

**THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
OF THE CITY OF DETROIT**

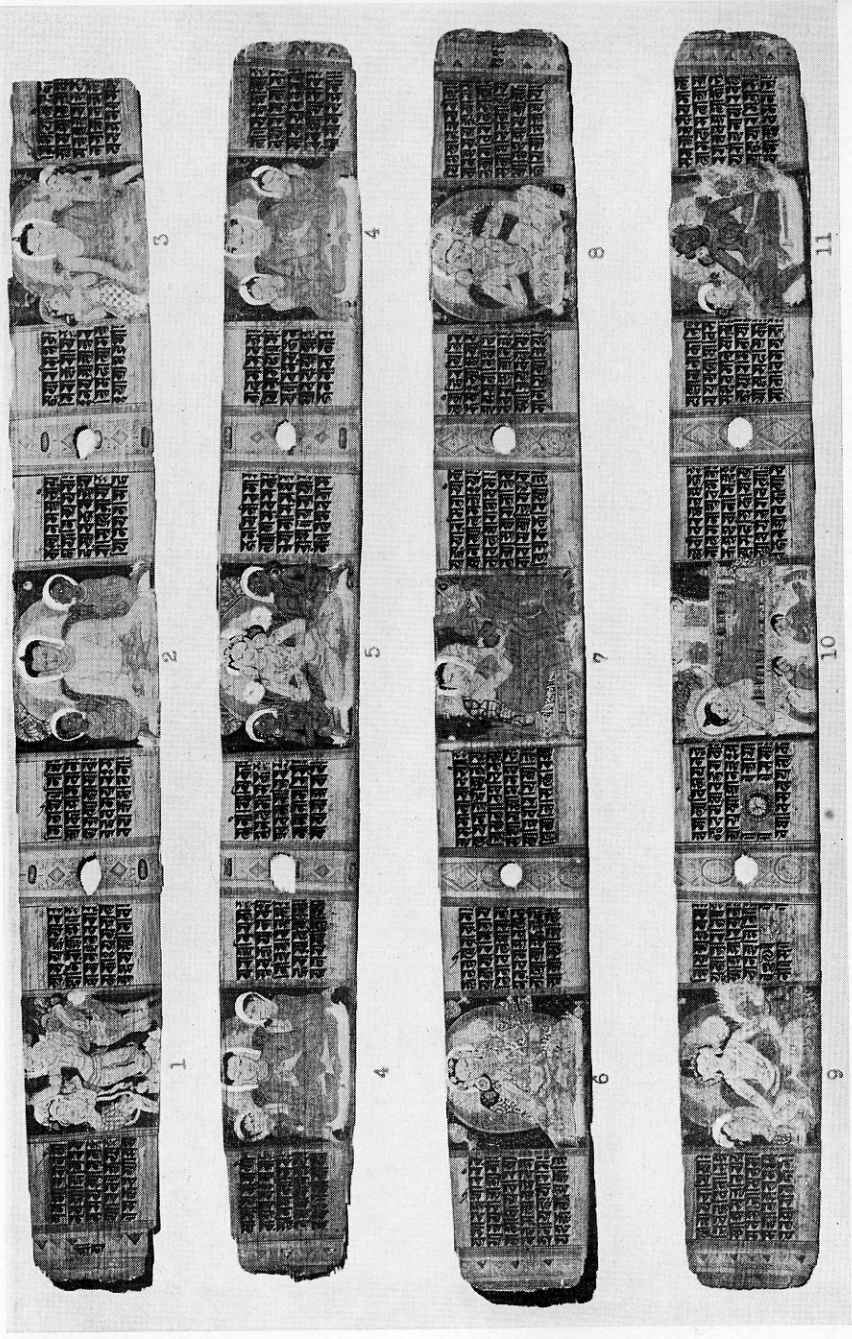
Bulletin

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GILT COPPER IMAGE OF VASUDHĀRĀ, NEPALESE, TWELFTH CENTURY.
Gift of The Founders Society, 1942.



FOUR LEAVES OF A MANUSCRIPT, NEPALESE, THIRTEENTH CENTURY. Gift of P. Jackson Higgs, 1927.

A MANUSCRIPT AND A BRONZE FROM NEPAL

THE ART of medieval Nepal is characteristically represented by two forms: illustrated manuscripts and copper ("bronze") images, usually gilded. Most of the examples found in our museums are Buddhist in origin, although the Hindu sects were equally active in craft production. The Institute is particularly fortunate in possessing both a manuscript¹ and a copper image,² the former being the gift of P. Jackson Higgs while the latter was recently purchased through the generosity of the Founders Society.

Mountainous Nepal was in the fortunate position of an outlying state, whose art was *retardataire* rather than provincial. As Coomaraswamy points out, the art of Nepal is, "at any given moment, likely to be superior to that of the plains." Thus we are confronted with Nepalese works of the ninth through the thirteenth centuries which strongly recall the fifth and sixth century Gupta art of Central India. But where Gupta art is subtle and sophisticated in a masculine sense, Nepalese art of this period is more feminine in its effect. In painting the color seems sweeter, more gentle, the line more delicate, while in sculpture the forms are more tender and pliant while the addition of inlaid jewels parallels the sweetened color effects of the paintings. Moreover, Nepalese bronzes and manuscripts are usually miniature in scale, while Gupta art is more often of heroic proportions.

From the standpoint of thought and meaning, however, medieval Nepalese art continues without weakening the traditions of Buddhist art in India. The images and illustrations, anonymous products of hereditary artisans, are the result of social and religious concepts, not individual notations resulting from observations of natural appearance. The resulting images, whatever their aesthetic accomplishment may mean today, were considered as a means to an end; they were not made for themselves but for their appointed place in the social system, i.e., as images or as illustrations aiding the less accomplished of the faithful to understand the life of the deity and the meanings inherent in his teaching. Like medieval and ancient art, these artifacts drew their sustenance directly from the culture without benefit of middleman. They are not the products of a day or a decade, but are the results of centuries of religious thought transmitted into material form by a craft tradition only slightly less old than the doctrines which were its reason for being.

NEPALESE MANUSCRIPT

This particular manuscript with the Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭasāhasrika-prajñā-pāramitā* (Book of Transcendent Wisdom) is unique in this country because of the synoptical life of Buddha pictured on the palm leaves in eight scenes.³ Although the manuscript itself is a basic scripture in Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) Buddhism, which is a later and more hieratic, ritualized and developed form of Buddhism, the Life scenes considerably outnumber representations of deities in the expanded hierarchy characteristic of the Great Vehicle. The Life scenes seem more human and understandable to the Westerner, while the deities of the Mahāyāna seem remote and inhuman at first glance. Thus while the Buddha's life was a series of acts which materialized basic ideas, the abstract forms of the deities personify ideas with less reference to acts. This changed attitude, the result of theological development from primitive to developed forms, can also be traced in other religions including Christianity.

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The Eight scenes represented in our manuscript roughly correspond to the Eight Miracles usually represented by Mahāyāna theology. The Descent of the Bodhisattva from Heaven is omitted as is the Great Miracle of Srāvastī. The First Sermon (Turning the Wheel of the Law) is represented twice, while an unidentified scene makes up for the total.

It is not possible here to give more of the Life of Buddha than is represented on the manuscript.³ The first scene (1) shows the Bodhisattva's birth as Prince Siddhārtha to Queen Māyā. The supernatural event occurs in the sacred Lumbini grove near Kapilavastu in Nepal. Queen Māyā, conforming to the Indian feminine ideal, is in the traditional pose of fertility goddesses and earth sprites. A ten-eyed deity receives the babe from Queen Māyā's side; an attendant bearing a fly-whisk (*caurī*) supports the Queen. The Bodhisattva's birth as a prince is important for it is even more significant to renounce a favored position than to escape from a poorer existence. The prince who renounces his worldly position is a favorite Buddhist subject and is often found in the Jātaka legends.

The second scene (3) shows the Bodhisattva in the ascetic garb beneath the *bodhi* tree at Bodhgayā. Realizing the misery of mankind he seeks a solution and after trial and error he arrives near his goal. Before he attains Enlightenment, however, there occurs the Temptation and Assault of Māra, the Evil one. The scene shows the Bodhisattva, triumphant over the wiles of Māra and his daughters, making the gesture of Calling the Earth to Witness to attest his right, as opposed to Māra's, to the seat beneath the Wisdom Tree. The serene bearing of the ascetic is wonderfully contrasted with the voluptuous wiles of Māra's daughters.

In the third scene (2) we see the Enlightened Buddha, for he is no longer a Bodhisattva, attended by two adoring disciples. Witnessing his attainment, his clothes now have the perfect simplicity of a Buddha, while his pose is that of the yogi who meditates (*padmāsana*; gesture *dhyāna*). The Saviour has realized by meditation the solution of misery and evil, a solution to be obtained in life, not necessarily after death. Understanding that the chain of existence (Nature) is impersonal and ordered by law, the Buddha finds solution in not striving to break that which cannot be disrupted. Non-desire and non-striving, the equitable life of disciplined moderation, is the goal of the enlightened.

The fourth scene (4) represented twice, is the cornerstone of Buddhist faith, the Sermon at the Deer Park in Benares. The hands are in the *dharmacakra mudrā*, symbolizing the Turning of the Wheel of the Law; beneath the Buddha is the lotus, a constant Buddhist motif. Since there are two representations, only slightly different, it would seem likely that one or both are intended not for illustrations as in the Birth or Temptation, but as visual representations of the Law in itself, i.e., not as a scene or an act, but as an idea alone.

The next three representations are of Miracles occurring during the wanderings of the Buddha and his disciples. These miracles often have the character of a Jātaka Tale with their compassion and gentleness with particular reference to animals. The first (fig. 2) shows the Buddha Taming the Maddened Elephant. We see the elephant threatening, with trunk upraised, and then kneeling in adoration of the Saviour. Such double representations are common to a conceptual attitude in art as found in the West as well as the East. The second Miracle (7) is that of the Monkey's Offering. We are told that a certain monkey made so bold as to offer a bowl to the Buddha. Overjoyed at the gracious reception of his gift he dances for joy and finds a final release in his exertions. Again we find the simultaneous narrative method used: the monkey offering his bowl, and the monkey dancing. The third scene (somewhat damaged and repaired) of this



FIGURE 2. BUDDHA TAMING
THE MADDENED ELEPHANT (ENLARGED DETAIL).

group is unknown to me, but it seems to represent the adoration of the Buddha by traditional Hindu deities. Perhaps this is the episode of Indra presenting healing fruits to the Buddha.

The final scene (10) from the Life of Buddha is the Parinirvāṇa or Death of Buddha. The Buddha lies on a Lion throne attended by sad-eyed disciples. Admonishing them to carry on his work and to hold to the faith he attains final release in the midst of the peace and enlightenment he had attained.

Five additional representations show deities of the Mahāyāna Buddhist Pantheon. Prajñāpāramitā (5), the personification of the Scripture, is shown in *dharmacakra mudrā*, with two attendants and with a lotus on either side. Padmapāṇi (9) is pictured in the pose of royal ease making the gesture of charity (*varada mudrā*) and attended by Mārīcī (?) who has an aurora shaped halo; to the left is an unidentified personage. At the other side of the same leaf is Padmapāṇi's sakti, Tārā (11), in her green form. She is in the same pose but her left hand makes the gesture of holding the lotus (*kataka mudrā*), which can be seen above her left shoulder. Other deities represented are Kuvera (8), the corpulent God of Wealth and his consort, Vasudhārā (6). Other pages of the manuscript are embellished with small Buddhist symbols: lotus, wheel, stupa, animals, etc.

Stylistically considered our manuscript seems to be of a slightly later time than the dated examples in Boston, Washington and Cleveland. In comparison with the painted covers on our manuscript which date from the sixteenth century,⁴ the textual illustrations have more subtle outlines which merge with the enclosed form. The color and drawing is of the twelfth century tradition but a little cruder and

more provincial. The curious projection of the farther eye observable on the three-quarters view of the face, is found, with a few exceptions, only in Gujarātī painting. Its presence here is not easily explained but it does indicate a date somewhat later than the twelfth and earlier than the sixteenth century, probably in the thirteenth.

COPPER IMAGE OF VASUDHĀRĀ

Vasudhārā, in the form represented by our image, is more than ordinarily difficult for the Westerner to understand. Surrounded by a rational and humanistic tradition, we are inclined to view images with six arms as freaks or monsters. Such an interpretation escapes the real meaning inherent in images in general and in this figure of Vasudhārā in particular. Coomaraswamy says, tersely and to the point, that images are "not meant to function biologically." They are not renditions of humanity but material aids to worship which embody a concept or an idea. Thus Vasudhārā needs six arms in order to hold the attributes which explain her functions and position in the Mahāyāna system. She is seated in the pose of ease (*lalitāsana*). The lower part of her body is covered by a *dhōṭī* on her head is jeweled crown, while about her neck and arms are jeweled necklaces and bracelets. These are inlaid with turquoise and another stone, probably jacinth. Beginning with the lower right and progressing clockwise, her hands hold the following attributes or make the following gestures: gesture of charity (*varada*), jeweled lotus bud, gesture of salutation, Prajñāpāramitā manuscript, spike of grain, jeweled vase.

The symbols, grain, jewel and vase, signify the nature of Vasudhārā. She is the Goddess of Abundance, the consort of Kuvera Jambhala, the God of Wealth (in our manuscript they are pictured together on the same leaf as a pair). The spike of grain is particularly significant and would indicate that the Goddess was originally a fertility deity absorbed by the Mahayana theology, perhaps the Hindu ogres-deity Hāritī.⁵

This image, like most Indian and Indonesian metal sculpture, was cast by the lost wax process. The small size, the gilding and the inset stones give the figure the precious air of a goldsmith's product. The easy grace of the torso and the gentle cast of the features are in the finest traditions of Nepalese art. The problem of the articulation of many arms has been solved with certainty; the effect is no less convincing from the back. Indeed it can be claimed that six arms are aesthetically more satisfactory than two, for they complete the movement of the figure contained within the circle whose outer limits are foot, knees, hands and crown. The tendency to elaborate ornament and the somewhat pliant nature of the image indicate a twelfth century date, one stage removed from the famous ninth century figure in Boston.

SHERMAN E. LEE

¹Accession Number: 27.586. Painting on palm leaf and wood. Height: $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches (average); Width: $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Two wooden covers; 250 leaves. Gift of P. Jackson Higgs, 1927. Mentioned by A. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 146. Other Nepalese manuscripts are in Boston (Museum of Fine Arts); Washington (Freer Gallery), and Cleveland. The last, dated 1160 A.D., is the earliest dated Indian painting in this country.

²Accession Number: 42.1. Gilt copper. Height: $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Gift of the Founders Society, General Membership and Donations Fund, 1942.

³For the Life of Buddha see N. Krom, *The Life of Buddha* (according to the Lalita Vistara, and illustrated by representations from the great Buddhist monument of Borobudur in Java).

⁴See *The British Museum Quarterly*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Oct. 1933, pl. XXIV, pp. 71, 72.

⁵Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, Oxford, 1928, p. 130.

POLISH TEXTILES

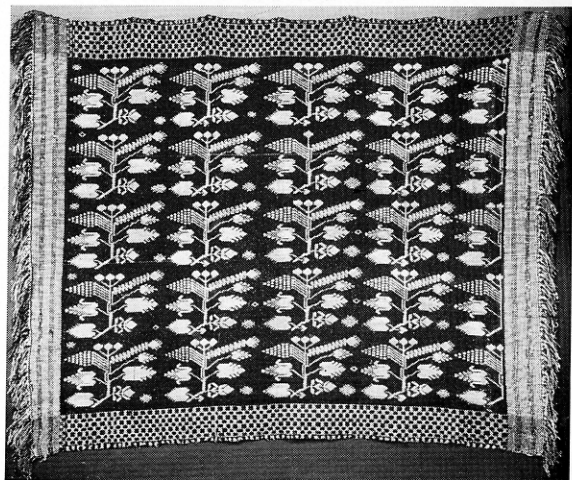
THE HISTORY of textile art in Poland does not go back beyond the seventeenth century; the curious intricacies of her political history seem to have prevented the growth of homogeneous national art before that time. To be sure, in the fourteenth century cloth of Cracow was traded from Prague to Novgorod; but this may have been due to the excellent quality of the wool rather than to outstanding design.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century Prince Michael Casimir Radziwill founded a factory for silk weaving at Sluck. The output consisted mainly of long sashes, an integral part of the Polish national costume, which up to that time had been imported from Persia or gained as plunder in the long wars against the Turks, especially at the great victory of John III Sobieski at Vienna in 1683. The first weavers at Sluck are said to have been Armenian prisoners of Sobieski's wars.

The factory at Sluck wove sashes until 1831, when the Russian government forbade the use of the national costume. During the latter part of the eighteenth century the factory was under the direction of John Madzarski, who had come from Persia. It is not impossible that, while working there, he became familiar with double cloth which, of all the splendid Safavid textiles, is perhaps the most truly delightful. In any case there remain a few specimens of fine glossy wool, woven in Poland around the turn of the eighteenth century. One of these has found its way to our textile collection, as the gift of Mr. Carl Clarke¹ (illustrated).

Double cloth, woven on two levels, requires two warps and two wefts of contrasting colors, joined by interchange of warp and weft wherever the pattern occurs. Such a fabric is reversible and very strong. Our hanging shows an additional refinement by introducing a third warp so that, while the chequerboard pattern of the bands at either side display the clear rhythm of brown and yellow, the design of the field appears in a *changeant* tone, due to the change in warp, which is white changing to greenish-grey. The design, though angular and dessicated, shows its relation to the Persian palmette tree. Both ends are woven firmly on one level, calling to mind the strong tapestry woven ends of many Persian rugs.

The double cloth hanging is anonymous folk art. A kelim (illustrated), presented by the Friends of Polish Art of Detroit, illustrates the experiments of "Lad,"



DOUBLECLOTH
WOOL HANGING, POLISH
EARLY NINETEENTH
CENTURY. Gift of
Carl Clarke, Detroit, 1941.

a cooperative manufactory founded in 1926 by members of the Warsaw Academy of Art.²

Designed and woven by Eleonora Plutynska, the kelim shows dancing figures in alternate blue and russet squares. A quality of absolute ornament has been achieved by careful distribution of the gay colors and by geometric limitation.

Tapestry weaving was fostered through the active interest of Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski, last king of Poland (1764-1798). Several noble families had their own factories at their country seats, thus the Lubomirski at Lancut, the Oginski at Slonim, the Radziwill at Korelicze. None of these private factories survived the partition of Poland. But at the beginning of the twentieth century came the discovery of folk art and with it the revival of kelim weaving. Within the first quarter of the century several factories were founded. Some of these foster a traditional popular style while others, such as "Tarkos" at Zakopane, "Kilim" at Cracow and "Lad" at Warsaw attempt a rejuvenation of the old craft by the high quality of the individual designs. Owing to political vicissitudes these activities have been interrupted. We trust that the gallant artists will soon be able to pick up their threads again.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

¹Accession Number: 41.22. Double cloth hanging Length: 68 inches; Width: 55 inches. Gift of Carl Clarke, Detroit, 1941.

²Accession Number: 42.13. Kelim. Length: 67 inches; Width: 44 inches. Gift of the Friends of Polish Art of Detroit, 1942.



KELIM BY
ELEANORA PLUTYNSKA,
POLISH, WOVEN IN 1930.
*Gift of The Friends of
Polish Art of Detroit, 1942.*