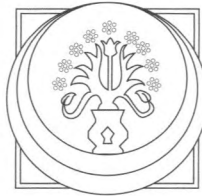


The Origin of
The Buddha Image
& Elements of Buddhist Iconography

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy



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Introduced by Coomaraswamy's "The Nature of Buddhist Art" (1938), "The Origin of the Buddha Image" (1927) is crowned by a supremely important metaphysical and spiritually transformative text, "Elements of Buddhist Iconography" (1935). Although this essay is about sacred art, it actually is sacred art itself in that it is able to transport the reader to the very threshold of an awakening. This is achieved through the etymological and artistic explication of the archetypal nature and profoundest meaning intended by the Cosmic Tree of Life (symbolizing the Buddha) and the Lotus Throne which are not actually situated in "art" but may be beheld within the human heart and found in each one of us.

We are truly fortunate to be able to provide a facsimile reproduction of the author's personal copies of these formative works with his own annotations and corrections.

The Publisher

The Nature of Buddhist Art

"He is not himself brought into being in images presented through our senses, but He presents all things to us in such images," HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, SCOTT, Hermetica, I.159.

IN order to understand the nature of the Buddha image and its meaning for a Buddhist we must, to begin with, reconstruct its environment, trace its ancestry, and remodel our own personality. We must forget that we are looking at "art" in a museum, and see the image in its place in a Buddhist church or as part of a sculptured rock wall; and having seen it, receive it as an image of what we are ourselves potentially. Remember that we are pilgrims come from some great distance to see God; that what we see will depend upon ourselves. We are to see, not the likeness made by hands, but its transcendental archetype; we are to take part in a communion. We have heard the spoken Word, and remember that "He who sees the Word, sees Me"; we are to see this Word, not now in an audible but in a visible and tangible form. In the words of a Chinese inscription, "When we behold the precious characteristics, it is as though the whole and very person of the Buddha were present in majesty. . . . The Vulture Peak is before our eyes; Nāgarahāra is present. There is a rain of precious flowers that robs the very clouds of colour; a celestial music is heard, enough to silence the sound of ten thousand flutes. When we consider the perfection of the Body of the Word, the eight perils are avoided; when we hear the teaching of the Mighty Intellect, the seventh heaven is reached" (Chavannes, *Mission Archéologique*, I.ii.340). The image is of one Awakened: and for our awakening, who are still asleep. The objective methods of "science" will not suffice; there can be no understanding without assimilation; to understand is to have been born again.

The epithet "Awakened" (Buddha) evokes in our minds today the concept of an historical figure, the personal discoverer of an ethical, psychological,

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contemplative, and monastic Way of salvation from the infection of death: which Way extends hence toward a last and beatific End, which is variously referred to as a Reversion, Despiration, or Release, indescribable in terms of being or non-being considered as incompatible alternatives, but certainly not an empirical existence nor an annihilation. The Buddha "is"; but he "cannot be taken hold of."

In the developed Buddhist art with which the present volume is mainly concerned we take for granted the predominance of the central figure of a "Founder" in a form that can only be described, although with important reservations, as anthropomorphic. If we take account of the manner in which this usually monastic but sometimes royal figure is sharply distinguished from its human environment, for example, by the nimbus, or by the lotus support, or similarly take account of the "mythical" character of the life itself as described in the early texts, we generally say that the man who is spoken of as "Thus-come" (Tathâgata) or as the "Wake" (Buddha) has been "deified," and presume that miraculous elements have been combined with the historical nucleus and introduced into the representations for edifying purposes. We hardly realize that "Buddhism" has roots that can be traced backwards for millennia; and that though the Buddha's doctrines are in the proper sense of the word original, they are scarcely in any sense novel; nor that this applies with equal force to the problems of Buddhist art, which are not in reality those of Buddhist art in particular, but rather those of Indian art in a Buddhist application, and in the last analysis the problems of art universally. It would be possible, for example, to discuss the whole problem of iconoclasm in purely Indian terms; and we shall in fact have something to say about it, in making the nature and genesis of the anthropomorphic image the main theme of this "Introduction."

If "Buddhism" (we use quotations because the connotation is so vast) is a heterodox or Protestant doctrine in the sense that it rejects the imper-

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sonal authority of the Vedas and substitutes or seems to substitute for this the authority of an historically spoken Word, it is nevertheless becoming more and more apparent every day that the content of Buddhism and Buddhist art are far more orthodox than was at first imagined; and even orthodox not only in a Vedic sense, but universally. For example, the famous formula, *anicca, anattā, dukkha*, "Impermanence, Non-spirit, Suffering," does not, as was once believed, involve a denial of the Spirit (*ātman*), but asserts that the soul-and-body or individuality (*nāma-rūpa, saviññāna-kāya*) of man are passible, mutable, and above all to be sharply distinguished from the Spirit. *Anattā* does not assert that "There is no Spirit," or "Spiritual-essence," but that "*This* (empirical self, *Leibseele*) is not my Spirit," *na me so attā*, a formula constantly repeated in the Pali texts. It is in almost the same words that the Upaniṣads assert that "What is other than the Spirit is a misery" (*ato anyad ārtam*) and that "This (its station) is not the Spirit, no indeed: the Spirit is naught that can be taken hold of, naught perishable, etc." (*sa eṣa neti nety ātmā agrābhyo . . . aśīryaḥ*, etc., BU. III.4.1 and 9.26). This is the greatest of all distinctions, apart from which there can be no intelligence of man's last end; and we find it insisted upon, accordingly, in all orthodox traditions, for example, by St. Paul when he says, "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb. IV.12).

We have traced elsewhere¹ the Vedic sources and universal values of Buddhist symbolism, and shall presently discuss the nature of symbolism itself. Here it will suffice to add that the Vedic and Buddhist, or equally Vedic and Vaiṣṇava or Vedic and Jaina scriptures, taken together in continuity, enunciate the dual doctrine, which is also a Christian doctrine, of an eternal and a temporal birth; if the former alone is expounded in the Rigveda, the Buddha's historical nativity is in reality the story of

¹ *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Cambridge, 1935.

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the aeonic manifestation of Agni—*Noster Deus ignis consumens est*—compressed “as if” into the span of a single existence. The “Going forth” from the household to the homeless life is the ritual transference of Agni from the household to the sacrificial altar: if the Vedic prophets are forever tracking the Hidden Light by the traces of its footsteps, it is literally and iconographically true that the Buddha also makes the *vestigium pedis* his guide; and if Agni in the Vedic texts, as also in the Old Testament, is a “Pillar of Fire,” the Buddha is repeatedly represented as such at Amarāvati. We need hardly say that from our point of view to speak of the “lives” of the Buddha or Christ as “mythical” is but to enhance their significance.¹

We very naturally overlook that the central problem of Buddhist art, of which a solution is essential to any real understanding, is not a problem of styles, but of how it came about that the Buddha has been represented at all in an anthropomorphic form: which is almost the same thing as to ask why indeed the Great King of Glory should have veiled his person in mendicant robes—*Cur Deus homo?* The Buddhist answer is, of course, that the assumption of a human nature is motivated by a divine compassion, and is in itself a manifestation of the Buddha’s perfect virtuosity (*kosalla, kauśalya*) in the use of convenient means (*upāya*): it is expressly stated of the Buddha that it belongs to his skill to reveal himself in accordance with the nature of those who perceive him. It had indeed already been realized in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas that “His names are in agreement with his aspect” and that “As He is approached, such He becomes” (*yathôpāsate tad eva bhavati*, ŚB. X.5.2.20); as St. Augustine, cited with approval by St. Thomas, expresses it, *Factus est Deus homo ut homo fieret Deus*.

The notion of a Creator working *per artem*, common to the Christian and

¹ To speak of an event as *essentially* mythical is by no means to deny the possibility, but rather to assert the necessity of an *accidental*, i.e., historical eventuation; it is in this way that the eternal and temporal nativities are related. To say “that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets” is not to render a narrative suspect, but only to refer the fact to its principle. Our intention is to point out that the more eminent truth of the myth does not stand or fall by the truth or error of the historical narrative in which the principle is exemplified.

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all other orthodox ontologies, already implies an artist in possession of his art, the fore-measure (*pramāṇa*) and providence (*prajñā*) according to which all things are to be measured out; there is, in fact, the closest possible analogy between the "factitious body" (*nirmāṇa-kāya*¹) or "measure" (*nimitta*) of the living Buddha, and the image of the Great Person which the artist literally "measures out" (*nirmāti*) to be a substitute for the actual presence. The Buddha is in fact born of a Mother (*mātrī*) whose name is Māyā (Nature, Art, or "Magic" in Behmen's sense of "Creatrix"), with a derivation in each case from *mā*, to "measure," cf. *prati-mā* "image," *pra-māṇa*, "criterion," and *tāla-māna*, "iconometry."² There is, in other words, a virtual identification of a natural with an intellectual, metrical, and evocative generation.³ The birth is literally an evocation; the Child is begotten, in accordance with a constantly repeated Brāhmaṇa formula, "by Intellect upon the Voice," which intercourse is symbolized in the rite; the artist works, as St. Thomas expresses it, "by a word *conceived* in intellect." We must not overlook, then, that there is also a third and verbal image, that of the doctrine, coequal in significance with the images in flesh or stone: "He who sees the Word sees Me" (*Saṃ-*

3-¹ The expression *nirmāṇa-kāya* is evidently derived from *Jaiminiya Br.* III.261-3. Here the Devas have undertaken a sacrificial session, but before doing so propose to discard "whatever is crude in our Spirit (*tad yad eṣāṃ krūram ātmana āsit*, i.e., whatever are its possibilities of physical manifestation), and to measure it out" (*tan nirmāṇam*, i.e., fashion it). Accordingly "they measured it out (*nirmāya*) and put what had thus been wiped off (*sammārjam*) in two bowls (*śarāvayoh*, i.e., heaven and earth) . . . Thence was born the mild Deva . . . it was verily Agni that was born . . . He said, 'Why have ye brought me to birth?' They answered, 'To keep watch'" (*aupadraṣṭyāya*). Here, then, Agni's embodiment in the worlds is already a *nirmāṇa-kāya*. That Agni is to keep watch corresponds on the one hand to the Vedic conception of the Sun as the "Eye of the Devas," and on the other to that of the Buddha as the "Eye in the World" (*cakkhuṃ loke*) in the Pali texts. Cf. my article "Nirmāṇa-kāya" in *JRAS*, ~~Oct. 1937~~. 1938. pp. 81-8

4-² The origin of the name of the Buddha's mother, Māyā, can be followed backward from the *Lalita Vistara*, XXVII.12 through AV. VIII.9.5 to RV. III.29.11. "This, O Agni, is thy cosmic womb, whence thou hast shone forth . . . Metered in the mother (*yad amimā mātri*)—Mātarīvān," cf. X.5.3, "Having measured out the Babe" (*mitvā śiṣum*). †

5-³ Observe, in this connection, that in John I.3-4, the Latin *quod factum est* represents the Greek ὃ γέγονεν (*Skr. jātam*). "The teaching of our school is that anything known or born is an image. They say that in begetting his only-begotten Son the Father is producing his own image" (Eckhart, Evans ed. I.258).

It is from the same point of view, that of the doctrine of ideas, that for St. Thomas, "Art imitates nature (i.e., *Natura naturans, Creatrix universalis, Deus*) in her manner of operation" (*Sum. Theol.* LI.7.1 c): and that Augustin "appuie plus nettement (i.e., que même Plotin) sur la même origine de la nature (i.e., *Natura naturata*) et des oeuvres d'art, *l'origine en Dieu*" (Svoboda, K., *L'Esthétique de Saint Augustin et ses sources*, Brno, 1933, p. 115).

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yutta Nikāya, III.120). These visible and audible images are alike in their information, and differ only in their accidents. Each depicts the same essence in a likeness: neither is an imitation of another, the image in stone, for example, not an imitation of the image in flesh, but each directly an "imitation" (*anukṛti*, mimesis) of the unspoken Word, an image of the "Body of the Word" or "Brahma-body" or "Principle," which cannot be represented as it *is* because of its perfect simplicity.

It was not, however, until the beginning of the Christian era, five centuries after the Great Total-Despersion (*mahā parinibbāna*), that the Buddha was actually represented in a human form. In more general terms it was not until then (with certain exceptions, some of which date back as far as the third millennium B.C., and despite the fact that the Rigveda freely makes use of a verbal imagery in anthropomorphic terms) that any widespread development of an anthropomorphic iconography can be recognized at all. The older Indian art is essentially "aniconic," that is, it makes use only of geometrical, vegetable, or theriomorphic symbols as supports of contemplation, just as in early Christian art. An artistic inability to represent the human figure cannot be invoked by way of explanation in either case; not only had human figures already been represented very skilfully in the third millennium B.C., but as we know, the type of the human figure had been employed with great effect from the third century B.C. onwards (and no doubt much earlier in impermanent material), *except* to represent the Buddha in his last incarnation, where even at birth and before the Great Awakening he is represented only by footprints, or generally by such symbols as the Tree or Wheel.

In order to approach the problem at all we must relegate to an altogether subordinate place our predilection for the human figure, inherited from late classical cultures, and must, to the extent that we are able, identify ourselves with the unanimous mentality of the Indian artist and patron

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both as it had been before, and as it had come to be when, a necessity was actually felt for the representation of what we think of as the “deified” Buddha (although in fact that he cannot be regarded as a man amongst others, but rather as “the form of humanity that has nothing to do with time,” is plainly enough set forth in the Pali texts). Above all must we refrain from assuming that what was an inevitable step, and one already foreshadowed by the “historicity” of the life, must be interpreted in terms of spiritual progress. We must realize that this step, of which an unforeseen result was the provision for us of such aesthetic pleasures as everyone who considers even the accompanying reproductions must derive from Buddhist art, may have been itself much rather a concession to intellectually lower levels of reference than any evidence of an increased profundity of vision. We must remember that an abstract art is adapted to contemplative uses and implies a gnosis; an anthropomorphic art evokes a religious emotion, and corresponds rather to prayer than contemplation. If the development of an art can be justified as answering to new needs, it must not be overlooked that to speak of a want is to speak of a deficiency in him who wants: the more one is, the less one wants. We ought not, then, to think so much of a deficiency of plastic art in aniconic rituals as of the adequacy of the purely abstract formulae and the proficiency of those who could make use of purely symbolic representations.

The aniconic character of Vedic ritual and early Buddhist art was, then, a matter of choice. Not only is the position iconoclastic in fact, but we can hardly fail to recognize a far-reaching iconoclastic tendency in such words as those of the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, IV.18.6: “The Brahman is not what one thinks with the mind (*yam manasā na manute*), but, as they say, is that whereby there is a mentation, or concept (*yenâkur manomatam*): know that That alone is Brahman, not what men worship here” (*nêdam yad idam upâsate*). At the same time the Upaniṣads distinguish clearly between the Brahman in a likeness and the Brahman not in any likeness, mortal and

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immortal (*mūrtam cāmūrtam ca martyam cāmrtam ca*, BU. II.3.1, where it may be noted that one of the regular designations of an image is precisely *mūrti*); and between the concept by which one distinctly remembers and the lightning-flash at which one can only exclaim (*Kena Up.* IV.4-5). The distinction is that of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck between the knowledge of God *creaturlicher wise, creatuerlikerwijs* and *âne mittel, âne wise, sonder middel, sonder wise*, and involves the universal doctrine of the single essence and two natures. It is clear that these texts and their implied doctrine are tantamount to a justification both of an iconography and of iconoclasm. It is the immediate value of an image to serve as the support of a contemplation leading to an understanding of the exterior operation and proximate Brahman, the Buddhist Sambhogakāya: it is only of the interior operation and ultimate Brahman, Buddhist Dharmakāya, Tattva, Tathatā, or Nirvāṇa, that it can be said that "*This Brahman is silence.*"¹

No one whose life is still an active one, no one still spiritually under the Sun and still perfectible, no one who still proposes to understand in terms of subject and object, no one who still is anyone, can pretend to have outgrown all need of means. It is not a question of the virtually "infinite possibilities of the simple soul" (Bouquet, *The Real Presence*, p. 85), which it would be absurd to deny, but one of *how* these potentialities can be reduced to act. One is astounded at the multitude of those who advocate the "direct" approach to God, as if the end of the road could be reached without a wayfaring; and forget that an immediate vision can be only theirs in

¹ A traditional saying quoted by Śāṅkara on *Brahma Sūtra*, III.2.17. Cf. the Hermetic "Then only will you see it, when you cannot speak of it; for the knowledge of it is deep silence, and suppression of all the senses" (Hermes, *Lib.* X.5, Scott, *Hermetica*, I.191). Just as for the Upaniṣads the ultimate Brahman is a Principle "about which further questions cannot be asked" (BU. III.6), so the Buddha consistently refuses to discuss the quiddity of Nibbāna. In the words of Erivgena, "God does not know what He himself is, because He is not any what," and of Maimonides, "By affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him." The Upaniṣads and Buddhism offer no exception to the universal rule of the employment side by side of the *via affirmativa* and *via remotionis*. There is nothing peculiarly Indian, and still less peculiarly Buddhist, in the view that we cannot know what we may become, which "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" (I Cor. II.9). In the meantime, the function of the image bodily, verbal, or plastic, or in any other way symbolic, is mediatory. See also my "Vedic Doctrine of Silence," *Indian Culture*, 1937, III.559 f.

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whom "the mind has been de-mented," to employ a significant expression common to Eckhart, the Upaniṣads, and Buddhism.

Plato

The *present* problem is not, then, one of the propriety or impropriety of the use of supports of contemplation, but of what sort the most appropriate and efficacious supports of contemplation must be, and of the art of making use of them. For *us*, the work of art both exists and operates on an altogether human, visible, and tangible level of reference; we do not, as Dante requires that we should, "marvel at the doctrine that hides itself behind (*s'asconde sotto*) the veil of the strange verses" (*Inferno*, IX.61); the verses are enough for us. It is otherwise in a traditional art, where the object is merely a point of departure and a signpost inviting the spectator to the performance of an act directed toward that form for the sake of which the picture exists at all. The spectator is not so much to be "pleased" as to be "transported": to see as the artist is required to have seen before he took up brush or chisel; to see the Buddha in the image rather than an image of the Buddha. It is a matter of *penetration*, in the most technical senses of the term (cf. *Muṇḍaka Up.* II.2.3): the variegated presentation in colours is merely a conceptual exteriorization of what in itself is a perfectly simple brilliance—"Just as it is an effect of the presence or absence of dust in a garment that the colour is either clear or motley, so it is the effect of the presence or absence of a penetration into Release (*āvedha-vaśān muktau*) that the Gnosis is either clear or motley. That one alludes to the profundity of the Buddhas on the Unsullied Plane in terms of iconographic-characteristics, stances, and acts (*lakṣaṇa-sthāna-karmeṣu*) is a mere painting of colours in space."¹ Or again, and with

¹ *Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra* of Asaṅga, IX.35, 36. Lévi, Sylvain, Paris, 1907 and 1911, I.39, 40 and II.77, 78. M. Sylvain Lévi has not quite understood *lakṣaṇa-sthāna*; the reference is to the descriptive iconography of narrative and visual art. Dr. Kramrisch (*A Survey of Painting in the Deccan*, pp. 27 and 203, note 31) has mistaken the bearing of the passage: "to paint with colours on space" is a proverbial expression implying "to attempt the impossible" or "effort made in vain," as for example in *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.127, where it is pointed out that a man cannot paint in colours on space, because "space is without form or indication." What Asaṅga is saying is that to think of any representation of the transcendent Principle as it is in itself is no more than an idle dream; the representation has a merely temporary value, comparable to that of the ethical raft in the well-known parable (*Majjhima Nikāya*, I.135).

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reference equally to verbal and visual imagery, the Buddha is made to say that the metaphorical expression “is adduced by way of illustration . . . because of the great infirmity of babes . . . I teach as does the master-painter or his pupil who disposes his colours for the sake of a picture, which picture is not to be found in the colours, nor in the ground nor in the environment. It is only to make it attractive to¹ creatures that the picture is contrived in colour: what is actually taught is irrelevant; the Principle eludes the letter.² In taking up a stand amongst things,³ what I really teach is the Principle as understood by the Contemplatives;⁴ a spiritual reversion evading every form of thought. What I teach is not a doctrine for babes, but for the Sons of the Conqueror. And just as whatever I may see in a diversified manner has no real being, so is the pictorial doctrine communicated in a manner irrelevant. Whatever is not adapted to such and such persons as are to be taught cannot be called a ‘teaching.’ . . . The Buddhas indoctrinate beings according to their mental capacity.”⁵ That is as much as to say with St. Paul, “I have fed you with milk and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (I Cor. III.2): “Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Heb. V.14).

It is only one who *has* attained to an immediate Gnosis that can afford to dispense with theology, ritual, and imagery: the Comprehensor has

It is, nevertheless, as the *sādhana*s express it, against a background of “space in the heart” that the picture that is “not in the colours” must be imagined; just as also Śaṅkarācārya’s “world-picture” (the intelligible cosmos seen in the *speculum aeternum*) is “painted by the Spirit on the canvas of the Spirit.” And because the picture has been thus imagined as an appearance manifested over against an *infinite* ground, the picture (of Amida, for example) painted in actual colours and on canvas stands out against an analogous background of *indefinite* extent.

¹ *Karṣanārthāya*: the notion coincides with the Platonic and Scholastic concept of the *summoning* quality of beauty.

² “Eludes” is precisely Dante’s *s’asconde sotto*. “Speech does not attain to truth; but mind (*νοῦς = manas*) has mighty power, and when it been has led some distance on its way by speech, it attains to truth” (Scott, *Hermetica*, I.185).

³ I.e., in being born, and consequently in using material figures, speaking parabolically, etc.

⁴ *Tattvaṃ yogīnām*: cf. RV. X.85.4, “Of whom the Brahmans understand as Soma, none ever tastes, none tastes who dwells on earth” and AB. VII.31, “It is metaphysically (*parōksena*) that he obtains the drinking of Soma, it is not literally (*pratyakṣam*) partaken of by him.”

⁵ *Lankavatāra Sūtra*, II.112–114.

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found what the Wayfarer is still in search of. This has too often been misinterpreted to mean that something is deliberately withheld from those who are to depend on means, or even that means are dispensed to them as if with intent to keep them in ignorance; there are those who ask for a sort of universal compulsory education in the mysteries, supposing that a mystery is nothing but a communicable, although hitherto uncommunicated, secret and nothing different in kind from the themes of profane instruction. So far from this, it is of the essence of a mystery, and above all of the *Mysterium Magnum*, that it cannot be communicated, but only realized:¹ all that can be communicated are its external supports or symbolic expressions; the Great Work must be done by everyone for himself. The words attributed to the Buddha above are in no way contradictory of the principle of the open hand (*varadā mudrā*) or expository hand (*vyākhyānā mudrā*). The Buddha is never ineloquent: the solar gates are not there to exclude, but to admit; no one can be excluded by anyone but himself. The Way has been charted in detail by every Forerunner, who *is* the Way; what lies at the end of the road is not revealed, even by those who have reached it, because it cannot be told and does not appear: the Principle is not in any likeness.

Of what sort are, then, the most appropriate and efficacious supports of contemplation? It would scarcely be possible to cite an authoritative Indian text condemning explicitly the use of anthropomorphic as distinguished from aniconic images. There is, however, one Buddhist source, that of the *Kālinga-bodhi Jātaka*, in which what must have been the early position is still clearly reflected. The Buddha is asked by what kind of hallow, shrine, or symbol (*cetiya*)² he can properly be represented in his absence. The answer is that

¹ "This sort of thing cannot be taught, my son; but God, when he so wills, recalls it to our memory" (Hermes, *Lib.* XIII.2, Scott, *Hermetica*, I.241).

² *Cetiya*, *cāitya*, are generally derived from *cī*, to pile up, originally used in particular connection with the edification of a fire-altar or funeral pile, and this is not without its significance in connection with the fact to be discussed

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he can properly be represented by a Bodhi-tree¹ whether during his lifetime or after the Despiration, or by bodily relics after this Decease; the "indicative" (*uddesika*)² iconography of an anthropomorphic image is condemned as "groundless and conceptual, or conventional" (*avatthukam manamattakam*). It will be seen that the wording corresponds to that of the Brāhmaṇa as cited above: *manamattakam* = *manomatam*.

Before we proceed to ask how it could have been that an anthropomorphic image was accepted after all, we must eliminate certain considerations extraneous to the problem. It must be realized, in the first place, that although an iconoclastic problem is present, it was as a matter of convenience, and without reference to any supposed possibility of a real localization³ or fetishism that the advent of the image can be said to have been

below, that the Buddha image really inherits the values of the Vedic altar. But as the Jātaka itself makes clear, a *cetiya* is by no means necessarily a stūpa, nor anything constructed, but a symbolic substitute of any sort, to be regarded as the Buddha in his absence: and there must be assumed at least a hermeneutic connection of *cī*, to edify, with the closely related roots *ci* and *cit*, to regard, consider, know and think of or contemplate; it is, for example, in this sense that *cetyah* is used in RV. VI.1.5, "Thou, O Agni, our means-of-crossing-over, *art-to-be-known-as* man's eternal refuge and father and mother," all of which epithets have, moreover, been applied also to the Buddha.

¹ This is not, of course, an exclusively Buddhist position. The Vedas already speak of a Great Yakṣa (Brahman) moving on the waters in a fiery glowing at the centre of the universe in the likeness of a Tree (AV. X.7.3.2) and this Burning Bush, the Single Fig, is called in the Upaniṣads the "one Awakener" (*eka sambodhayitr*), and everlasting support of the contemplation of Brahman (*dbiyālamba*, *Maitrī Up.* VII.11). In *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka*, XI.2 the spirant Brahman is "As it were a great green tree, standing with its roots moistened."

² Cf. my *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, pp. 4-6. I now render *uddesika* by "indicative" in view of the discussion by Professor De La Vallée Poussin in JHAS. II.281-282: from the passage which he cites from the *Yogaśāstra* of Asaṅga it is clear that the *uddiśya* means "indicative of the Buddha"; the examples given of such indicative symbols are "stūpa, building, and ancient or modern shrine." If it was only later that *uddesika cetiya* came also to mean "Buddha-image" (*tathāgata paṭimā*), this would mean that the Jātaka takes no account at all of Buddha-images: alternatively, Buddha images must be held to have been deprecated with other indicative symbols, as "arbitrary." The net result, that Buddha images were either ignored, or condemned, suffices for our purpose, the demonstration of the trace of an originally aniconic attitude.

³ The question is one at the same time of localization and temporality. In modern Indian personal devotions it is typical to make use of an image of clay temporarily consecrated, and discarded after use when the Presence has been dismissed; in the same way the Christian church becomes the house of God specifically only after consecration, and if formally desecrated can be used for any secular purpose without offence. The rite, like the temporal Nativity, is necessarily eventful; the temporal event can take place *anywhere*, just because its reference is to an intemporal omnipresence. In any case, it is not a question of contradiction as between a "God extended in space" (Bouquet, *loc. cit.*, p. 52) and a special presence at a given point in space: extension in space is already a localization in the same sense that procession is an apparent motion. All Scripture employs a language in terms of time and space; it is not only

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“postponed,” and also as a matter of convenience that the image was realized when a need had been felt for it; and in the second place, that the resort to an anthropomorphic imagery by no means reports any such humanistic or naturalistic interests as those which led to the subordination of form to figure in European art after the Middle Ages or in Greek art after the sixth century B.C. The question of localization has been fundamentally misunderstood. If it is practically true that “the omnipresent Spirit *is* where it acts or where we are *attending* to it” (Bouquet, *The Real Presence*, p. 84), it is equally true that this “where” is *wherever* there is posited a centre or duly set up an image or other symbol: the symbol can even be carried about from place to place. Not that the Spirit is therefore in one place more than another or can be carried about, but that we and our supports of contemplation (*dhīyālamba*) are necessarily in some one place or another. If the use of the symbol is to function mediately as a bridge between the world of local position and a “world” that cannot be traversed or described in terms of size, it is sufficiently evident that the hither end of such a bridge must be somewhere, and in fact wherever our edification begins: procedure is from the known to the unknown; it is the other end of the bridge that has no position.

By fetishism we understand an attribution to the physically tangible symbol of values that really belong to its reference; or in other words a confusion of actual with essential form. It is a fetishism of this sort that the Buddhist texts deprecate when they employ the metaphor of the finger pointing to the moon, and ridicule the man who either will not or cannot see anything but the finger. The modern aesthetic approach makes fetishes of traditional works of art precisely in this sense. Our own attitude is indeed so naturally and obstinately fetishistic that we are shocked to find and unwilling to believe that it is taken for granted in Buddhism that “those who

visual images that must be shattered if this is to be avoided. The iconoclast does not always realize all the implications of his ideal: that it cannot be said of anyone who still knows who he is, that all his idols have been broken.

Plato ^{in the same way} distinguishes

"Soulless images" ~~as~~ ^{sharply distinguished} from the "ensouled gods" ^{that they represent in Plato's Laws 931A}; and yet "we believe that when we worship the former the latter ~~for~~ ^{are} kindly and well-disposed towards us". And so, just as

of. Plotinus enneads II

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consider the earthen images, do not honour the clay as such, but without regard to them in this respect, honour the Immortals designated" (*amara-sainjñā*, *Divyāvadāna*, Ch. XXVI), ~~and~~ in Christian practice ~~that~~ "honour is paid, not to the colours or the art, but to the prototype" (St. Basil, cited in the *Hermeneia* of Athos). Cf. Epiphanius, *Op. 2* "We make images of the Holy Beings

de spur. same

to communion and honor

As regards the second point it will suffice to say that "anthropomorphic" in the sense in which this word is appropriate to Indian images does not import "naturalistic"; the Buddha image is not in any sense a portrait, but a symbol; nor indeed are there any Indian images of any deity that do not proclaim by their very constitution that "This is not the likeness of a man"; the image is devoid of any semblance of organic structure; it is not a reflection of anything that has been physically seen, but an intelligible form or formula.¹

Even at the present day there survives in India a widespread use of geometrical devices (*yantra*) or other aniconic symbols as the chosen supports of contemplation. If in the last analysis the intellectual has always preferred the use of abstract and algebraical or vegetable or theriomorphic or even natural symbols, one cannot but be reminded of the position of Dionysius, to whom it likewise appeared more fitting that divine truths should be expounded by means of images of a less rather than a more noble type in themselves (the noblest type in itself being that of humanity): "For then," as St. Thomas follows, "it is clear that these things are not literal descriptions of divine truths, which might have been open to doubt had they been expressed under the figure of nobler bodies, especially for those who could think of nothing nobler than bodies" (*Sum. Th.* I.1.9). What the Buddha anticipated was not that the figure in stone could ever have been worshipped literally as such, but that he might come to be thought of as a man, who denied of himself that he was "either a man, or a god, or a daimon" as one amongst others and had not in

¹ The image in pigment or stone, "indicative" of the Buddha, is as much an image of (and as little in the nature of) the God "whose image it is" as is the image in flesh or in words: each is "a sensible God in the likeness of the intelligible God" (*εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ [θεοῦ] θεὸς αἰσθητός*, Plato, *Timaeus*, 92: we do not shrink from the implied identification of the *aparinihuta* Tathāgata with *ὁ κόσμος οὗτος*).

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fact "become anyone." He prognosticated precisely such a humanistic interpretation of the "life" as that which leads the modern scholar to attempt to disengage an "historical nucleus" by the elimination of all "mythical elements," and to repudiate any attribution of omniscience to him to whom the designation "Eye in the World" was appropriate. It is just those "who can think of nothing nobler than bodies"¹ who in modern times have discovered in the incarnate Deity, Christian or Buddhist, nothing but the man; and to these we can only say that this "his manhood is a hindrance so long as they cling to it with mortal pleasure" (Eckhart).

The iconolatrous position developed in India from the beginning of the Christian era onward is apparently in contradiction of that which has been inferred in the *Kālingabodhi Jātaka*. It is, however, the iconoclastic position, that of Strzygowski's "Mazdaean" and "Northern" art, that still determines the abstract and symbolic nature of the anthropomorphic image and can be said to account for the fact that a naturalistic development had never taken place in India until the idea of representation was borrowed from Europe in the seventeenth century. The fact that the *Śukranītisāra* condemns portraiture at the same time that it extols the making of divine images very well illustrates how the Indian consciousness has been aware of what has been called "the ignominy implicit in representational art"—an ignominy closely related to that of an obsession with the historical point of view, to which in India the mythical has always been preferred. The parallels between the Indian and Christian artistic development are so close that both can be described in the same words. If, as Dr. Rowland² justly remarks, "With the sculptures of Hadda and the contemporary decoration of the monasteries at Jaulian (Taxila), the Gandhara school properly so-called is at an end. Counter currents of influence from the workshops of Central and Eastern India have almost transformed

¹ A remarkable anticipation of the Renaissance point of view. "Coming events cast their shadows before."

² *Art Bulletin*, XVIII, 400.



2—Yakṣa (Besnagar)
III Cent. B. C.



3—Yakṣa (Patna)
II Cent. B. C.



4—"Bodhisattva" (Buddha)
(Mathurā). 123 A. D.



5—Buddha (Sārnāth)
V Cent. A. D.

Stylistic Sequence of Yakṣa and Buddha Figures

मम मायायै प्रतिकल्पितो अमरावतः

In the *Divyāvadāna*, ch. ~~LXXVII~~, Upagupta compels Māra to exhibit himself in the shape of Buddha. Upagupta bows down to the form thus produced, and Māra is shocked at this apparent worship of himself and protests. Upagupta explains that he is adoring not Māra, but the person represented, "just as people venerating earthen images of gods do not revere the clay but the immortal ones represented by them. . . ."

362, 363

"Indeed, I am well aware of this, that the foremost of teachers has passed away into Nirvāṇa, yet beholding his lovely likeness (*nayanakāntiṃ ākṛtiṃ*), I have bowed to that Rsi; it is not you whom I worship."

Analogous to the coming into use of a Buddha icon is the first use of the Buddha legend as material for a drama. In this connection the *Kah-gyur* (Schiefner, *Tibetan Tales*, no. XIII) has a story about an actor, who went first to the Nāga Nanda, a faithful worshipper of the Buddha (in whose lifetime the events are supposed to have taken place), to obtain from him the necessary data for the drama. Nanda, on hearing the purpose for which the information was required, refused contemptuously: "Wretched man," he said, "do you wish us to portray the Teacher for you? begone, for I will tell you nothing." The actor, however, obtained the required information from a learned nun and composed his drama. "He pitched a booth in Rājagṛha on the day when the festival of the Nāgarājas Girika and Sundara was celebrated and sounded a drum. And when a great crowd had collected, he exhibited in a drama . . . events in the life of Bhagavant, in harmony with the *Abhiṣkramaṇa Sūtra*. Thereby the performers and the assembled crowds were confirmed in the faith. And they uttered sounds of approval, and he made a large profit."

All this must have been very like what took place when Buddha images first came into use. Incidentally it has some value for the history of the Indian drama.

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Origin of the Buddha Image: Corrigenda

Captions:

- ✓ Figure 2 For *Besnagar* read *Pārḥham* ✓
- Figure 4 For *Mathurā* read *Sārnāth* ✓
- Figure 5 For *Sārnāth* read *Mathurā* ✓
- Figure 38 For *Great Enlightenment* read *First Meditation* ✓

Description of Plates:

- Figure 2 For *Besnagar* read *Pārḥham* ✓
and for *Indian Museum, Calcutta*, read *Mathurā Museum* ✓
- Figure 8 Add *Lahore Museum* ✓
- Figure 38 For *Great Enlightenment* read *First Meditation* ✓



68—Buddha (Annam)



69—Buddha (Mathurā)



70—Buddha (Ceylon)



71—Buddha "Burma"



72—Buddha (Sārnāth)



73—Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi (Sārnāth)

Late Kuṣāna and Gupta Buddhas and Bodhisattvas