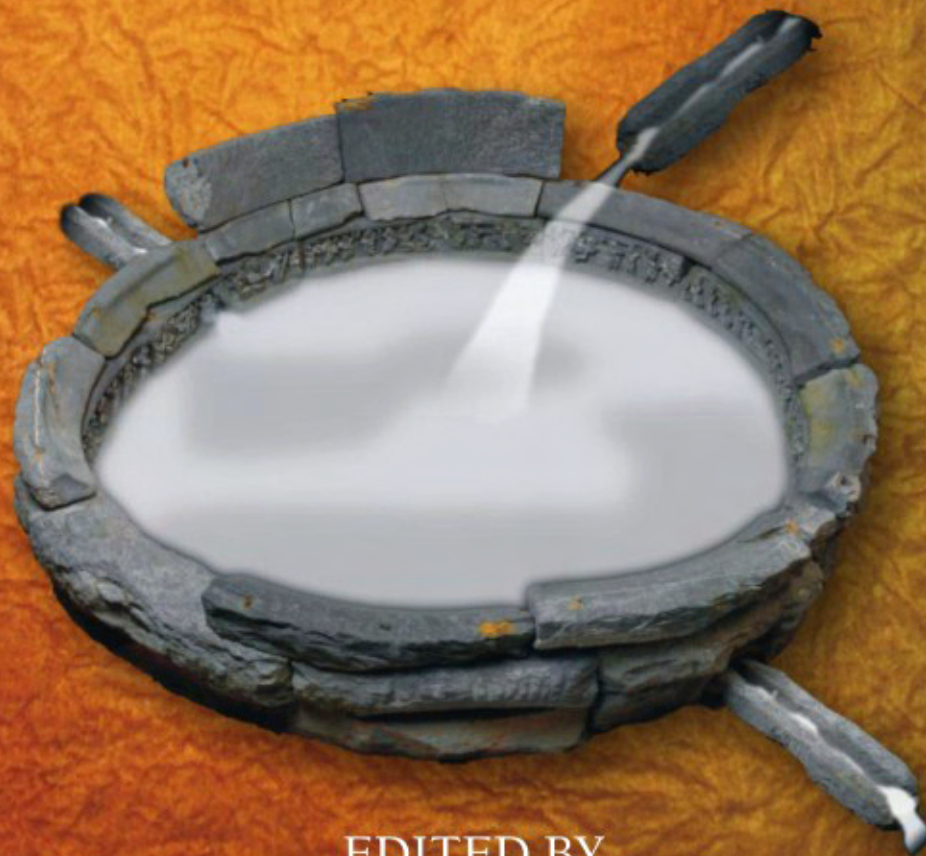


# PRAJÑĀDHARA

*Essays on*

## ASIAN ART HISTORY EPIGRAPHY AND CULTURE

*in Honour of*  
Gouriswar Bhattacharya



EDITED BY

Gerd J.R. Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji

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### The use of the *Vessantara jātaka* in a manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*

JINAH KIM

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#### Introduction

It is unclear when and how the practice of illustrating the manuscripts of the Buddhist *sūtras* began in South Asia, but the material evidence of surviving illustrated manuscripts that date from the beginning of the eleventh century demonstrates it was in practice by then. When they started making the manuscripts with paintings in the eleventh century, the illustrators of the Buddhist manuscripts invented different ways to convey and emphasize the meaning of the text. Given the material of these manuscripts, most of which were made of palm-leaf in a *pothī*-type format with long and narrow leaves, and the practice of writing in *scriptura continua* in Sanskrit manuscripts, the task of illustrating them was not an easy one. Some illustrators engineered ingenious ways to achieve their goals, so that their paintings not only beautify the manuscripts of the sacred text but also convey the profound meaning of the text.

One such example is seen in the illustrated manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (*Perfection of Wisdom in eight thousand lines*, henceforth *AsP*) now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (BKB), Benares Hindu University in Varanasi (Saraswati 1971: 246, 261-262). In this essay, I would like to demonstrate how the makers of the BKB manuscript illustrate the *Prajñāpāramitā* text by making a full use of given spaces in every illustrated folio while working within the convention of placing images at the beginning and the end of the manuscript. My analysis will also show that the rationale for iconographic choices must have been propelled by the goal of delivering the profound message of the text. But first let us review what is known about this manuscript.

#### Physical condition of the manuscript

The palm-leaf manuscripts from eastern India and Nepal are prepared by stringing together a pile of loose palm-leaf folios and two wooden end boards with a cord or metal-sticks through pre-bored holes. The format of the palm-leaf manuscripts makes it easy to disassemble the book. More often than not, this has contributed to the circulation of illustrated folios from South Asian Buddhist manuscripts in art markets separate from the rest of the manuscript. Even when a whole manuscript is acquired, many institutions separate the illustrated folios from the rest of the manuscript partly due to the higher market value of the painted folios and the concern for their preservation.<sup>1</sup> Legitimate issues of preservation of paintings aside, such collecting practice diminishes the context of a book, when illustrated folios are treated as separate art objects. In cases

like the *AsP* manuscript in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, the paintings on each illustrated folio are treated as separate items and assigned individual accession numbers (see Table 1). While this might be convenient to list the paintings in the collection, the paintings get even more isolated and distanced from their context as part of a book. Moreover, this cataloguing system makes it difficult to determine whether the entire manuscript of the illustrated folios under consideration is in the BKB collection or not. Judging from the similarity in shape and size between the illustrated folios and some text folios of the *AsP* which are mixed together with text folios of varying sizes and shapes, the whole manuscript might be in the collection.<sup>2</sup>

Four illustrated folios, the last folio with the colophon, and the illustrated wooden covers are kept separately from the rest of the manuscript. The illustrated folios are in relatively pristine condition with most of their vibrant colours preserved (**Plates 25.2-3, 8-13**). The first two folios and the front cover which bears a bit of *pūjā* marks, such as sandal paste residue, suffered some physical damage. The front cover seems to have been cracked vertically and broken into two pieces along the left side hole (**Plate 25.1**), which is consistent with the damage around the top of the first folio and the bottom of the second folio near the left side hole (**Plates 25.8-9**). The front cover suffered a few more cracks to the left. The damage might result from the cover being dropped on a hard surface on its left side, but this may not explain why the first two folios suffered similar damage. It might also have been the case that something heavy and sharp was dropped on the book or accidentally hit the book. These cracked parts were repaired and put together using nails, a restoration method often seen in the manuscripts from Nepal. It is possible that the front cover was repaired before coming into the BKB collection, most likely at the time of damage. However, it is difficult to determine when the restoration was done exactly since there is no post-colophon claiming the merits of this good deed at the end of the original colophon on folio 256v.<sup>3</sup>

### Date and provenance: The identity of Gomīndrapāla

The flawless quality of the palm-leaves and sumptuous and vibrant pigments of blue, yellow, green, white, orange and red, suggest that the donor of this manuscript must have been a person of means. The colophon on the verso of illustrated folio 255 identifies the donor as Pauruṣa, who is simply referred to as a lay Mahāyāna donor (*mahāyānayāyinaḥ paramopāsaka*). As part of a stock phrase of the donor colophon, this reference gives little information about who this Pauruṣa was. There follows a long verse possibly explaining the general intention of the donor and the merit of donating the book of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. At the end of this long eulogy, the colophon records that the manuscript was prepared by a scribe named Kāśyapa during the 4<sup>th</sup> year (*catuṣṭaye*) of Gomīndrapāla.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know the identity of Kāśyapa either, for the scribe does not identify himself. The regularity of careful and controlled writing suggests Kāśyapa must have been a trained scribe for writing manuscripts in *kuṭīla* or hooked script.<sup>5</sup>

The most interesting part in the colophon information is the name of the king Gomīndrapāla because this name, Gomīndrapāla, is not found in any other source. D.C. Sircar and others have suggested that Gomīndrapāla might be a misspelling or misreading of Govindapāla,<sup>6</sup> one of the last Pāla kings who seem to have been holding a fort in the Magadha area during the late twelfth century (c.1176-80). If Gomīndrapāla and Govindapāla refer to the same king, the date of this manuscript would be around 1180. Although it is difficult to confirm the identity of Gomīndrapāla and his relation to other Pāla kings with the evidence at hand, a cursory comparison between this manuscript and a manuscript dated with Govindapāla's reign

would be helpful in determining the relative date of the Gomīndrapāla manuscript. Fortunately, the *AsP* manuscript now in the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS), London, dates to the 4<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Govindapāla.

The colophon of the RAS manuscript indicates that the manuscript was prepared in the Nālandā monastery (Cowell/Eggeling 1876: 3). The absence of shrine structures surrounding the deities in both manuscripts suggests relative proximity of the production sites of these two manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> However, the colour palette and the style used for illustrations in the Bharat Kala Bhavan manuscript are quite different from those in the Royal Asiatic Society manuscript. The figures in the RAS manuscript show relatively elongated limbs and slimmer bodies defined through the use of fine outlines.<sup>8</sup> The decorative details, such as patterns on cushions and decorative tops of throne-backs, are more intricate in the RAS manuscript. On the other hand, the illustrator of the BKB manuscript used shading and gradation of colour to define the shapes of figures. The use of bright blue, orange, yellow, and white makes the paintings in the BKB manuscript eye-catching and jewel-like (**Plates 25.2-3, 8-13**). The extensive use of white and sky blue colour is another distinctive feature of the BKB manuscript.

Of course, these stylistic differences may be more regional than temporal. But in the same vein, we can not discount the possibility of Gomīndrapāla being another Pāla king who claimed his lineage to the earlier Pālas, especially considering the waning political situation for the Pāla kings towards the end of the twelfth century. A.M. Chowdhury (1967: 136) has suggested that Govindapāla might have been a namesake Pāla, active in small areas in Bihar, not an actual Pāla king. Whether having a familial relation to the earlier Pālas or not, Govindapāla seems to have been politically influential in parts of Magadha (present day Bihar) judging from the manuscript colophons and inscriptions bearing his regnal years. Gomīndrapāla could have been contemporaneous with Govindapāla or slightly later and also active in different parts of Magadha. The stylistic analysis of the paintings may not give a definitive answer to the question of Gomīndrapāla's identity, but other unique features in the pattern of illustrations point to a late twelfth-century date for the BKB manuscript.

### **Layout of illustrations and the use of periphery space**

The illustrations in this manuscript are placed on the facing pages of the first two folios (fol. 1v – fol. 2r), and on the last two illustrated folios (fol. 254v – fol. 255r). As in many illustrated manuscripts of the *AsP* prepared in eastern India, there are three panels on each illustrated folio, each measuring around 7.3 cm by 6.5 cm (**Plate 25.2**). The total of twelve panels on these four illustrated folios depicts the eight scenes from the Buddha's life and four Bodhisattvas, including Lokanātha, Maitreya, Arapacana *maṇḍala* (Mañjuśrī), and Vajrapāṇi, all standard subjects. But new elements appear between them.

Each illustrated folio in almost every illustrated *AsP* manuscript from eastern India employs decorative patterns of foliage and jewels in the narrow panels at the end of each folio and surrounding the two string holes. These decorative bands frame both the text and the images and give the folio a rich, jewel-studded appearance. They tie images in one manuscript together as a single visual unit, giving them a group identity. They often share a colour scheme of orange and yellow in the border design with the main image panels. Towards the end of the twelfth century, there seems to have emerged a new way of using these narrow spaces for figural representations that compliment the main panels. Using the decorative bands around holes as part of the iconographic program was initially practiced in the wooden covers in the manuscripts made

during the mid-twelfth century in eastern India,<sup>9</sup> and some illustrators followed this scheme to further enrich the illustrative program.

In a few other late twelfth-century manuscripts, the narrow panels around the two holes that used to be decorated with foliages and geometric patterns in the earlier manuscripts contain human figures that go with the illustrations of the page. This scheme is followed in the *Pañcarakṣā* manuscript dated to Govindapāla's 22<sup>nd</sup> year now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata,<sup>10</sup> the *AsP* manuscript dated to Govindapāla's 32<sup>nd</sup> year now in the Asiatic Society, Mumbai,<sup>11</sup> and the *AsP* manuscript dated to Lakṣmaṇasena's 47<sup>th</sup> year (c. 1195) in the Bharat Kala Bhavan,<sup>12</sup> all datable to the late twelfth century. For example, in the Mumbai Asiatic Society manuscript, the first two illustrated folios depict two monks wearing patched robes seated on each narrow panel framing the main image panels that depict four scenes from the Buddha's life, Amitābha and Prajñāpāramitā (**Plate 25.4**), while the folios 106v and 107r where the esoteric deities of Guhyasamāja, such as Sambara, Akṣobhya and Heruka, appear with their respective consorts have Ḍākinī figures of different colours surrounding the group (**Plate 25.5**). The Ḍākinīs around the Guhyasamāja deities mark and celebrate the sacred ground enabling these deities to appear inside a book of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* while monk-like figures suggest that the images on the first two folios are the objects of monastic devotion. These images appearing in the periphery space of the late twelfth-century manuscripts confirm and identify the level of secrecy of the main images that they accompany.

An eleventh-century manuscript now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) seems to anticipate this narrative use of the narrow string-hole panels (**Plate 25.6**), but the pattern in this manuscript is quite different from the late twelfth-century manuscripts.<sup>13</sup> A single standing female or male figure occupies each narrow panel surrounding the two holes, and the two figures on two holes attend the deities in the central panels on either side in the first two folios. In addition, the first two folios have three illustrated panels on each whereas the last two folios have only two illustrated panels on each. The result is that the standing female figures on the narrow panels of the last two folios attend no images but rather the text. Thus, it could be safely established that this eleventh-century example does not belong to the same group as the late twelfth-century examples and the trend could be identified as a late twelfth-century characteristic.

This characteristic in the late twelfth-century manuscripts helps dating undated stray folios with the similar feature. For example, an illustrated folio from an *AsP* manuscript in the LACMA collection (M.72.1.23) has two small male figures seated on lotuses painted on the narrow bands around the holes (**Plate 25.7**). This folio has three main panels depicting the Buddha's life scenes, namely, Buddha's Descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven on the left, the Śrāvastī miracle in the middle, and the Buddha's Birth on the right. The two male figures on the narrow bands face each other looking towards the central panel. They seem to attend the Buddha in the central panel. The layout of the other two panels reinforces this impression because the Buddha in the Descent panel leans towards right, facing the central panel, while Māyādevī's posture of giving birth makes her face and body turned towards left, leading our attention to the central panel (Pal 1993: 64). We do not know much about the provenance or the date of this folio even though it is one of the most ornate surviving *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folios in terms of its calligraphy and paintings. P. Pal mentions that this was acquired by Giuseppe Tucci while he was in Tibet. I would like to suggest that this folio must have been in the Ngor monastery in Tibet in 1920s and 1930s when Rāhula Sāṅkṛityāyana visited Tibet searching for Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscripts in Tibetan monasteries.<sup>14</sup> Judging from his reports and photographs, it seems that the folio belonged to an already incomplete manuscript.<sup>15</sup> At one point in its life,

possibly encouraged by the manuscript's imperfect condition, one folio left the monastery and went through different hands to enter the LACMA collection in 1972.<sup>16</sup>

The former provenance does not lend any substantial historical information regarding its origin, but the photos taken by Sāṅkṛityāyana supplement the stylistic analysis of the LACMA folio.<sup>17</sup> Paleographic characteristics and stylistic features such as pointed and angular tips of fingers and eyelids, and the spiky rendition of decorative elements, make it possible to speculate the date of this folio as belonging to a twelfth-century manuscript. Moreover, my above observation regarding the use of the decorative bands for figural representations in the dated manuscripts makes it possible to suggest a late twelfth-century date for the manuscript. Likewise, the BKB Gomīndrapāla manuscript could be placed towards the end of the twelfth century, possibly later than Govindapāla's 4<sup>th</sup> year, based on the appearance of figural representations on the narrow panels framing the central panels. The tiny figures on the narrow bands in the BKB Gomīndrapāla manuscript, however, seem to play a more substantial role in the iconographic program than those in other late twelfth-century manuscripts, although their ultimate function might be the same. These figures appear to be interconnected, and perhaps, engaged in a dialogue, alluding to a narrative. In the following section, let us consider what they represent and examine how the tiny figures on the narrow bands relate to the rest of the iconographic program.

### Visual narrative in the periphery: the *Vessantara jātaka*

The two narrow bands around the holes on each illustrated folio in the Gomīndrapāla manuscript have figures painted on the bottom parts. The top parts of these bands show the traditional jewel-like geometric patterns matching the decorative bands on the either end of the folio. In the first folio (**Plate 25.8**), the bottom part of the left side band includes a male figure with yellow skin-tone in princely attire. He sits facing right and holds a vessel in his right hand, his arm extended slightly forward as if offering it to the right. He may be offering the vessel to the Buddha who is seated in the central panel, which depicts the moment of Buddha's Enlightenment. However, one step further to the right, an emaciated, dark-skinned male figure wearing an *upavīta* and minimal clothes covering his hips immediately catches out eyes on the right side band. His appearance suggests he must be an ascetic Brahmin. He seems to have walked into the panel as his bent legs suggest. He is shown stretching his right hand out as if asking for a donation. Facing each other from the symmetrically placed narrow bands, the two figures seem to be in dialogue with each other, one giving and the other begging.

The facing page on the second folio shows a similar configuration carried one step further (**Plate 25.9**). The dark-skinned emaciated Brahmin on the right stretches his both hands forward, intensifying the level of begging. His counterpart on the left seems to be the same princely figure on the first panel but it is hard to be certain what he is doing because of the damage around the hole. He seems to hold a sword in his right hand behind his head in the posture of tonsure or inflicting himself. The Brahmin's eager gesture of begging clearly connects the two. Whatever the result of the prince's action, the Brahmin is asking for something.

On the last two folios these two actors switch positions. On folio 254v, we see the begging Brahmin on the left side panel, with his hands put together in front of him and his knees slightly bent, suggesting very sincere request in a subservient manner (**Plate 25.10**). This Brahmin figure, while dark skinned and emaciated as the previous two, has black hair with a single strand of hair on the back of his head, which is not

apparent in the first two examples. The prince sits calmly in a relaxed manner, using a *yogapaṭṭa* around his left leg. His left hand rests to the side while his right hand shows the gesture of argument or explanation similar to *vitarka mudrā*,<sup>18</sup> as if trying to persuade the begging Brahmin. The next folio, the last illustrated folio in this manuscript shows the object of their dispute.

On folio 255r, the left side narrow panel shows the dark-skinned emaciated Brahmin with two small boys (**Plate 25.11**). The Brahmin has his right hand raised above as if he is about to strike the boys, while holding them tied in ropes. Although their facial features are sketched with minimal lines, the facial expressions with wide open eyes are enough to suggest that they are scared. They look back to the right side while being pushed to walk to the left by the Brahmin. The boys' turned heads direct the viewer's attention to the right although the movement suggested by the direction of their bodies and the Brahmin is to the left.

On the right side narrow panel sits the prince seated again with the *yogapaṭṭa* around his left leg but now with his left hand raised in front of the chest and his right hand extended to the left as if presenting something (**Plate 25.12**). Surely these are father and sons, and the prince who has given away his two children to a Brahmin would have to be none other than the prince Vessantara. In the *Vessantara jātaka*, the prince Vessantara gives away his two children Jāli and Kanhajīna to an evil Brahmin as an ultimate act of giving. This final set suggests that this whole sequence must represent the *Vessantara jātaka* in which the virtue of selfless giving (*dāna*) is much emphasized. While the textual reference for the activities of the prince's giving in the first two folios is unclear, the theme of generous giving is clear throughout the four sequences of begging and giving, and the last two panels make it clear that the illustrator had the *Vessantara jātaka* in his mind.

This is a rare example where the narrow panels tell a separate story from the main image panels. The painter of this manuscript invented an ingenious way to represent the *Vessantara jātaka* by placing the crucial visual elements in the narrow panels that were often reserved for decoration. Then, why was this story chosen to be represented in the panels that are in between the text and the images? What was the relationship between the *Vessantara jātaka* in these periphery spaces and the rest of the iconographic program? More importantly, why does a manuscript of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* have the visual narrative of the *Vessantara jātaka* when there is no reference to the story in the text? The answer to this last question is extremely important in understanding the role of illustrated books in the Buddhist book-cult, for it counters the notion that the images in the *AsP* manuscripts were not related to the text and inserted only for the purpose of increasing the merits of the donors.

### Perfect Giving for the Perfect Wisdom: *Vessantara jātaka* and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*

The main illustrations of the Gomīndrapāla manuscript include the eight scenes of the Buddha's life as shown in the layout of the iconographic program (Table 1). The life scenes beginning from the Birth and ending with the Parinirvāṇa are placed in a more or less sequential order on the first two folios and the second to last illustrated folio, except for the penultimate event of Monkey's offering of honey. The scene of Monkey's offering of honey is placed on the second folio of the manuscript, instead of its usual location, next to the scene of Parinirvāṇa on folio 254v. It is also out of sequence in terms of the compositional balance of the iconographic program: the most common principle in arranging the eight panels in the illustrated *AsP* manuscripts is to pair two scenes featuring the Buddha in the same posture on a single folio,



**Table 1: Iconographic program of the illustrated folios, Gomīndrapāla ms., Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU**

1		<b>Birth</b>		<b>Vessantara</b>		<b>Māravijaya</b>		<b>Brahman</b>		<b>First Sermon</b>	
v	text		text		text		text		text		text
acc.nos.		4779		4780		4781		4782		4783	
2		<b>Monkey's offering of honey</b>		<b>Vessantara</b>		<b>Śrāvastī miracle</b>		<b>Brahman</b>		<b>Taming of the mad elephant</b>	
r	text		text		text		text		text		text
acc.nos.		4784		4785		4786		4787		4788	
254		<b>Descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven</b>		<b>Brahman</b>		<b>Parinirvāṇa</b>		<b>Vessantara</b>		<b>Avalokiteśvara (Lokanātha)</b>	
v	text		text		text		text		text		text
acc.nos.		4789		4790		4791		4792		4793	
255		<b>Maitreya</b>		<b>Brahman</b>		<b>Arapacana maṇḍala</b>		<b>Vessantara</b>		<b>Vajrapāṇi</b>	
r	text		text		text		text		text		text
acc.nos.		4774		4775		4776		4777		4778	

for example, standing Buddha in the Descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and in the Taming of the mad elephant. In this manuscript, the scene of Descent seems to have switched positions with the scene of Monkey's offering of honey.

This iconographic idiosyncrasy seems to correlate to the choice of depicting the *Vessantara jātaka* in the narrow panels. The *Vessantara jātaka* emphasizes selfless giving (*dāna*), and the images in the narrow panels succinctly represent the gist of the story by showing only the acts of giving and receiving. The event of Monkey's offering of honey marks the penultimate moment of the Buddha's life but it also emphasizes the merit of giving. It is through giving of honey to the Buddha and the Buddha's acceptance of the gift that the monkey earned his immediate incarnation as a *deva* who, in the painting, is represented as waving as if in thanks to the Buddha for accepting his gift while flying away in blue clouds (**Plate 25.13**). Placement of this scene on the second folio, while unexpected, effectively emphasizes the importance of giving along with the little figures in the narrow panels that are engaged in the generous act. Then, the intention is clearly to emphasize the virtue of giving, one of the six *pāramitās*, or perfections. Maybe, the patron, Pauruṣa, had requested this to be the case reflecting on his own good act of donating a sumptuously made *AsP* manuscript. The makers of this manuscript might have felt necessary to emphasize the act of giving through beautiful illustrations to solicit more donations for making manuscripts. The discussion of devotional intention is conjectural. However, the choice of the *Vessantara jātaka* seems to have a doctrinal implication as well.

### Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddhas of all times and spaces

The representations of the *Vessantara jātaka* are found almost everywhere in early Buddhist sites in India. Because it is the last incarnation of the Buddha in the Pali canon the *Vessantara jātaka* has remained one of the most popular subjects to be represented in Buddhist art. But the relationship between the *Vessantara jātaka* and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* seems quite remote. Nonetheless, the Gomīndrapāla manuscript is not the only one that features the *Vessantara jātaka* for illustrations. A book cover in the National Museum, New Delhi, also depicts the narrative of the *Vessantara jātaka* (acc.no. 51.212).<sup>19</sup> This book cover is currently bound together with an *AsP* manuscript dated to N.S. 477 (1327 CE).<sup>20</sup> Given more space, that is, the entire inner surface of a wooden book cover, the artist depicted the *jātaka* in detail (**Plate 25.14**). The narrative unfolds using a form of continuous linear narrative, with each scene framed by compositional elements (Dehejia 1990: 386-388). The first frame shows the prince giving away the magic elephant to a Brahmin, which resulted in the banishment of him and his family in the next scene. In the third frame, a dark-brown skinned Brahmin approaches the family with the gesture of asking something from them. The fourth frame shows the result that the prince has given away the animals that were pulling the chariot, and now, two deer help them with the chariot. The story might have continued to the other book cover, which is now lost. While we cannot be completely certain that the *Vessantara jātaka* cover was originally part of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text to which it is now joined, it is of interest that someone found the combination plausible and that this *jātaka* is found in the context of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text.

To return to our principal *AsP* manuscript in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, one of the covers depicts the goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* who embodies the text of the same name seated in the center among the seven Buddhas of the past and the future Buddha Maitreya (**Plate 25.15**). She is yellow in complexion and holds her hands in teaching gesture. Green female figures attend her (**Plate 25.16**). Each of the Seven Buddhas is seated under a tree demonstrating different gestures. They probably represent the seven Buddhas and Maitreya in a sequential order, although this does not mean that each Buddha shows an established iconography. Their identity as the Buddhas of the past and future comes from the collective nature of having the seven Buddhas and one Bodhisattva, Maitreya, as a group. Here, the famous analogy of *Prajñāpāramitā* as the mother of all Buddhas explained in the *AsP* is clearly visualized since in the center of all the Buddhas of all times sits *Prajñāpāramitā* from whom the enlightenment of every Buddha originates. The illustrator of this manuscript seems to have pushed this analogy one step further to include transcendental Buddhas (also known as *pañca jina* or *pañca tathāgata*).

The other cover shows five Buddhas of all directions appearing in the order of Vairocana (white), Ratnasambhava (yellow), Akṣobhya (blue), Amitābha (red) and Amoghasidhi (green) (**Plate 25.17**). They are followed by four Bodhisattvas featuring four colours in the order of yellow, blue, red and white (**Plate 25.18**).<sup>21</sup> When understood together as a group, the iconographic program in the book covers show that every enlightened being originates from *Prajñāpāramitā* who is seated in the center of the composition. Thus we see multiple levels or stages of Buddhism linked.

### Conclusion: Illustrating the Perfection of Wisdom

Then, what about the Buddha's life scenes and the *Vessantara jātaka* inside the manuscript folios? All the Buddhas that appear on the book covers converge in, or diverge from, the historical Buddha since every

Buddhist tradition would treasure his enlightenment and life as the fundamental root, regardless of their doctrinal orientation. The representations of the Buddha's life scenes on the illustrated folios locate the historical Buddha inside the book of the *AsP*. The story of the prince Vessantara as the last of his incarnations in which he perfected his virtues to become a Buddha is a perfect thread to fill in the interlacement between the historical Buddha and the Prajñāpāramitā that are laid out in the body of the manuscript in the form of the image and the text. Although it is a story of one of his previous lives, the *Vessantara jātaka* could also be understood as representing one of the stages one needs to complete to reach the state of enlightenment. The story's emphasis on the virtue of giving, one of the six *pāramitās*, may have played an important role for this choice. Just as it was upheld important at earlier Buddhist sites, the makers of the BKB Gomīndrapāla manuscript might have reintroduced its importance at the end of the twelfth century to represent the import of Prajñāpāramitā as the all-encompassing root of all enlightenment experiences. By weaving together the *Vessantara jātaka*, the Buddha's life scenes, the Buddhas of all times, and the transcendental Buddhas with the warp of Prajñāpāramitā, they turned a manuscript of an age-old text into a meaningful sacred object that embodies the principle of enlightenment and moral behavior in the context of a complex doctrinal environment of the late twelfth century in eastern India. Although its size is meager, the manuscript became a perfect object that links various levels of the Buddhist doctrine through its illustrative program, just like Borobudur.

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I would like to thank Joanna Williams for her insightful suggestions. I am also indebted to Gerd Mevissen for providing valuable reference materials and comments.

### Notes

1. This is a common practice in institutions in India and UK where many complete manuscripts are housed. There is an institutional difference between libraries and museums regarding how they treat illustrated manuscripts. Libraries often treat the text folios almost equally as the illustrated folios whereas museums treat the illustrated folios with much more care so that the text folios of different manuscripts are left mixed together without even being catalogued.
2. During my research at the Bharat Kala Bhavan in 2003, I was able to examine one bundle of text folios among which I found folios numbered from 3 to 79. I believe they belong to the same manuscript as the illustrated folios of the Gomīndrapāla manuscript because of the similarity of the writing and the shape and size of the palm-leaf folios. It is possible that more text folios of this manuscript are in the collection.
3. Many Pāla manuscripts that survived in Nepal bear the records of the great deeds of later owners who repaired and cherished the book with rituals. Although there is no post-colophon added at the end of the manuscript, it is possible that this was recorded on a separate folio which is now lost or misplaced, or on the recto side of the first folio. I was not able to verify whether there is any colophon on the recto of the first folio for this folio is on display under a glass frame with two other illustrated folios.
4. Here, I would like to correct my earlier reading of the colophon where I suggested the date to be the 32<sup>nd</sup> or 48<sup>th</sup> year of Gomīndrapāla (Kim 2006: 122). The date in the colophon and the scribal information read as follows: "*rājye gomīndrapālasya samvatsara catuṣṭaye// śrīmatīkāśyapeneyaṃ likhitāṣṭasahasrikā//*" fol. 256r.



5. Gouriswar Bhattacharya has suggested that the script used in early Pāla inscriptions should be referred to as “*siddhamāṭṭṛkā*” instead of “*kuṭila*” while those in later Pāla inscriptions that used to be referred to as “proto-Bengali” should be called “*gauḍī*” or “*gauḍīya*” following al-Birūnī’s record (Bhattacharya 1998: 15). However, in the context of manuscript production during the eleventh and twelfth century in eastern India, what is referred to as the “proto-Bengali” script is distinctively different from what is referred to as the “*kuṭila*” script. Although I agree with Bhattacharya’s proposal to use the local nomenclature of the time, it would not be helpful for our understanding to call every type of script in manuscript writing “*gauḍīya*”. From the formal similarity, it may be possible to use “*siddhamāṭṭṛkā*” to refer to what used to be called “*kuṭila*” script but this too is limiting because the term cannot convey the distinctive characteristics of the hooked, ornamental script used in manuscript writings different from those used in inscriptions. In addition, because of the prominent use of the word, “*siddham*” to refer to the script used for writing Sanskrit *dhāraṇīs* in the Buddhist writing practice in East Asia, the connotation of the word is not straightforward and more esoteric than what one would hope for in nomenclature. Another possibility for referring to the type of the script used in eastern Indian manuscripts would be “*rañjana*” for their ornamental quality would be succinctly understood in this term. However, this term is also used to refer to the script used in the manuscripts made during the seventeenth century or later, which revived the then archaic, hooked, ornamental script of earlier manuscripts. Calling both the old and the new as “*rañjana*” does not seem helpful for differentiating the two. It also implies a long line of a continuous tradition instead of changes and revivals in the cultural history of Nepal, which is not the case. Thus, for the lack of a better terminology, I continue to use the term “*kuṭila*” even though it has been criticized by Bhattacharya.
6. D.C. Sircar (1982: 127) suggests that Gomīndra must be a modification of “Govinda” referring to other examples where “*va*” and “*ma*” seem to be interchanged.
7. By the twelfth century, the manuscripts produced in the area of Aṅga and Varendra have deities seated under shrine structures. The manuscripts made in the central area of Magadha adhered to an older scheme, resisting the use of shrine structures to frame images, as exemplified in the manuscripts produced in the Nālandā monastery during the twelfth century. For example, the *AsP* manuscript now in the British Library (Or. 6902) was prepared in the Vikramaśīla monastery during the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Gopāla’s reign and has deities seated inside shrine structures (Zwalf 1985: 58-59, pl. 62). The trend seems to have begun in southeastern Bengal as seen in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript dated to Harivarman’s 8<sup>th</sup> year (c. 1100) now in the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery. This manuscript shows many Bodhisattva images appearing in varying types of shrine structures (Bhattacharya 1944). Losty also suggests the use of shrine structures as a 12<sup>th</sup>-century southern Bengal characteristic in manuscript paintings (see Losty 1989).
8. For example, Indra who stands behind the Buddha in the scene of Buddha’s Descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven in the RAS manuscript (fol. 101v) is much slimmer with elongated limbs than that in the BKB manuscript. See Losty 1982: fig. 9.
9. Many surviving wooden covers that come with eastern Indian manuscripts are often prepared later in Nepal, but some manuscripts dating from the mid-twelfth century, such as the *AsP* manuscript in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts dated to Gopāla III’s 4<sup>th</sup> year (c. 1147) and the *AsP* manuscript in the National Archive, Kathmandu, dated to Madanapāla’s reign (c. 1158-76), survive with the illustrated book covers that were prepared with the rest of the manuscripts. These book covers have illustrations of the Buddha’s life scenes, Prajñāpāramitā, and a retinue of Bodhisattvas. See Pal/Meech-Pekarik 1988: fig. 22; Bautze-Picron 2000: pls. 7.11-12.
10. Bhattacharyya 1969; Saraswati 1971: 246.
11. Kulkarni/Desai 1998: viii-ix, no. 22, figs. 8-11 & frontispiece; Bautze-Picron 2000: 117-118. Bautze-Picron mentions that this manuscript was copied in the 39<sup>th</sup> year of an unspecified era, but the colophon clearly reads, “*śrīmadgovindapāladevasyātītārājye samvat 32*”, indicating that it was copied during Govindapāla’s 32<sup>nd</sup> year. “*ātīta*” or “passed” indicates that Govindapāla was no more in power.

12. Saraswati 1971: 246.
13. The colophon page gives the date of this manuscript as Mahīpāla's 27th year (Pal 1993: 50-51).
14. The first two folios of this manuscript are published in his report published in 1937. See Sāṅkṛityāyana 1937: plate opp. p. 20 "Leaves of illustrated MSS. (Ngor Monastery)".
15. Sāṅkṛityāyana's photos were also published in the *The Album of the Tibetan Art Collections* by the Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute in Patna (Pathak 1986). The first two folios of the manuscript appear on plates 20, 22 and 24. The first folio seems to have been severely damaged, missing one third of the right section as shown in the plate 24 in the *Album*. The folio might belong to the manuscript no. 57 in his list published in his first report in 1935. He reports that this manuscript was incomplete with only 174 folios and had "beautiful paintings on three leaves and two wooden covers" (Sāṅkṛityāyana 1935: 32). It is possible that he photographed only the first two folios and the third folio, which must have been placed in the middle of the manuscript, was left out in his photograph. I suspect this third folio must be the one now in the LACMA collection.
16. Interestingly, a few of illustrated folios in the LACMA collection that were formerly in the Nasli and Alice Heeramanek Collection are identifiable in Sāṅkṛityāyana's reports. For example, the folio with Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (M.72.1.21) seems to belong to the *AsP* manuscript in the Shalu monastery (No. XXVIII 288 in Sāṅkṛityāyana's list). See Sāṅkṛityāyana 1937: 42; Pathak 1986: pls. 25-29.
17. Sāṅkṛityāyana's photos have proven to be valuable resources for the study of Buddhist manuscript paintings. For another study of the manuscript paintings using his photos, see Allinger 2001.
18. It is hard to see whether his finger tips are touched or not. If they are straight open, the gesture seems to suggest that the prince is asking the Brahmin what he wants because he has given everything in his possession including his body parts.
19. See Losty 1982: colour plate V; Gupta 1985: 90, no. 121.
20. The illustrated folio with Prajñāpāramitā from this manuscript is published in Gupta 1985: 88, no. 119. There is a possibility that this cover might not have belonged to the manuscript originally. The other book cover that is bound together with this manuscript is painted with eastern Indian style using predominantly orange and green pigments while this cover is definitely done in Nepalese style using a variety of colours. Physical markers of alteration suggest that this book cover has been modified to be reused for this manuscript. The book cover with the *Vessantara jātaka* does not show any sign of physical alteration, but it would not be surprising if this book cover was also salvaged from some other manuscript and used for this fourteenth-century manuscript.
21. The four Bodhisattvas hold lotuses with distinctive attributes on them, but their exact identity remains elusive. I wonder if they are four among the eight Bodhisattvas that surround Akṣobhya in the *Akṣobhya maṇḍala* described in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, especially given that Akṣobhya is seated in the center of the five-Jina group. See Bhattacharyya 1972: 6, "*Piṇḍīkramoktākṣobhyamaṇḍalam*".

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**Plate 25.1: Repaired condition of the front cover, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU. Photo by author.**



Plate 25.2: Illustrated folio with Maitreya, Arapacana *maṇḍala* and Vajrapāṇi as main panels, fol. 255r, *AsP* ms., Gomīndrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4774-4778. Photo by author.

Plate 25.3:  
Vajrapāṇi  
with attendants,  
fol. 255r, *AsP* ms.,  
right side panel,  
Gomīndrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year,  
late 12<sup>th</sup> century,  
Bharat Kala Bhavan,  
BHU, 4778.  
Photo by author.



Plate 25.4: Prajñāpāramitā in the central panel with four monks on the narrow panels, fol. 2r, *AsP* ms., Govindapāla 22<sup>nd</sup> year, Asiatic Society of Mumbai, BI-210. Photo by author.



Plate 25.5: Svābhāraprajñā (Akṣobhya's consort) in the central panel with four Ḍākinīs on the narrow panels, fol. 107r, *AsP* ms., Govindapāla 22<sup>nd</sup> year, Asiatic Society of Mumbai, BI-210. Photo by author.





Plate 25.6: Four illustrated folios of an *AsP* ms., Mahipāla (I) 27<sup>th</sup> year, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.86.1. 85a-d. Photograph © 2007 Museum Associates/LACMA.



Plate 25.7: Illustrated folio of an *AsP* ms. with three scenes from the Buddha's life, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.72.1.23. Photograph © 2007 Museum Associates/LACMA.



Plate 25.8: Buddha's Enlightenment in central panel, prince and ascetic Brahmin in narrow band panels, fol. 1v, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> c., Bharat Kala Bhavan, 4781. Photo by author.



Plate 25.9: Śrāvastī miracle in central panel, prince and begging Brahmin in narrow band panels, fol. 2r, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, 4786. Photo by author.





Plate 25.10: Parinirvāṇa in central panel, begging Brahmin and prince in narrow band panels, fol. 254v, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4791. Photo by author.



Plate 25.11: A Brahmin taking away Vessantara's two boys, left side narrow band panel, fol. 255r, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4775. Photo by author.



Plate 25.12: Prince Vessantara, right side narrow band panel, fol. 255r, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4777. Photo by author.



Plate 25.13: Monkey's offering of honey, left panel, fol. 2r, *AsP* ms., Gomindrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4784 and 4785. Photo by author.





Plate 25.14: Vessantara *jātaka*, inside of a book cover, *AsP* ms., 12<sup>th</sup> century(?), National Museum, New Delhi, 51.212. Photo courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.



Plate 25.15: Prajñāpāramitā with seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya, book cover, *AsP* ms., Gomīndrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4794. Photo by author.



Plate 25.16:  
Prajñāpāramitā  
with attendants,  
detail of Plate 25.15.  
Photo by author.



Plate 25.17: Five Jinas, book cover, *AsP* ms., Gomīndrapāla 4<sup>th</sup> year, late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, 4795. Photo by author.



Plate 25.18:  
Four Bodhisattvas,  
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Photo by author.

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