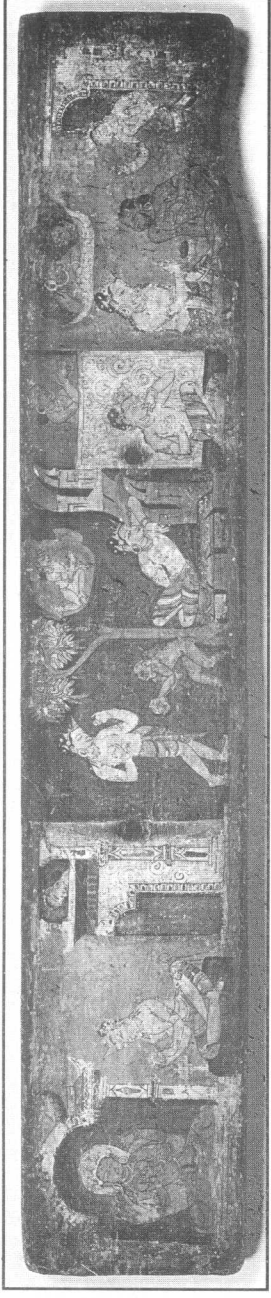
VARIED VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SADĀPRARUDITA STORY

The Sadāprarudita narrative seems to have gained popularity in Nepal. A number of illustrated folios and book covers of the *AsP* manuscripts executed in Nepalese style of twelfth and thirteenth century feature identifiable scenes of this story. Before moving on to the discussion of the illustrations in the Kolkata manuscript introduced in the beginning of this essay, a cursory investigation of the varied modes of the narrative representation employed to depict the Sadāprarudita story in the Nepalese manuscripts seems to be in order, for it will help us analyze the significance of the illustrations in the Kolkata manuscript and connect dots between the two manuscripts.

One of the three illustrated folios from a Nepalese *AsP* manuscript now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M 86. 345. 11 a c) presents this story in a single panel (M 86. 345. 11. b). It shows a male figure reclining under a tree and cutting his right thigh (Pl. 30.10).¹⁸ His body is smeared in blood and he seems to have ripped open his chest, probably to get the heart. This man clearly represents Sadāprarudita at the moment of self mutilation. The Brahman sits in front of Sadāprarudita with his hands extended towards him waiting to take Sadāprarudita's bone marrow and blood. The merchant's daughter stands behind the tree on the right side of the panel, with her head turned away from the gruesome scene.

This single panel depicting the bloody event of self mutilation stands for the entire story of Sadāprarudita and its moral, the selfless devotion to one's teacher of Prajñāpāramitā that ensures the acquisition of the Prajñāpāramitā. The painting is not randomly placed but it is chosen to be placed at the end of Chapter 31. It does not seem accidental that the text right next to the painting in the middle reads, "This (was) the thirty-first chapter of the *AsP*, titled Dharmodgata (*āryaśīṣasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitāyāndh-armedgata-parivarta-ekatrīṃśatamaḥ*)."¹⁹ The readers and the users of the book would have easily recognized that Sadāprarudita's self infliction depicted here represents his devotion to Dharmodgata whose preach and another incident of selfless act of devotion by Sadāprarudita and his troupe make up most of Chapter 31.¹⁹

Representing the story with a single panel was not the only mode of narrative representation employed in Nepalese manuscripts. One of the photos of illustrated folios taken by Sāṅkṛityāna during his trip to Tibet in late 1920s and early 1930s has a partial



view of an illustrated folio that features the Sadāprarudita narrative. Pl. 30.11. Sadāprarudita Sāṅkṛityāna's invaluable photos were published in 1986 from the narrative on the book cover K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute in Patna under the editorship of P.N. Ojha and S.K. Pathak with the title, *The Album of the Tibetan Art Collections*.²⁰ The third folio in plate 24 of this book shows two scenes from the Sadāprarudita narrative.²¹ The central panel of the folio shows a man seated to the left. He seems to be piercing his upper left arm. A young man stands in front of him and a woman seems to run down from a house on top of which a couple observes the unfolding event. The woman must be the merchant's daughter and the young man must be Indra in disguise as a young Brahman. The right panel shows four of them on a chariot, probably representing Sadāprarudita and the daughter followed by her parents.

After a careful examination of the photos against Sāṅkṛityāna's reports of his trips published in three installments in *Journal of Bengal and Orissa Research Society* in 1935, 1937 and 1938, I have concluded that this folio must belong to a manuscript that was in the Ngor Monastery when he visited there.²² Sāṅkṛityāna reports that a manuscript of the *AsP* (No. II.56) was incomplete with folios from 3 to 207. This particular manuscript, he says, had beautiful paintings on the last leaf and on two wooden covers. The last leaf with paintings that Sāṅkṛityāna mentions must be folio 207 as he reports. Because the manuscript is incomplete and missing the first two folios, which otherwise would have contained illustrations, there was only one illustrated folio left when he examined this manuscript. The folio with the Sadāprarudita narrative in the photo is numbered 207, and thus it must belong to the manuscript that was in the Ngor Monastery when Sāṅkṛityāna visited there. Although it is difficult to study the image from a reproduction of an old black and white photograph, the style of the paintings seems to be concurrent with the paintings in the Nepalese manuscripts. The representation of the characters and the chariot in the right side panel is similar to that of the *Vessantara jāṭaka* in one of the covers in the National Museum, New Delhi (Acc. No. 51.212).²³

These paintings are on the verso of folio 207, and if the facing folio (fol. 208) survived, it would have had the rest of the story as seen in the Boston example. The narrative sequence in this manuscript must begin with an event prior to the self-mutilation for, this scene is placed in the central panel unlike the Boston example that begins with the scene of self mutilation on the left panel.

Another Nepalese example representing this story now in the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York, captures it in yet another narrative frames (Acc. No. 1984. 429. 1 a-b). In this example, the story is depicted inside of the book covers that most likely belong to an *AsP* manuscript. They must have originated from Nepal judging from the style. The narrative is shown in multiple frames, following the sequence and details of the events as described in the text (Pls. 30.11, 30.12).

It begins with Sadāprarudita paying homage to the Prajñāpāramitā, represented as a four-armed female deity in the first panel (Pl. 30.11, left). This scene gives an answer to why the subsequent events take place in the following panels. It is like a preamble to the narrative that might be read, "in search of the Prajñāpāramitā, Sadāprarudita did the following", just

Like the Buddha opens the story in the text by addressing Subhuti, “Furthermore, Subhuti, one should search for perfect wisdom as the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita has done, who at present leads the holy life in the presence of the Tathāgata Bhīṣmagarjitānirghoṣhaśvara.”²⁴ The event unfolds as Sadāprarudita wanders about in the forest not caring for his body and welfare. In the painting, this situation is cleverly represented with a monkey offering food and Sadāprarudita showing no interest to the food offered (Pl. 30.11, middle). In fact, each scene shows the genius of the painter who seems to have been very inventive and pragmatic in rendering the story visually apprehensive.

The voice from the sky (*antarīkṣhānirghoṣha*) in the text is represented with a celestial being appearing in the air amidst red flame or light.²⁵ Māra who obstructed the people from listening to Sadāprarudita’s cry appears in the sky with an angry look on him with his attendant as if acknowledging that his attempt to prevent Sadāprarudita from making the great merit of self-sacrifice had failed (Pl. 30.11, right). Sadāprarudita is depicted as cutting his right calf to bleed with a small dagger, and when he appears next time on a chariot in the middle of the other cover, he is shown wearing an ornament around his calf that looks similar to his armlet, as if wearing a band-aid to cover his scar from the previous event (Pl. 30.11, right, Pl. 30.12, middle). This is unique to this painting for in other manuscript paintings he is not depicted with any sign of trauma after the initial mutilation scene. According to the text, Indra reveals his true identity and offers to grant a boon, but Sadāprarudita rejects this offer and restores his mutilated body himself “through the Buddha’s might and through the perfect purity of the Bodhisattva’s resolution.”²⁶ It seems that the painter decided to show the sign of Sadāprarudita’s sacrifice and the magical restoration. This little detail helps us identify Sadāprarudita from others, and we could discern that Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter are shown twice in this panel, walking towards the next scene.

The last panel of the narrative sequence shows Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter seated in front of the preaching Buddha who is seated on a pedestal with an elaborate canopy hovering over him (Pl. 30.12, right). Although the preacher is represented as a Buddha figure not a Bodhisattva, this must depict the culminating event of the Sadāprarudita narrative in which the group arrived in Gandhavaṭī and listened to Bodhisattva Dharmodgata’s teaching on Prajñāpāramitā.²⁷ There are unmistakable visual clues for this story, including Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter present in the front row among the audience. The yellow rectangular object topped by jewels, which is installed on a stand in the middle of the scene, must represent the book of Prajñāpāramitā. The air-bubble in the upper right hand corner must contain unhappy Māra and his attendant just like they appear in the sky in the facing panel although the damage makes it hard to confirm the identification.

Such an elaborate and inventive representation of the story suggests that it was open to interpretation unlike the conventionalized set of visual narratives such as the eight scenes of the Buddha’s life. More examples representing this story are sure to be found. For now, the varied examples of representing the Sadāprarudita story in the *AsP* manuscripts seem enough to suggest that the visual representations of this narrative were yet to

Pl. 30.12. Sadāprarudita narrative on the book cover



SADĀPRARUDITA NARRATIVE AND THE BOOK-CULT

Pl. 30.13. Dharmodgata preaching Prajñāpāramitā

The scene of Sadāprarudita cutting himself is so visually provocative and powerful that it could easily be the ‘icon’ of the story. It could also be the visual title of the story that reads “Sadāprarudita’s selfless devotion to the teacher of the Prajñāpāramitā.” Given its visual power, it may be an obvious choice to pick the scene of self-mutilation to represent the entire story if a “monoscenic” representation is desired for the iconographic program of the manuscript.²⁸ In some examples, as we have seen, it was indeed the case. But, in others, the emphasis was given not to the most dramatic event but to the most climatic event that reveals the result of all the dramatic actions taken along the path. As narrated previously, the story culminates to the events in Gandhavaṭī where the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaches Prajñāpāramitā and Sadāprarudita worships the Prajñāpāramitā in person. The Boston example shows the scene of Dharmodgata preaching the Prajñāpāramitā in the centre of the last folio, a prominent location in the iconographic program. In addition, the last scene of the narrative in the Boston manuscript is the worship of the book by Sadāprarudita. I believe that the two paintings placed at the end of the Kolkata manuscript represent these two scenes.

The preaching Bodhisattva seated on an elaborate pedestal on folio 298 verso of the Kolkata manuscript (Pl. 30.13) must be the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata from whose finger tips seems to come out the yellow rectangular object on a pedestal in front of him, the book of Prajñāpāramitā. The visual liaison between the fingers and the book gives an impression that Dharmodgata conjectured the book and its stand from his own hands. It physically relates the action of teaching, suggested by his hand gesture, to the content of teaching, implied by the book. The two figures seated in front of Dharmodgata are not necessarily identifiable individually, but they are clearly in the audience of Dharmodgata’s teaching. The facing panel has the same yellow rectangular object placed on a stand, representing the book (Pl. 30.14). The book is prominently located as in the previous panel, but bigger in size. A *stūpa*-like structure hovers over the book. This *stūpa*-like high tower structure must represent the *kuiṭāgāra* that Dharmodgata built for the Prajñāpāramitā.

The last panel of the Boston manuscript also shows the *kuiṭāgāra* in the form of a small yellow object over the book (Pl. 30.10), but due to the damage and its minute scale, it is hard

to identify what this *kutāgāra* looks like. On the other hand, the Kolkata manuscript shows a much bigger and more detailed depiction of the structure (Pl. 30.14). It has a few receding tiers on the bottom and a small dome topped with vertically stacked umbrellas. The damage on the top part of the painting is unfortunate, but even without the uppermost part, the structure looks just like a *stūpa* depicted in other Nepalese manuscript paintings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, like the “*Svayambhuchaitra*” in the *AsP* manuscript in the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, A. 15 dated to N.S. 191 (Pl. 30.15). The *stūpa*-like shape of the *kutāgāra* in the painting on folio 299 recto highlights the importance of the book as a sacred object and makes it an unmissable focal point of veneration. The sheer size of the book also makes a clear statement about its status as the sacred object to be worshipped by the devotees who look upward at the book with all due respect (Pl. 30.14).

If the panel depicting the preaching Bodhisattva represents the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaching the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the male and female devotee figures seated in front of a small *maṇḍala* worshipping the book in the facing panel must represent Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter, especially in comparison with the last two panels in the Boston example that feature preaching Dharmodgata in one and the worship of the book in the other. They may, of course, be a generic lay devotee couple.²⁹ With the donor colophon on this very folio, this would be a perfect place to portray the donors. In addition, the donor figures that appear in the lower registers of the steles from eastern India and Nepal of this time often feature a couple if not an entire family.³⁰ Their visual affinity to the contemporary sculptural representations of the donor figures may encourage anyone who has no prior knowledge of the text and its story to identify them as the donor couple. Moreover, in later Nepalese manuscripts, the last panel is often given to the depiction of donor and his family.³¹ Although it is tempting to fix their identity as one or the other and make an argument for one, it seems more productive to open our interpretation to why they might be both.

The contemporary manuscript illustrations like the Boston example and the text of the manuscript suggest that anyone in the know would have recognized the two paintings as a set depicting the climactic event of the Sadāprarudita narrative. The makers of this manuscript must

Pl. 30.14. Sadāprarudita and merchant’s daughter worships the book of *Prajñāpāramitā*



have chosen these two scenes to represent this narrative. The chance of the manuscript being displayed open for public viewing throughout its career before coming to the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, is, extremely slim. The manuscript must have remained in limited circulation. The two paintings are not only intended to represent the Sadāprarudita narrative but most likely to have been read as such among the people who used the manuscript. At the same time, Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter in this painting are indeed devotees, not just ordinary ones, but the most devoted worshippers of the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its teacher.

Sadāprarudita’s quest for the teacher of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is sometimes likened with Sudhana’s search for the teaching in the *Avatamsaka sūtra*.³² One of the major differences between the two characters is that Sadāprarudita has a female companion, the merchant’s daughter. Although the merchant’s daughter’s relationship to Sadāprarudita is not conjugal, the unnamed “merchant’s daughter” could easily be likened with the wives and female members of the family who are represented but often remain unnamed in inscriptions.³³ The pattern of donating images seems to have increasingly involved women of the household, for donor figures are often depicted as couples as long as they are not monastic celibates.³⁴ In this historical and cultural context, Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter seem to present the ultimate role model for lay donors of the book of *Prajñāpāramitā*.³⁵ They are to honour and worship the book of *Prajñāpāramitā* as Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter did.

The two simple scenes chosen in the Kolkata manuscript emphasize the importance of the book, especially considering how prominently the book of *Prajñāpāramitā* is depicted in relation to the archetype donors of Sadāprarudita and the merchant’s daughter. In this manifestation of the story, the focus is completely shifted to the book. The importance of the worship of the book, which was obviously practised with the manuscript in which these paintings appear, might have encouraged the choice of these two simple scenes from the narrative. But, even in its most elaborate narrative representations as seen in the Boston example, the focus of the story is the book of the *Prajñāpāramitā* as it appears in every panel held dearly by Sadāprarudita, if not actually in worship. Then, the visual narrative of Sadāprarudita seems to have been employed to illustrate the book-cult explained in the text of the *AsP*. In the Kolkata manuscript, the focus of the visual narrative is shifted from the dramatic events to the most culminating event of teaching and the worship of the book, and so the book’s importance as a cultic object is even more highlighted and the gist of the book-cult gets epitomized in two simple scenes.

Pl. 30.15. Svayambhu stūpa (caption reads, “Nepāl svayambhuchaitra”), *Ashtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*

CONCLUSION

The story of Sadāprarudita as told in the *AsP* is not necessarily about the worship of the book. Like the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage in the *Avatāṃśaka sūtra*, it is about searching for the teaching of *dharma*, especially of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Like the *Śibi jātaka*, it emphasizes selfless giving, so the story is in fact about selfless devotion to the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its teacher. Various visual representations of this story in the eastern Indian and Nepalese manuscripts of the *AsP* confirm that the theme of quest for the perfect wisdom and of selfless devotion to the teaching is closely followed in pictorial rendering of the story. Yet, the way it is rendered in the Kolkata manuscript and the Boston manuscript clearly indicates that "Prajñāpāramitā" in the text was understood as the book of *Prajñāpāramitā*, and this book was one of the most important elements of the story. After all, these paintings appear in the book of *Prajñāpāramitā*, and it is not a surprise that the books of the *AsP* promulgate their self-importance and prove that they are worthy of veneration.

The date of the Boston manuscript is tentative for it is given in a Pāla king's regnal year, but Gopāla's 4th year may be around AD 1147 with our current knowledge of the Pāla chronology. The date of Kolkata manuscript is AD 1148 (N.S. 268). These two manuscripts are more or less contemporaneous to each other. Interestingly, they are among the earliest dated illustrated manuscripts that feature the Sadāprarudita narrative. Thus, the Sadāprarudita narrative as rendered in these two manuscripts not only illustrates the book-cult as explained in the text but also helps us understand the book-cult as practised in the twelfth century. Hopefully, this study will help identify more twelfth century manuscripts with the Sadāprarudita narrative that could shed some light on our understanding of the Buddhist book-cult of the twelfth century.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. J.P. Losty, "An Early Indian Manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*," in Debala Mitra and Gouriswar Bhattacharya (ed.), *Studies in Art and Archaeology of Bihar and Bengal* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1989), 8. Losty argues that it is natural to find that the images do not go with the accompanying text in the manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra* now in the British Library because the images in the manuscripts of the *AsP*, the most popular text of the time, often have nothing to do with the text.
2. H.P. Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Government collection under the care of the Asiatic society of Bengal*, Vol. I, Buddhist Manuscripts (Calcutta: Baptist mission Press, 1917), 3-4. This information is given in the colophon on the verso of folio 299. *Ibid*.
3. Shastri wrongly reports that the first two leaves contain four illustrations.
4. This painting of the Bodhisattva in preaching gesture on folio 298 verso was previously published in Pratapaditya Pal's *The Arts of Nepal* (fig. 26) and the *Buddhist Book Illuminations* (fig. 39) with wrong provenance as belonging to a manuscript in the Cambridge University Library. Pal, *The Arts of Nepal* Vol. 2, paintings (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), fig. 26; P. Pal and J. Meech-Pekarik, *Buddhist Book illuminations* (New York: Ravi Kumar Publishers, 1988), fig. 39.
6. This record was provided to me on August 3, 2005 when I did research at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
7. Acquisition record, No. 20.589, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Aug 3, 2005. Coomaraswamy identified them as representing the *Kṣhāntivādin jātaka*. A.K. Coomaraswamy "An illustrated Nepalese Manuscript," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, Vol. XIX, no. 114 (August, 1921), 47-49. I would like to thank Eva Allinger for this reference.
8. Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its verse Summary* (Berkeley, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), xvi.
9. Lewis Lancaster suggests that this part of the Sadāprarudita story is a parallel to the *Śibi jātaka*. Lewis Lancaster, "An Analysis of the AshtasāhasrikāPrajñāpāramitāsūtra from the Chinese translations," PhD Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1968), 208.
10. The story recast here is based on Conze's translation. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 277-290.

11. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 285. "atha khalu sadāprarudito bodhisattvo mahāsattvaṣṭīkṣaṇaṃ śāstrāṇi gṛhītvā dakṣiṇaṃ bāhuṃ viddhva lohitāni niḥstrāvayati sma/dakṣiṇaṃ chorāni viddhva nirmāṇaṃ kṛtvā aṣṭhi bhettum kuḍyamūlāmapasānikrāṇatī sma" dakṣiṇaṃ choruṃ viddhva nirmāṇaṃ kṛtvā aṣṭhi bhettum kuḍyamūlāmapasānikrāṇatī sma Vaidya (ed.), *Ashtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* with Haribhadra's Commentary Called Aloka (Dharbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit learning, 1960), 245-246. This is a very detailed description of the bloody event of self-infliction that suggests the level of Sadāprarudita's devotion.
12. In the story, Sadāprarudita hurts his right arm, but this would have meant wielding the sword in his left hand. The painting seems to represent a more practically reasonable situation where Sadāprarudita holds the sword in his right hand and thus cutting his left arm. Another difference is that in the text, Sadāprarudita himself explains what he is doing, not the Brahman.
13. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 287. Vaidya, *AsP*, 247.
14. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 288, parentheses mine. Vaidya (ed.), *AsP*, 249-250. "tena khalu punaḥ samayena dharmodgatena bodhisattoena mahāsattvena prajñāpāramitāyāḥ kṛtāśaḥ saptaratnamayaṇi kuṭāgārāni kāritamabhūt lohitachandanālanīkṛitāni muktājālaparikṣiptāni/chaturshu kuṭāgārakoṇeshu maṇiratnāni sthāpitāni yāni pradīpakṛitāni kurvanti sma/chatastaścha dhūpaghaṭikā rūpyamavyaśchaturdisamavastatḥ yatra śuddhaṃ kṛṣṇāgūru dhūpyate sma yaduta prajñāpāramitāyāḥ pūjārthani/tasya cha kuṭāgārasya madhye saptaratnamayaḥ, paryāṇikaḥ prajñāpto 'bhut/chaturṇāṇi ratnāṇāni peḍā kṛtā yatra prajñāpāramitā prakṣiptā suvarṇapaṭṭeshu likhītā vīṭīna vāiduryeṇa/hachcha kuṭāgārāni nānāchitrapaṭṭadāmaḥbhīḥ pralambamānātralīnikṛitamabhūt /"
15. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 289.
16. *Ibid*.
17. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 296.
18. P. Pal suggests that this scene is a unique representation of the lady Māyā reclining right before the birth. Pratapaditya Pal, *Buddhist Book Illuminations* (New York: Ravi Kumar Publishers, 1988), fig.43, 121.
19. Another example of an iconic representation of the story in a single panel is found in the *AsP* manuscript now in the Tibet Museum, Lhasa. In this painting, Sadāprarudita is seated to the left cutting his right thigh and drawing blood and bone marrow out of it, while an old Brahman and a girl stand in front of him. This painting also has the Buddha appearing in the sky amidst clouds, conflating the scene of self mutilation with the event of the Buddha appearing in the mid air to instruct Sadāprarudita to go to Gandhavaṭi in one. This painting appears in the catalogue of Tibetan artifacts published in China. Yan Zhongyi, Jiang Chen'an, Zheng Wenlei (eds.), *Precious Deposits: Historical Relics of Tibet* (Beijing, China :Morning Glory Publishers ;Chicago, IL : Distributed by Art Media Resources, 2000), Vol.1, 111.
20. S. K. Pathak (ed.), *The Album of the Tibetan Art Collections* (Collected by Pt. Rahula Samkrityayana from the Nor, Zhalu and other monasteries in 1928-29 and 1934), (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1986).
21. *Ibid.*, pl. 24.
22. Sāṅkṛityāyana, " Sanskrit Palm-leaf Mss. In Tibet," *JBORS*, Vol.21 (1935), 32.
23. For reproduction, see P. Pal, *Arts of Nepal*, fig. 32, and S. P. Gupta (ed.), *Masterpieces of the National Museum Collection*, fig.121. The National Museum, New Delhi has a complete manuscript of the *AsP* with this book cover, missing only a few folios. The manuscript is dated to N.S. 477 (AD 1327). The paintings on the other cover, however, are executed in eastern Indian style and must have been retrofitted to this manuscript. It is possible that this cover, too, did not originally belong to this manuscript, although it is less likely for the paintings on the manuscript folios are similar to the paintings of the *Vessantara jātaka* in their style and colour palette.
24. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 277.
25. Vaidya, *AsP*, 238.
26. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom*, 286. This is another point of story that differs from the *Śibi jātaka* in which Indra restores the body of the king.
27. This choice of representing Dharmodgata Bodhisattva as Buddha might reflect a conscious effort to conflate the Dharmodgata Bodhisattva who preaches the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the Buddha who preaches the entire *AsP*. This conflation of identity serves the narrative in two folds, locating it

both in the past when Dharmodgata preached the Prajñāpāramitā and in the present when the Buddha preaches the Prajñāpāramitā in the *AsP*.

28. Vidya Dehejia, "On modes of visual narration in early Buddhist art," *The Art Bulletin*, LXXII, No. 3 (1990), 378.

29. I use the term "generic" because the colophon does not specify if the donor was married.

30. Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Between men and gods: small motifs in the Buddhist art of eastern India, an interpretation," in K.R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere (ed.), *Function and Meaning in Buddhist art: Proceedings of a seminar held at Leiden University*, 21-24 October 1991 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 59-79.

31. Many *Pañcharakṣā* manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth century show the donor families in the last illustrated panels. For example, the British Library has a number of Pañcharakṣā manuscripts most of which contain the depictions of the donor families at the end of the manuscript, see Or.13894, Or.13852 and Or. 13946. Or.13946 has a full page depiction of the donor family.

32. Richard D. McBride, "The Vision-Quest motif in narrative literature on the Buddhist traditions of Silla," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 27 (2004), 20.

33. However, this situation changes considerably later in Nepal, for all the family members are often named and listed in the donative inscriptions of manuscripts and sculptures made after the fifteenth century.

34. As discussed in Bautze-Picron's essay, the rectangular slabs and the lower registers of the steles from eastern India show donor figures often as couples.

35. The doctrinal significance of the Sadāprarudita-merchant's daughter couple is also an important topic to discuss in relation to the rampant esoteric images in the manuscript paintings of the twelfth century eastern India, but it is out of scope of the present article.

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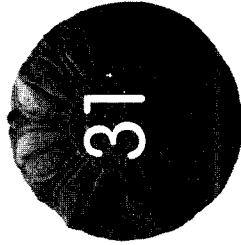
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Two Unpublished Mārīchī Sculptures in the Khulna Museum, Bangladesh, and Related Images from Mainamati

Gerd J.R. Mevissen

Mārīchī, the Buddhist goddess of Light and Victory, is well known to scholars of Indian iconography.¹ Quite a large number of Mārīchī images originated from Eastern India. In her comprehensive study on this goddess Claudine Bautze-Picron (2001) listed thirty-four stone sculptures from Bihar,² fourteen from Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh),³ and altogether thirty-one from Orissa,⁴ Uttar Pradesh⁵ and other regions.

The present article aims at bringing to attention the existence of two large stone sculptures of Mārīchī that remained unnoticed so far.⁶ They are presently kept in the Archaeological Museum at Khulna in the south-west of Bangladesh and may be dated to the eleventh/twelfth century, the high-time of Mārīchī image carving in the Bengal region.⁷

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The first image (Pl. 31.1) bears the museum's acc. no. 48; it is carved out of black stone and measures 121 cm in height and 62.5 cm in width. Quite unspecifically, its provenance is given as Barisal, without indicating whether by this is meant the City, the District or the Division of the same name in the south of Bangladesh. The sculpture is remarkably well preserved and complete, no damage can be observed.

The three-headed and eight-armed goddess stands in *pratyālīḍha* position, i.e., with her right leg bent and the left one stretched, on a *viśvapadma* pedestal. Her central head as well as the one on the proper right are human, with wide-open eyes, a third eye on the forehead, and a forceful (though not fierce) facial expression. As usual in Mārīchī images, her left head is that of a sow. Her ears are adorned with round *kuṇḍalas*, her heads with a tall *mukuta* ornamented with triangular elements. She wears a multiple beaded necklace, triangular-shaped *keyūras* on her upper arms, broad wristlets and chains on her ankles. The