

AN INSCRIBED BODHISATTVA IMAGE FROM MATHURĀ

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In this paper Mr. T. N. Ramachandran describes an inscribed image of red sandstone from Mathurā and draws attention to its identification as the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha, to the robe worn by the Bodhisattva displaying brocade design as in the case of the statues of Kanishka [A.D. 78-101 (?)] and Vima Kadphises [A.D. 40-78 (?)] and, being closely related to the old central Asian Scythian dress, to the inscription (unfortunately mutilated) being a votive record (in Brāhmi script and Sanskrit language) giving the name of the donor as the householder Nāgadina (Nāgadatta) and to both style of sculpture and palaeography of the inscription pointing to early second century A.D. as the possible date of the image.

MR. Ajit Ghose, a distinguished lawyer and scholar of Calcutta, who is famous for his collection of antiquities and paintings, has an interesting headless sculpture (image) from Mathurā which is also inscribed. The circumstances that led to its acquisition are that Mr. Ajit Ghose purchased it from a private man in Agra who found it some 25 years ago near Mathurā while digging for the foundations of a house. The image which measures 1 foot × 1 foot × 3 inches is of first class importance to the study of early Indian sculpture and epigraphy (pl. XXXVIII).

The sculpture, which is of the red sand stone variety common in Mathurā, has unfortunately suffered from age, age-long neglect and rough use to which it appears to have been subjected before it came into Mr. Ajit Ghose's hands. It reveals on its back a smoothed surface and a wide and gradual depression in the centre such as would result by its use for grinding or pounding purposes. For the same reason the lower part of its front which represents a rectangular pedestal (*piṭha*) slightly projecting forward has also suffered and its surface has got smoothed. This is unfortunate as this part originally contained an inscription in two or three lines as in the case of some Mathurā Buddha, Bodhisattva and Jina reliefs already known. Faint traces of a *pa* in the first line and a *ra* and *na* in the second line alone remain now to give us the sad tale of the annihilation of the whole record at the hand of vandalistic grinders and chutney-pounders.

Luckily, like the *madhu-bindu* or 'the drop of honey' of Jaina Cosmology, something is left on the torso part of the figure, in front and on its right and left sides, from which we can recapture the content and the intent of the figure sculptured. Those that had mutilated the inscription did not spare the head, and we have only a headless figure left to determine whether Buddha was meant or the Bodhisattva (Prince Siddhārtha). Luck does not fail us here either, for the lower hanging (tassel or drop) of a *kunḍala* of the right ear is left as a solitary clue to determine that the Bodhisattva was the spirit of the sculpture. It is easy, at first sight, to imagine that the Buddha was meant and in this hypothesis, other known figures of Buddha seated in *dhyāna* figured by L. Bachhofer in his *Early Indian Sculpture*¹ will help. But the survival of the faint *kunḍala* of the right ear proves that the Bodhisattva was the *lakshya*. The pose of the Bodhisattva seated with hands folded on the lap in meditation (*dhyāna*), his dress (*saṃghāti*) completely covering both the shoulders with a ridge mark below the neck and adjusted like a half circle in the centre over his folded

¹ Part II, fig. 86.

feet and the *saṅghāti* or *chīvara* placed in an elegant flow over the right and left hands are some characteristics of our figure which mark it out as a good study of symmetry (cf. *symmetria prisca* of Leonardo da Vinci). These features are also strikingly present in a Buddha image from Mathurā of the second century A.D. now in the Lucknow Museum.¹ But the Lucknow Museum Buddha has the usual robe of wavy lines and sits on a *padmāsana*, while our Bodhisattva has a plain rectangular *āsana* and has a robe of brocade-design as in the case of the statues of Vima Kadphises and Kanishka in the Mathurā Museum of A.D. 40-78 (?) and 78-101 (?) respectively.² According to Bachhofer such drapery is very closely related to the old Central Asian Scythian dress.³ The *brocaded drapery* that is associated with our Bodhisattva figure is more like that of the figures of the Kushan kings Kanishka and Vima Kadphises than like the chequered robes that Buddhist monks are sometimes shown as wearing in the sculptures of Amarāvati and others of the first to third centuries A.D.⁴ The monks' robes that occur in Amarāvati are more suggestive of rags all sewn together, resembling, according to Rhys Davids, 'a field cut up by rows of boundaries that served also as water channels', than the rich brocaded robes, with the squares, symmetrically arranged on them such as we see both in our Bodhisattva figure and in the statues of the Kushan kings, for which reason, it is easy to distinguish our figure as a prince, or to speak correctly Prince Siddhārtha who was a *Bodhisattva* before he became the Buddha. Having been executed during the Kushan rule the figure bears the marks of Kushan drapery.

While the upper limit of its date is furnished by its similarity with the statues of Kanishka and Vima Kadphises as A.D. 40-78, its lower limit is supplied not only by its similarity to the Buddha figure in the Lucknow Museum of A.D. 130-140,⁵ but also by the palaeography of the remnants of the inscription on the two sides of the pedestal of the figure (pl. XXXIX). The script is Brāhmī and the language Sanskrit.

What remains of the inscription on the sides can be read as follows:—

RIGHT SIDE

hi ta su khā r(tha)m

LEFT SIDE

Line 1. *Nā ga di na sya*

Line 2. *gra(gri) ha dha ra sya*

'(The gift) of the householder (?) Nāgadina (Nāgadatta)—for the welfare and happiness of.....'

What remains of the inscription shows that it is a votive record giving the name of the donor as a householder(?) Nāgadina for the welfare and happiness of (all creatures including himself and his family). Though *grihadharasya* must normally occur before *Nāgadinasya*, being an adjective (*viśeshana*), its appearance as here is not uncommon in prose, while in poetry it is frequent. It is easy to add *artham* after *sukha* as it is a contraction of the known formula *hitasukhārtham bhavatu*. And this form occurs in the Kushan inscriptions of the second century A.D. in Sānchī.⁶ The name Nāgadina also occurs in a Sānchī inscription⁷ which reads as *seṭhino Nāgadinasa dānam*. Nāgadina (Nāgadatta)

¹ L. Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture* (New York), fig. 86.

² *Ibid.*, figs. 76, 77.

³ *Ibid.*, part II, fig. 77.

⁴ Sivaramamurti, *Amarāvati Sculptures* (Madras, 1941), pl. IX, fig. 14.

⁵ Bachhofer, *op. cit.*, fig. 86.

⁶ J. Marshall, A. Foucher and N. G. Majumdar, *The Monuments of Sānchī*, p. 386 and pls. 53, 105c, 138.

⁷ G. Bühler, 'Inscriptions of Sānchī', *Epigraphia Indica*, I (1892), II, p. 109, no. 115; H. Lüders, *A List of Brāhmī Inscriptions*, nos. 28, 171, 235 and 431.

and Yakhadina (Yakshadatta) are names which have been explained as bearing witness to the prevalence of the Nāga and Yaksha cults.¹

Though it is *gra* in the inscription *grahadhara*, I take it that *gri* was meant. *Grahadhara* may mean one who supports or deals with the planets (*grahas*). But with *gra* corrected as *gri* we have *grihadhara* meaning perhaps 'householder', which Nāgadina, the donor, probably was. *Grihadhara* perhaps corresponds to *gahapati* meaning 'householder' occurring in Amarāvati inscriptions² and elsewhere. The characters closely resemble those of the later Kushans³ and on grounds of palaeography the lower limit of the date of the sculpture can be said to be the latter half of the second century A.D. The evidence of style would place it between A.D. 40 and 140. Thus both style of sculpture and palaeography of inscription would help to assign the image to early second century A.D.

¹ Marshall, Foucher and Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

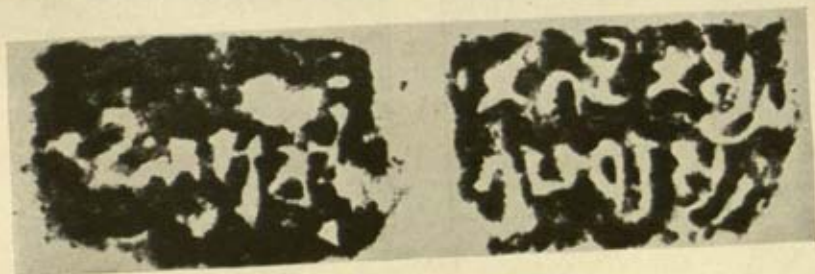
² Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

³ *Epigraphia Indica*, IX, p. 242.

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Inscribed Bodhisattva image from Mathurā

102 A



A



B

Inscribed Bodhisattva image: A, right side; B, left side

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