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## ILLUSTRATED BUDDHIST MANUSCRIPTS

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### Prologue

Illustrating a text or a story with pictures was a common practice in ancient South Asia. On the walls of the famed Ajanta caves in Deccan (Maharashtra, India) survive a great number of stories told in picture from the fifth century.<sup>1</sup> A reference to the practice of showing painting (*citra*) to tell a story in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, first discussed by Coomaraswamy in 1929, also seems to suggest the longevity of the tradition of story-telling in picture in South Asia.<sup>2</sup> In Bengal (West Bengal in India and Bangladesh), the celebrated *patua* or *pat* painting tradition may go back many centuries before the earliest extant examples (c. 18th century).<sup>3</sup> Given this longstanding tradition of illustrating stories with pictures, it may come as a surprise to find that the earliest surviving illustrated manuscripts from South Asia date to the turn of the first millennium, and that most surviving early manuscripts with painted folios belong to the Buddhist circles, and they are not of some well-known Indic epic like the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*.

The Buddhist stories may not be the most action-packed kinds, and they are deeply didactic, but the Indic Buddhist literature does not lack narratives and fables, and the Buddha himself is featured as a master storyteller.<sup>4</sup> However, the most common text chosen to make an illustrated manuscript during the period from the turn of the first millennium into the 13th century is the *Prajñāpāramitā*, especially the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [*the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses*, henceforth *AsP*]. This is an important Mahāyāna *sūtra* expounding the doctrinal concept of emptiness/voidness (*śūnyatā*), which is epitomized in the Buddhist axiom, "Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form." Why was this metaphysical text chosen for illustration? How was it illustrated?

Answers to these questions explain what a book (*pustaka*), a term used to refer to these manuscripts in accompanying colophons, might have meant for those who made and used them in medieval South Asia. First, the *Prajñāpāramitā* articulates most clearly the idea that a manuscript in Indic Buddhist circles was

not just a text but also a potent cultic object.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the foremost reasons why the *Prajñāpāramitā* was chosen for making illustrated manuscripts. Secondly, this text's doctrinal and cultic importance was communicated through a programmatic and holistic approach to illustration. The method of manuscript illustration thus developed is akin to designing a temple's iconographic program, which ultimately conveys the power and presence of its central deity through statues in niches and relief panels on the highly regulated surface.<sup>6</sup>

A manuscript was conceived as a three-dimensional space in which rectangular painted panels were systematically placed to signify the doctrinal and cultic importance of the text, which from about 1100 CE onwards became increasingly interpretive and innovative.<sup>7</sup> It is in this context of burgeoning illustrated manuscript production that we find one of the most profusely illustrated manuscripts known to us, which attempts to illustrate the text directly, and not just at the metonymic level. And this manuscript, now in the British Library (Or.13940), most likely hails from somewhere in southern Bengal.<sup>8</sup>

### Illustrated manuscripts of Bengal

This chapter explores notable characteristics of illustrated manuscripts produced in Bengal (Bangladesh and West Bengal in India). Most of the surviving illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts from Bengal were prepared in the 12th century. As we will see in this chapter, they bear out and confirm the general cultural map of the period already identified in other visual and archaeological evidence, especially the distinctive artistic styles of Southern Bengal (the 'Vaṅga style') vis-à-vis Northern Bengal (the 'Varendra style'). The manuscripts bearing the Varman-era dates exemplify a distinctive pictorial style, and were written in a script akin to *Gauḍīya* (so called proto-Bengali) script, distinct from the *kuṭiḷa* (hooked) or *siddhamātrikā* script commonly used in manuscripts prepared in a



Fig. 1: Top left: AsP Ms, Nalanda. c. mid 11th century, Bottom left: AsP Ms, Nalanda, dated Rāmapāla 15th year (c. 1092 CE), Top Right: AsP ms, Vikramaśīla, dated Gopāla 15th year (ca. mid 12th century), Bottom Right: AsP Ms (Vaṅga Ms 2), Harivarman 19th year (ca. early 12th century).

Magadhan monastic center like Nalanda in Bihar, India (see fig. 1). In fact, their production site may have been somewhere in today's Munshiganj district (area where the ancient capital of Vikramapura was located), where copper plate inscriptions of the Varman kings have been found. Recent archaeological excavations in the area by a team led by Sufi Mostafizur Rahman of Jahangirnagar University support the strong presence of Buddhist institutions along with a number of superb examples of Buddhist sculptures collected from the area earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

Identifying manuscripts prepared elsewhere in Bengal proves much more problematic: they are not as homogeneous in terms of their style as the Vaṅga group, and the production sites are often unknown or difficult to identify. Exact geographical locations of the medieval toponyms are seldom identifiable even if there is a colophon providing patronage and scribal information with place names. Nonetheless, a number of 12th century manuscripts collectively seem to represent the artistic creativity and ingenuity of manuscript makers of Bengal. In comparison to contemporaneous examples from Magadhan sites, these manuscripts feature paintings with more ornate backdrops, which aligns well with the characteristics of the 'Varendra' style in contemporary sculpture. They also use pictorial space on each painted page more creatively, which seems to have begun with the experiments seen in the Vaṅga group and was quickly picked up elsewhere in Bengal and beyond.



Fig. 2: Folios 536b-537a, Vaṅga Ms 1, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.121.36.6 (top); 55.121.36.4 (bottom). Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

In thinking about illustrated manuscripts in regional terms, I follow in the footsteps of J.P. Losty who in a series of pioneering publications suggested three regional categories of Bengal, Bihar, and Nepal, in Buddhist manuscripts. We should also consider what the regional differentiation means in the larger historical and cultural context. In the context of this chapter, I suggest that the distinctive visual languages developed in 12th-century Bengal relate to how the people at the time saw their world in both regional and trans-regional contexts. Given the unique visual languages seen in the Vaṅga group, we may even suggest that illustrated manuscripts from this corner of Bengal may be signaling a sense of a vernacular identity rooted in a specific place.

### On paleography, provenance, and a vernacular Identity

Losty departs from previous art historical scholarship by paying close attention to palaeography and accompanying colophons. I believe we can take this methodological intervention further by considering the implication of palaeographic variations in contemporary manuscript writing practices in comparison to epigraphic practices seen in stone and copper plate inscriptions. It is easy to take the manuscript's palaeographic characteristics as signaling the provenance of its production, but this is not straightforwardly so, partly due to the cultic nature of illustrated manuscripts outlined above. The most formal type of a script like the *siddhamātrkā* seems to have been deemed most suitable for creating a cultic, often ceremonial, object.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the study of illustrated manuscripts would benefit greatly from a more in-depth analysis of palaeographic types developed in the 11th and the 12th centuries to identify a pattern of variations in scribal practices that may or may not have been tied to a region.<sup>11</sup> For example, I would challenge a century-old assumption that every rounded top script is 'Newari' (called *bhujimola*), which then supports the Nepalese provenance of a manuscript.<sup>12</sup> Scholars have proposed various hypotheses to explain the combination of 'Pāla miniatures with Nepalese script' or a Pāla regnal year with a supposedly Nepalese script.<sup>13</sup> But if we accept the possibility of this particular type of a round-top script being in use for writing manuscripts in the area of Magadha (today's Bihar, India), we do not need to hypothesize so much about the circumstances of their production and can appreciate the contribution of the makers of these manuscripts more straightforwardly.<sup>14</sup>

The use of a round-top script in manuscripts prepared in the Pāla domain may point to loosening of the convention in painted manuscript production in Magadhan monastic centers where the norm was to use the *siddhamātrkā* script also commonly used in official documents (i.e. land grants and royal and monastic praśasti inscriptions). In a similar vein, that some manuscripts from Bengal were written in a script specific to manuscript writing that scholars associate with the development of the *Gauḍīya* or proto-Bengali script is an important historical phenomenon to recognize (see the example in figure 1). A Sanskrit Buddhist scripture prepared as a cultic object was written in a script that could be tied to the development of the vernacular as a written language, whether it is Maithili or Bengali. This palaeographic choice in these illustrated manuscripts can be understood in the context of the formation of a vernacular identity.

### Manuscripts of Vaṅga

We know of at least two illustrated manuscripts bearing the regnal years of a Varman king, Harivarman, whose political center was located in the area

around Vikramapura (today's Munshiganj district near Dhaka, Bangladesh).<sup>15</sup> A complete manuscript of the *AsP*, finished in Harivarman's 19th regnal year, belongs to the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi [henceforth Varendra *AsP* Ms]. A set of twenty-two illustrated folios from a manuscript of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [henceforth *PvP*], including a colophon folio bearing the date of Harivarman's 8th regnal year, is in the collection of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery in India [Baroda *PvP* Ms].<sup>16</sup> The latter entered the Baroda Museum in early 1940s as reported by Bhattacharya. The former was purchased and presented to the Varendra Research Society [parent organization to the Varendra Research Museum] by the founder of the Society, Sarat Kumar Ray (died in 1945) sometime between 1910 and 1940.<sup>17</sup> As previously noted by other scholars like Claudine Bautze-Picron, the manuscripts bearing dates in the regnal years of Varman kings are distinct from the manuscripts known from Magadhan monastic sites.<sup>18</sup>

Two manuscripts may not seem to form a critical mass for us to understand the practice and the aesthetics associated with the production and use of illustrated manuscripts in Southern Bengal. However, their distinct formal characteristics make it possible to recognize a sizable group of examples among stray folios dispersed around the globe. In addition, a unique illustrated manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra* [henceforth *Kv*] in the British Library (Or. 13940) also belongs to this group as noted in previous scholarship.<sup>19</sup>

The Baroda *PvP* manuscript seems to have been a massive production, with a total of five hundred sixty folios, each folio measuring about 56.6cm by about 6cm. While only twenty-two illustrated folios entered the Baroda Museum's collection, the manuscript as a whole should have had at least seventy painted folios [two folios at the beginning of each chapter for a total of thirty-four chapters, and two at the beginning and two at the end of the entire manuscript.] This was an ambitious undertaking, not seen in known Magadhan examples of the 11th century. Luckily, we know of at least thirty-five additional painted folios that may belong to this manuscript (seventeen in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ten in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, two in the McGill University Library, and six in private collections) and the original wooden book covers (the Chester Beatty Library).<sup>20</sup> Along with the Baroda folios, they add up to fifty-seven folios, giving us a good sense of the pictorial language developed for illustrating manuscripts in the Varman ruled area of Southern Bengal. For convenience of discussion, I refer to this group associated with the Baroda folios as Vaṅga Ms1, the Rajshahi *AsP* manuscript as Vaṅga Ms2, and the British Library *Kv* manuscript as Vaṅga Ms3.



### Overall Structure and Design of Vaṅga manuscripts

Two horizontally facing pages, that is, on the reverse or verso side of a folio [as in ‘folio 536b’] and on the front or recto side of a folio [as in ‘folio 537a’], are illustrated with painted panels in a 12th century palm-leaf manuscript, as we see in figure 2. A non-illustrated page is divided into three blocks of text, but they are not meaning-blocks or paragraphs. Each line of the text reads continuously regardless of the spaces between these blocks. The vertical rectangular spaces around the holes between the text blocks create a visual break in the sea of letters, as if they are the columns rhythmically dividing the surface of a temple. An illustrated page in Vaṅga Ms1 bears a single painted panel in the center flanked by two decorative bands around the holes and another two on the both ends of the folio. The latter two bands contain *stūpas*.<sup>21</sup> These *stūpas* are not identical. In addition to color variations, such as white, yellow, and blue, we can notice subtle variations in the shape of *stūpas*. They are consistently represented with a staff and flying streamers as if depicting ‘living’ *stūpas* as sites of devotional activities (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> This active use of the available pictorial space within a single page is a noticeable feature in Vaṅga manuscripts.<sup>23</sup> Most illustrated manuscripts from Magadha feature only geometric and vegetal decorative motifs in these bands.<sup>24</sup> Given Vaṅga manuscripts’ early 12th century dates, this may have been the beginning of a new trend in illustrated manuscript production, which developed throughout the 12th century.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the use of the more expanded pictorial space for painting, another unique



Fig. 3: From left to right, *stūpa* border details on Folios 351b, 266b and 491a, Vaṅga Ms1.

elements seen in Vaṅga manuscripts is the use of a plain single color border to frame each painted panel. Even the decorative bands around the holes and the *stūpa* bands on either end are framed by a single color border, which enhances each painted page's uniform appearance.



Fig. 4: Buddha in preaching gesture, folio 536b, Vaṅga Ms 1. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.121.36.6. Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

The effort to make the manuscript's pictorial program coherent and systematic is clear from pairing of decorative patterns on facing pages in the Vaṅga manuscripts. The choice of similar compositional schemes on facing pages also enhances this impression. Thus, in Vaṅga Ms1, folio 536b features a Buddha displaying the *dharmacakra-pravartana mudrā* (preaching gesture) seated against a plain white body halo inside a flat-roofed, white, raised chamber like structure, which is set within the blue background, and a thick yellow border frames the panel (fig. 4). The facing page, folio 547a, features almost identical compositional and color schemes: Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in *varadā mudrā* is on folio 537a, but the rest of the panel is fairly similar to what we see in folio 536b, including tiny flame-like swirly motifs on the white body halo (fig. 5). Avalokiteśvara is also seated inside a white chamber like structure. While this structure appears a little more elaborate than the Buddha's with an addition of a central finial and a thicker projection of the horizontal roof member decorated with a zigzag pattern, the two panels harmoniously connect with each other.

A systematic placement of images in a manuscript prepared with over five hundred folios, as in Vaṅga Ms1, would have been difficult without a production master or an authority that controls the design and the overall program in place. While putting painted panels on a single side was the norm, a pragmatic modification seems to have been made when the text's allotment demanded it. For example, a single folio now in the Metropolitan Museum of



Fig. 5: Avalokiteśvara, folio 537a, Vaṅga Ms1. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.121.36.4.  
Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

Art bears painted panels on both sides, which is unusual in the corpus of Buddhist illustrated manuscripts from South Asia.<sup>26</sup> However, when we imagine the folios in their original context of the manuscript, it becomes clear that folio 543 is double sided because chapter 30 ends on folio 542b and chapter 31 titled ‘*anugama*’ [lit. approach; ways to approach the *Prajñāpāramitā*] is very short; it ends on folio 544a. Folio 543 is thus paired on both sides: the end of chapter 30 (folio 542b) on the one side, and with the end of chapter 31 (folio 544a) on the other side, as seen in figure 6. The central image on folio 542b is the four-



Fig. 6: From top to bottom: folios 542b-543a, folios 543b-544a, Vaṅga Ms1, Metropolitan Museum of Art (55.121.36.5, 55.121.36.3 (double sided), 55.121.36.9)  
Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).



armed yellow goddess Bhṛkuṭī seated to the left on a chaise-like chair with her feet crossed on a support with a small female attendant intently looking at her (fig. 7).<sup>27</sup> Facing this panel on folio 543a is an image of a rare two-armed form of goddess Māricī standing in *pratyālīḍha* pose (with her right leg bent and left leg stretched).<sup>28</sup> Her three eyes are widely open, and she holds a *vajra* in her raised right hand and a twig of *aśoka* flowers in her left hand displaying the threatening (*tarjanī*) *mudrā* (fig. 8).



Fig. 7: Bhṛkuṭī, folio 542b, Vaṅga Ms 1, Metropolitan Museum of Art 55.121.36.5. Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

These two panels do not seem to mirror each other in their composition in comparison to what we see in many paired painted panels, but there seems to have been a certain rationale in the arrangement. When we flip the folio 543 to the reverse side, the central panel depicts a two-armed form of goddess Tārā, seated and displaying *varadā mudrā* (boon giving gesture) in her right hand and holding a blue lotus (*utpala*) in her left hand (fig. 9). Facing Tārā on folio 544a



Fig. 8: Two-armed Māricī, folio 543a, Vaṅga Ms 1, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.121.36.3(a). Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).



Fig. 9: Tārā, folio 543b, Vaṅga Ms1, Metropolitan Museum of Art 55.121.36.3(b).  
Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

is an eight-armed, three-faced form of the goddess Mārīcī, who stands in the same *pratyālīḍha* pose in front of the raising flame painted like a round orb of a body halo just as the two-armed Mārīcī on the previous spread on folio 543a (fig. 10). Along with a blue sow face on her left side and a twig of *aśoka* flowers in her raised left hand, a boar (most likely a sow) in between her lunging legs clearly conveys Mārīcī's identity. From a modest two-armed form on folio 543a seen in figure 8, flipping the folio produces Mārīcī's more formidable form on folio 544a as seen in figure 10 with multiple arms and heads, wearing a tall crown and a fitted *choli*-like blouse that often appears in sculptural depictions of martial goddesses from early medieval Bengal. The sequence of the goddesses in a way imparts a sense of dynamic progression, which is enhanced by the manuscript's inherent kinetic quality.



Fig. 10: Eight-armed Mārīcī, folio 544a, Vaṅga Ms1, Metropolitan Museum of Art 55.121.36.9. Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

### Style of Painting

One of the most distinctive traits of illustrated manuscripts from Vaṅga is simplicity in the painting's style. As we can see from the goddess Bhṛkuṭī panel in figure 7, for example, the red lines delineating the figures and many other details are light and cursory, while the black lines detailing the physiognomic features, especially the eyes, and in the case of Bhṛkuṭī, the rolling locks of hair drawn on the shoulders, appear almost spontaneous and swift. Colors are bold and flat with no efforts for shading or volumetric illusion, and details like jewelry and decorative patterns on garments are kept minimalistic, often represented with simple, whimsical dots and squiggly lines. Simplicity in style does not compromise the clarity in execution, however. Some of the iconographic attributes may appear rather indistinct as in the case of eight-armed Mārīcī on folio 544a (fig. 10), but the identity of the deity is unmistakable.<sup>29</sup> That this style is cherished and practiced in the region is clear from Vaṅga Ms2 [Varendra Research Museum], prepared about eleven years after the completion of Vaṅga Ms1. This manuscript is much modest in its scale and features only six painted folios, two facing pages placed at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the manuscript (folios 1b-2a, 90b-91a, 190b-191a). On folio 91a of Vaṅga Ms2, we find the same eight-armed Mārīcī drawn and painted in a very similar manner as the one on folio 544a of Vaṅga Ms1. Thin and swift red lines delineate the overall figure and decorative details including the dotted pattern on her lower garment and her ornaments (fig. 11). The color palette also remains simple and bold, and it displays a nearly identical distribution of colors as in the previous example. This painting appears more whimsical and cursory because the lines are bolder, as seen in the three eyes on the goddess's principal yellow face. Some details are simplified and abbreviated. Even the sash between her stretched legs appears more cursorily drawn. Yet abbreviation and simplification did not compromise the painting's iconographic clarity and



Fig. 11: Eight-armed Mārīcī, folio 91a, Vaṅga Ms2, Varendra Research Museum no.689.



visual impact. In fact, this painting of Māricī appears more dynamic and energetic than the earlier image. The sow's switched direction, facing Māricī's left leg instead of the right, contributes to this dynamism, as the eyes of Māricī seem to meet the sow's upward facing gaze.

### Action-packed Pictures

The simplicity goes in tandem with the iconographic clarity seen in the Vaṅga manuscripts while the dynamism created through spontaneous, whimsical lines and bold application of colors contributes to the painting's lively quality. As mentioned in the beginning, Vaṅga Ms3, a profusely illustrated manuscript of the *Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra*, that extols the virtues of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, includes painted panels that illustrate moments from Avalokiteśvara's adventures.<sup>30</sup> The iconographic program and the visual narrative's role in the Vaṅga Ms 3 deserve a more in depth analysis, and here the discussion will be limited to the animated quality of painting. For example, an unusual two-armed form of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara dancing appears on folio 32b (29b) of the Vaṅga Ms3.<sup>31</sup> The panel does not necessarily tell a story, yet the dynamic composition and lively execution of three figures give a sense of witnessing an active scene of interactions (fig. 12). Avalokiteśvara twists his body and extends his right arm across his upper body while his left arm is raised up and bent.<sup>32</sup> He turns his head down to his right and meets Tārā's upward looking gaze. Tārā's legs are bent in dancing posture echoing Avalokiteśvara's. Avalokiteśvara's posture is also echoed in the dwarf-like figure of Hayagrīva, who despite his pot-bellied stature is up and dancing imitating the arm movement of Avalokiteśvara. Hayagrīva's wide eyes look intently at Avalokiteśvara's



Fig. 12: Dancing Avalokiteśvara, Folio 32b (29b), Vaṅga Ms3 (Kv), British Library Or.13940. Image© The British Library Board.



dramatically splayed right fingers and direct our gaze upwards to Avalokiteśvara's extended right arm. Bold and flat application of colors along with swiftly executed lines help create an impression of ecstatic enjoyment that the three figures seem to embody.<sup>33</sup>

Depictions of widely circulated narrative scenes like the moments from the historical Buddha's biography follow the iconographic conventions already established by the early 11th century, but the above outlined characteristics of the style, i.e. how the painting was executed, contribute to animating each scene with lively, cartoon like qualities, even when it portrays a rather static moment. For example, on folio 559b, the panel depicts the scene of Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath following a conventional iconography: the Buddha in the center displays *dharmacakra-pravartana mudrā* with hands held in front of chest, while two monks kneeling in *añjali mudrā* look towards the preaching Buddha (fig. 13). Two deer flanking the wheel in the center right under the Buddha's seat make a clear reference to the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath. The main actions, preaching and listening, are stationary and rather monotonous, yet swift lines and bold coloring energize the scene. The eyes of all the characters, including the deer reverently looking up, are drawn impressionistically, adding certain dynamism to the scene.

### Locating Vaṅga manuscripts

Folio 559 featuring the scene of the first sermon is now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York along with eleven other folios from Vaṅga Ms1. In its original context, this folio would have been paired with folio 560 now in the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery.<sup>34</sup> On folio 560a, the last folio of the manuscript, we see a ritual scene depicting a *pustaka pūjā* (lit. book worship)



Fol. 13: First Sermon at Deer Park, Sarnath, fol.559b, Vaṅga Ms1, Metropolitan Museum of Art 55.121.36.7. Image: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

with a lay male and a monk kneeling on either side, paying homage to an over life size manuscript placed on a bulbous shaped pedestal in the center (fig.14). Such a self-referential scene does not appear in illustrated manuscripts prepared elsewhere. A ritual scene depicting the donor family and a ritual specialist begins to appear in some Nepalese manuscripts from the 13th century onwards, and none of the surviving manuscripts from Magadhan sites feature a *pustaka pūjā* scene on an illustrated page.



Fig. 14: Pustaka pūjā, fol.560a, Vaṅga Ms1, Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, PG.5F.18.

The scene of a ritual refers to the lived world of the donor, in this case, Rāmadeva, as named in the accompanying colophon. It is noteworthy that the painting's cartoon-like style contributes to the impression of earthliness (see fig.14). The painting is executed in the simplest possible terms, using bold colors and swift lines. There is no attempt at shading, and every detail seems abbreviated. Rāmadeva and his companion monk, who is seated on the other side of the book, are holding their hands in *aṅjali mudrā*. Yet, this gesture varies slightly from what we see in the previous scene of First Sermon. Instead of two hands folded together tightly like the monks in the facing page (folio 559b), the artist managed to depict a single finger (pinky) extended outwards in folded hands of both the monk and the layman. It is as if they are about to make a pact. The monk's whimsically drawn wide-open eyes make him look like he would wink at the kneeling man (Rāmadeva) at any moment, while Rāmadeva is intently looking at a simple *maṇḍala* drawn for the ritual in front of him.

The pairing of the First Sermon (fig.13) and the ritual scene (fig.14) effectively collapses the narrative time of the Śākyamuni Buddha and the experienced time of the donor, Rāmadeva. This arrangement reminds us of the common inclusion of the ritual scenes on the bottom registers of contemporary

sculptures. For example, in the stone stele of Tārā from Vajrayogini (Munshiganj district, Bangladesh), we see a manuscript on a bulbous shaped pedestal (fig. 15). Unlike our painting, the book is attended by a ritual specialist, a *vajrācārya* holding a *vajra* and a *ghaṇṭā* (fig. 16). Due to the overall composition, the ritual scene remains in the periphery of the stele. If the ritual scene in the stone stele places the donor (named Saṅgheśugupta in the inscription) in the world of the divine (Tārā), collapsing of the time in a manuscript moves in the opposite direction to the world of the human, not only due to the compositional balance between the painted panels but also thanks to the simple and animated pictorial language.

The painting's simplicity conveys a sense of rootedness in the lived world. That this scene of ritual appears in a manuscript prepared in Southern Bengal at the turn of the 12th century becomes even more meaningful when we locate this manuscript in the world of artistic production of the time. As scholars have noted, the corpus of surviving sculptures from the ancient regions of Vaṅga and Samatāṭa (today's southern and eastern Bengal) signal a strong sense of a regional style from the 11th century onwards.<sup>35</sup> It is in this context that the Vaṅga manuscripts were prepared using a plain visual language akin to a vernacular, and also written in a script that shares many features with a proto-Bengali script. The provenance of the Vaṅga manuscripts has been speculated as somewhere in the Comilla district (ancient region of Samatāṭa).<sup>36</sup> However, it is possible that they may have been prepared somewhere closer to the heartland of Vaṅga, in the vicinity of the ancient capital of Vikramapura (in today's Munshiganj near Dhaka).

The stone stele of Tārā (figure 15) was found at Sompara, a hamlet in the village of Vajrayogini in today's Munshiganj district of Bangladesh. According to N.K. Bhattachali, this image was found in the vicinity of an old tank, southern side of which bore the fragments of basement walls of an old temple at the time of discovery. Adjacent to this site, a copper plate grant issued by Sāmalavarman



Fig. 15: Tārā (Aṣṭamahābhayā-Tārā/ Candragomī's Tārā), ca. 12th century. Donor: Kāyastha Śrī Saṅgheśugupta. Black stone. Sompara, in the village of Vajrayogini, Munshiganj district. Ht: 120cm. National Museum of Bangladesh, Dhaka.



Fig. 16: A book placed on a pedestal with offerings and a Vajracarya, detail of fig. 15.

was found, and it records a religious gift to the Prajñāpāramitā (*śrīprajñāpāramitābhaṭṭārikā*). Sāmalavarman is believed to have been Harivarman's brother, and when taken together with the depiction of a manuscript as a central ritual object on the Tārā stele, it is not difficult to imagine illustrated manuscripts discussed here being produced in nearby sites. This is a speculative suggestion, and it is possible that we may find an even closer match in terms of locality for production of illustrated *Prajñāpāramitā*

manuscripts somewhere in Samatāṭa (the present day Comilla district in Bangladesh). However, evidence at hand seems compelling to locate objects bearing regnal years of Varman kings in the vicinity of its capital, Vikramapura, given the geographic distribution of the epigraphic evidence relating to the Varmans.<sup>37</sup>

The Varman regnal years in Vaṅga manuscripts are appreciated for their value in establishing the limits of the ruling period of the Varman kings and for attributing Southern Bengal as their production site. If the Varmans indeed came from somewhere in Kalinga (in today's Odisha, India) as suggested by A.M. Chowdhury almost half a century ago, their movement may help us direct our attention to recognizing illustrated Buddhist manuscripts from Odisha that thus far remain elusive in our understanding, despite abundant sculptural evidence suggesting prevalent use of manuscripts as cultic objects in rituals and the celebrated production of illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts in the later centuries of the second millennium. In other words, Vaṅga manuscripts may hold a key to understand what illustrated Buddhist manuscripts prepared in Odisha may have looked like, and understanding their unique pictorial style and design strategies as attempted here is an important first step for this future task.

### **Illustrated manuscripts of Bengal outside Vaṅga: Brief observations**

As stated at the beginning of this essay, illustrated manuscripts prepared in the areas of Bengal outside Vaṅga are difficult to identify with certainty. Manuscripts identified as potentially prepared in northern Bengal in previous scholarship



share one distinct formal feature: an architectural motif is consistently used to frame the deities and the narrative scenes of the Buddha's biography.<sup>38</sup> Most known dated examples bearing this feature are dated to the latter half of the 12th century.<sup>39</sup> The earliest dated example that showcases this feature is the Benkaim Pañcarakṣā manuscript (39th year of Rāmapāla, c. 1116 CE), which postdates Vaṅga Ms 1 (8th year of Harivarman, c.1100 CE). As seen in figure 17, the architectural motif behind the eight-armed goddess Mahāpratisarā on folio 86b of the Benkaim ms shows a three-tiered pyramidal roof with deep recesses in between the horizontal tiers, topped by an *āmalaka*, and a trefoil arch shaped opening, which S.K. Saraswati categorizes as '*bhadra* (tiered) type.' It may represent a specific type of temple architecture once prevalent in Bengal, but very little survives in terms of super structures of temple architecture. Here, comparison with surviving sculptural examples provides a useful insight regarding the geographic spread of this particular motif, which suggests an interesting connection back to the art of Vaṅga.

As noted in the chapter on Brahmanical and Buddhist sculpture of Bengal, many examples of architectural sculpture depicting deities inside a *bhadra* type shrine structure hail from the Vaṅga region, and some examples are found in the ancient region of Rāḍha (western Bengal, for example, in Hooghly, Burdwan, Bankura and Purulia districts), and northern Odisha.<sup>40</sup> While none of these examples are securely dated, most are dated to the late 11th or 12th century based on stylistic analysis.<sup>41</sup> Most sculptural examples hail from somewhere in Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh) with a potential



Fig. 17: Mahāpratisarā, folio 86b, *Pañcarakṣā* ms, 39th year of Rāmapāla, c. 1116 CE, Varendra (northern Bengal?), Catherine Glynn Benkaim collection.

genesis in the Vaṅga region. They feature particular architectural details similar to those seen in contemporary manuscripts.<sup>42</sup> For example, a ten-armed image of the goddess Durgā found in Dulmi in today's Purulia district in West Bengal is represented within a prominent shrine structure, and this architectural frame is quite similar to the one depicted in a rare 12th century manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*, now in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi.



Fig. 18: Four-armed Lokanātha, fol.67a, Kv Ms, c. 2nd half of the 12th century, Bengal(?), Varendra Research Museum No.852.

In the Varendra Kv manuscript, there are six painted folios (1b-2a, 28b-29a, 66b-67a), and each painted panel depicts a deity enclosed in a shrine space, the formal features of which succinctly delineate the *bhadra* type.<sup>43</sup> As seen in figure 18, a four-armed form of Avalokiteśvara stands inside a *bhadra*-type structure with three horizontal tiers and an *āmalaka* finial (faintly visible due to paint loss). The similarity between the painted version and the sculpture goes beyond their shared use of a *bhadra*-type framing device. The decorative patterns used on the surface of the shrine structure backdrops are also nearly identical, featuring flower and foliage patterns combined with certain geographic patterns like zigzag and diamond patterns and a beaded band pattern (fig. 19). In fact, the shape of the opening is a round arch with slightly raised apex in both sculpture and painting. Except for the replacement of *kīrtimukha* with a *cakra* or lotus like roundel in the painting, the two are nearly identical in form.

The Varendra Kv manuscript exemplifies a typical problem in identifying a provenance of a relatively late painted Buddhist manuscript from Bengal. The colophon on folio 67b of the Varendra Kv Ms tells us that the manuscript was prepared for a lay female donor Sahoka, a daughter-in-law of Naiśupadri, who is identified as a resident of Jāpura village (*pāṭaka*).<sup>44</sup> The



Fig. 19: Details of decorative patterns on architectural frames on Durgā (Mahiṣāsura-mardini) stele and on painted folios of the *Kv* manuscript. Durgā, Stone stele, Dulmi, Purulia, West Bengal, c. early 12th century, Indian Museum, Kolkata. *Kv* manuscript, c. second half of the 12th century, Bengal (?), Varendra Research Museum No.852.

location of Jāpura is unclear, and the manuscript is undated. The painting's style (harder lines, limited palette of black, yellow, vermillion and white, and ornateness) and the use of an ornamental script (*kuṭila*) with particularly pronounced hooks suggest this manuscript may be closely related to a manuscript in the Sam Fogg collection, bearing the date of Govindapāla's elapsed 32nd regnal year (fig. 20).<sup>45</sup>

The illustrated manuscripts bearing Govindapāla's "elapsed" or "passed" regnal years present a serious challenge because none of them can be securely located despite the presence of toponyms identifying the places of residence of



Fig. 20: Vajratārā with donors, fol.216b, center panel, AsP Ms, Govindapāla's 30th year, c. 1195CE. Photo courtesy of Sam Fogg, London.



their donors and even their scribes.<sup>46</sup> Understanding where and why some Buddhists of the late 12th century used the regnal years of Govindapāla remains an important future task. These dated late 12th century manuscripts were prepared for lay donors, both male and female, and in provincial locations outside monastic centers. They offer a glimpse of what the visual culture of the people at a more local level may have been like at a moment when Bengal faced tremendous pressure from impending changes in political order.

### Epilogue

It is rare to find a donor/lay devotee of the manuscript represented inside the pages of an illustrated manuscript as in Vaṅga Ms 1 (see fig. 14). On folio 216b of the Sam Fogg AsP manuscript, we see a family of donors painted, not in a painted panel, as in Vaṅga Ms1, but outside the frame of the central panel depicting eight-armed Vajratārā seated inside a shrine (see fig. 20). Five human figures portrayed against a block of red background most likely represent the family members of the donor, identified in the accompanying colophon on folio 217b as Maitaka, son of Cchinna who was a resident of Siaucaya village, and they are paying homage to the goddess, Vajratārā. The figures are drawn in swift and simple lines, and painted with a thin wash and minimal color variations: the two male figures on Vajratārā's right are in green and the three female figures on her left are in yellow (fig. 21). Their placement outside a regulated painted panel embraces a new possibility to maximize a pictorial space available within a manuscript page, and this unique intervention portrays the human devotees in utmost proximity to the goddess, Vajratārā. In comparison to the sculptural depiction of the donors in stone steles as seen in the image of Tārā from Vajrayoginī (see fig. 15) where the human scale is rendered minute in the divine realm, the relative scale of human figures is about one third to the size of the goddess in the painting (see fig. 20). The architectural frame surrounding the goddess, the relative scale of human figures and the use of red backdrop create an impression of a lived world where the devotees are seated inside a grand shrine with Vajratārā in the center.

Recognizing the capacity to represent a glimpse of the lived reality of the period seen in this late 12th century manuscript from Bengal allows us to draw an interesting connection between illustrated manuscripts from Bengal and the celebrated painting tradition of western Himalayan kingdoms of Guge-Purang/Ngari regions. As noted in previous scholarship, famed murals of Buddhist monasteries at Tabo (c. 11th century, completed around c. 1046 CE) and Alchi (completed around 1300 CE) showcase a clear sense of historicity and a strong interest in representing the laity, both royal and otherwise, in pictorial records.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, a folio from a paper manuscript of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from the Tholing monastery (Western



Tibet) now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.81.90.6) features a remarkably similar composition to the portrayal of the donor family in the Sam Fogg manuscript.<sup>48</sup> In the center of the folio is a painted section with a six-armed goddess seated on a lotus seat and hovering over a ritual scene underneath her (fig. 22). This ritual scene features a monk and a lay patron on the right side of the goddess and two male devotees with large-brimmed hats placed next to them on the other side. A detailed rendition of ritual offerings appears in between the two groups.



Fig. 21: Donor family paying homage to the goddess, detail of fig. 20.

The styles in the two painted pages are quite different: two distinct sets of pictorial vocabularies are used to depict the goddesses and the lay donors. The image of Vajratārā is seated inside a shrine structure, and the proportion of her swaying torso and the rendering of dramatically active multiple arms convey a sense of fluidity and volume akin to the stylistic features seen in Pāla period stone sculptures. To the contrary, the six-armed goddess Prajñāpāramitā in the Tholing manuscript page is slender and her torso is elongated and her multiple arms are



Fig. 22: A ritual scene with devotees and a monk in front of a goddess (Prajñāpāramitā), a folio from a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript, ink, opaque water color, and gold on paper.

Illustration:  $4 \frac{7}{8} \times 10 \frac{3}{4}$  in. (27.3 × 12.4 cm); Folio:  $7 \frac{1}{2} \times 26 \frac{1}{8}$  in. (19. × 66.3 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.81.90.6. Image: [www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org).

depicted as stiff additions behind her elbows and do not convey a sense of dynamism apparent in the Bengali example. Differences are also noticeable in the treatment of clothing and ornaments: Tholing Prajñāpāramitā is depicted with a tight fitting *choli* and a checkered patterned lower garment,<sup>49</sup> whereas Vajratārā is shown with a diaphanous scarf wrapping across her chest and the rest of her upper body is left bare. How physiognomic features are portrayed differs considerably as well. All of these formal traits point to two divergent traditions of artistic practices. It is remarkable, then, that the idea of representing the lay donors underneath the goddess against a red backdrop in the center of the folio is shared in the two examples despite their geographic and temporal disparity and seemingly unrelated artistic genealogies.

While it is impossible to know how this idea may have traveled between these two regions, it is worth remembering that illustrated manuscripts are portable objects that can serve as material vehicles for transmission of knowledge, both textual and visual. The distance between their artistic languages noticed here suggests copying through a proxy, be it an object (as in an illustrated manuscript) or a human agent (as in through oral retelling/report), rather than traveling artisans. If later Tibetan hagiographic records about a famed Bengali Buddhist master, Atiśa (Dīpñkara Śrījñāna, c. 982-1054 CE), hold certain historical veracity, they point to frequent trans-regional travels between Buddhist communities of medieval Bengal and those in the Western Himalayas during the 11th century. The shared idea seen in the two manuscripts may have been a direct result of one such travel.<sup>50</sup> The cultural and artistic connections between Bengal and its Himalayan neighbors through Buddhist activities have been repeatedly noted in previous scholarship.<sup>51</sup> Illustrated manuscripts from Bengal can provide a new body of evidence to substantiate these historical connections. They can tell many stories when we appreciate their artistic and historical value beyond the confines of an individual painted page.

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#### Notes and References

- 1 The scholarship on Ajanta's murals and the identification of narrative contents is extensive. For example, see Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art : Visual Narratives of India*, Visual narratives of India, New Delhi, 1997; Dieter Schlingloff, *Erzählende Wandmalereien = Narrative Wall-paintings*, Wiesbaden, 2000; Dieter Schlingloff and Monika Zin, *Guide to the Ajanta paintings*, New Delhi, 1999.
- 2 Richard Burton, 'Painting with Intent: History and Variety in an Indian Painting Tradition', in Anna L. Dallapiccola (ed.), *Indian Painting: The Lesser Known Traditions*, New Delhi, 2011; Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'Picture Showmen', *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 2, 1929.

- 3 Richard Burton, 'Painting with Intent'; On the Bengali paṭ painting tradition's capacity to adapt, see Kavita Singh, 'What's new in Paṭa Paintings?' in *Indian Painting: The Lesser Known Traditions*, 2011.
- 4 Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 1997.
- 5 See the discussion in Chapter 1, Jinah Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book-cult in South Asia*, Berkeley, 2013.
- 6 See further discussion in Jinah Kim, 'Painted Palm-Leaf Manuscripts and the Art of the Book in Medieval South Asia', *Archives of Asian Art*, 65, no. ½, 2015.
- 7 Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, 2013.
- 8 For the detailed analysis of this manuscript's iconographic program, see J.P. Losty, 'An Early Indian Manuscript of the Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra,' in Debala Mitra and Gouriswar Bhattacharya ed. *Studies in Art and Archaeology of Bihar and Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.
- 9 I thank Mr. Abdul-Muyeed Chowdhury for providing valuable information on this excavation. I also thank Dr. Sufi Mostafizur Rahman for sharing his insights on his findings with me.
- 10 Emulating this script resurfaces in the later centuries (post sixteenth century) in Nepal, which Bendall describes as an archaistic revival. Cecil Bendall, 'Palaeographical Introduction,' *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge, with Introductory Notices and Illustrations of the Palaeography and Chronology of Nepal and Bengal*, Cambridge, 1883.
- 11 I am preparing a separate study on the issues surrounding *lipi* (scripts) and manuscript production.
- 12 Bendall suggested this in his exposition on the palaeographic developments published in the catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library. Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Buddhist Sanskrit*, 1883. Also see, Eva Allinger, 'The Epsilon 1 Manuscript in the Wellcome Library, London,' *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Su'dasiens* LIV, 2012.
- 13 Losty suggests that a scribe who was an Indian monk in Nepal may have used a Nepalese script to write the manuscript now in the British Library (Or. 14268). J.P. Losty, 'Bengal, Bihar, Nepal? Problems of Provenance in 12th Century Illuminated Manuscripts, Part 2,' *Oriental Art* 35, no. 3, 1989: 147-48. Another interpretive leap is taken in Eva Allinger's recent study where she argues a manuscript (Wellcome Library Epsilon 1) must have been recopied in Nepal along with the original colophon of the Pāla regnal year. Allinger, 'The Epsilon 1 Manuscript in the Wellcome Library, London.'
- 14 To point out just one quality in which the lettering in this particular group of Pāla manuscripts differs from the *Newari bhujimmola* examples, if we look at the letter "ta", it is consistently distinct (close to proto-Bengali "ta" rather than the "ta" in *bhujimmola*), as already noted by the authors who insist on Nepalese provenance for these manuscripts.
- 15 Claudine Bautze-Picron, 'Buddhist Painting during the Reign of Harivarmadeva (end of the 11th c.) in Southeast Bangladesh', *Journal of Bengal Art* 4, 1999; Claudine Bautze-picron, 'Three More Folios from the Harivarmadeva Manuscript', in Shahnaj Husne Jahan (ed.), *Abhijñān: Studies in South Asian Archaeology and Art History of Artifacts, Felicitating A.K.M. Zakariah*, Oxford, 2009.
- 16 B. Bhattacharya, 'Twenty Two Buddhist Miniatures from Bengal (11th century A.D.)', *Bulletin of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery* Vol. 1, 1944.

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- 17 Sachindra Nath Siddhanta, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Varendra Research Museum Library*, Vol. 1, Rajshahi 1979: ix.
- 18 Bautze-Picron, 'Buddhist Painting during the reign of Harivarmadeva'.
- 19 *Ibid.*; Losty, "An early Indian manuscript of the Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra", 1989.
- 20 See the information in Jinah Kim, 'Local Visions, Transcendental Practices: Iconographic Innovations of Indian Esoteric Buddhism', *History of Religions* 54, no. 1, 2014.
- 21 These *stūpas* are not identical. In addition to color variations, such as white, yellow, and blue, we can notice subtle variations in the shapes of the *stūpas*. More interestingly, they are consistently represented with a staff and flying streamers as if depicting "living" *stūpas* that were active sites of devotional activities.
- 22 The possibility of their representing active sites of pilgrimage is also noted in Bautze-Picron's study. Bautze-Picron, 'Buddhist Painting during the reign of Harivarmadeva'.
- 23 The most expansive use of pictorial space on a single page is seen in Vaṅga Ms3.
- 24 This is also true in a mid-twelfth century manuscript from Vikramaśīla now in the British Library (Or.6902). See Kim, 'Painted Palm-Leaf Manuscripts', 2015."
- 25 This ultimately culminates in utilizing every narrow band for illustrating the manuscript, by inserting various figures in these narrow rectangular spaces to complete a *maṇḍala* scheme or to tell a narrative. Examples for the *maṇḍala* scheme are seen in late Buddhist manuscripts like the *AsP* manuscript in the Asiatic Society Mumbai, BI-210 (Kim 2013, MsD9), and another one in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (Kim 2013, D10). For the visual narrative of *Viśvantara* (Vessantara) *jātaka* appearing in this marginal space of an *AsP* manuscript, see Jinah Kim, 'Illustrating the Perfection of Wisdom: The Use of the Vessantara Jātaka in a Manuscript of the Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra', in Gerd Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji, (ed.) *Prajñadhara: Essays on Asian Art, History, Epigraphy and Culture*, New Delhi, 2009.
- 26 All surviving folios of Vaṅga Ms3 are double-sided painted folios, but this is an idiosyncratic example.
- 27 This Bhṛkuṭī image is unique in iconographic articulation. She is shown displaying the preaching gesture in the principal hands, and holds a rosary (*mālā*) and a trident on raised right and left hands respectively. Along with her third eye, a tiny *stūpa* in front of her matted lock of hair is also clearly delineated.
- 28 Claudine Bautze-picron, 'Between Śākyamuni and Vairocana: Mārīcī, Goddess of Light and Victory', *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* (2001); Jinah Kim, 'Emergence of a Buddhist Warrior Goddess and the Historical Development of Tantric Buddhism', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* New Series 28-29 (2013); Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, Princeton, 2006.
- 29 The iconographic attributes are depicted in Mārīcī's hands but today they look almost invisible because they were drawn rather cursorily with very thin yellow ink, much of which is lost.
- 30 On the *Kāraṇḍavyūha's purāṇa* like character, see the discussion in Alexander Studholme, *The Origins of O? Ma?ipadme Hu?: A Study of Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, New York, 2002. For the identification of adventure stories depicted in Vaṅga Ms 3, see Losty, "An Early Indian Manuscript", 1989.
- 31 Losty, 'An Early Indian Manuscript', 1989.
- 32 This particular arrangement of arms is seen in the images of Nāṭeśa or Dancing Śiva from Southern Bengal. The principal difference would be that Dancing Śiva images feature multiple arms. On the connection with Nāṭeśa of Southern Bengal, see Bautze-Picron, 'Buddhist Painting during the reign of Harivarmadeva'.



- 33 In this regard, peacock feathers above Avalokiteśvara's head is of special interest given the importance of peacock feathers in later Kṛṣṇa iconography. Kṛṣṇa dallying with Gopis become a frequent motif in later Hindu temples in Bengal as seen on the walls of terracotta temples of Bishnupur. Jayadeva, the celebrated author of the *Gita Govinda* in which this image of Kṛṣṇa dancing with Gopis is articulated, is supposed to have been active in the Sena court about three generations after the completion of Vaṅga Ms3. This particular iconography of two-armed Avalokiteśvara seems to suggest that the idea of *rasa* expressed through dancing Kṛṣṇa (which also relates to the expression of *bhakti* in Chaitanya's Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism) was known in Vaṅga by the end of the 11th century.
- 34 The folios kept in the Baroda collection are consistently missing the yellow hue and appear somewhat different from the folios surviving outside the sub-continent. There is still a chance that they may belong to two different manuscripts, but as Claudine Bautze-Picron points out based on Karren Wisenbom's study, there is a strong possibility that they may indeed belong a single manuscript, identified here as Vaṅga Ms1. Jinah Kim, *Receptacle of the Sacred*, 2015. Even if they belong to two separate manuscripts, it is most likely that they were prepared by the same group of manuscript makers.
- 35 Susan L. Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena School of Sculpture*, Studies in South Asian Culture, Leiden, 1984; Eun-su Lee, 'On Defining Buddhist Art in Bengal: the Dhaka Region', PhD Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009.
- 36 Bautze-Picron, 'Buddhist Painting during the reign of Harivarmadeva'; Bautze-picron, 'Three more folios from the Harivarmadeva Manuscript'.
- 37 A.M. Chowdhury, *Dynastic History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1967.
- 38 See for example, J.P. Losty, 'Bengal, Bihar, Nepal? Problems of Provenance' ; Claudine Bautze-Picron, 'The Elaboration of a Style: Eastern Indian motifs and Forms in Early Tibetan (?) and Burmese Painting', in Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger (ed.), *The Inner Asian International Style 12th-14th Centuries*, Vienna, 1998; Eva Allinger, 'A Pāla-period Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Manuscript Distributed Between Five Collections', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens / Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies* 51(2007).
- 39 The manuscripts dated with the regnal years of Govindapāla provide good examples. Govindapāla's 14th *gata-rājya samvat* is equated with V.S. 1232 in a Gaya inscription. D.C. Sircar, 'Three Pāla inscriptions', *Epigraphia Indica* 35(1963-64).
- 40 As noted in the chapter on sculpture, some examples survive from the Varendra region (northern Bengal).
- 41 Susan L. Huntington, *The "Pāla-Sena" School of Sculpture*, Studies in South Asian Culture, Leiden: 1984; Eun-su Lee, 'On Defining Buddhist Art in Bengal' Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Texas, 2009. Eun su Lee suggests that the use of the architectural framing device may relate to the wide spread use of the same in miniature versions in the peripheral areas of steles, but as the example she gives, figure 92 in her study, demonstrates, the framing device used in miniature depictions is rarely the "*bhadra*" type
- 42 John C. Huntington notes the difference between the "Pāla convention" and the "Nepali convention" in the treatment of the horizontal architectural member. See Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India ( 8th-12th Centuries) and Its International Legacy* Dayton, Ohio, 1990: 331. As seen in Huntington's drawing in figure 57, the "Pāla convention" features a straight bar with an additional shield-like feature on top, and this is what we see in the manuscript and the sculpture.
- 43 I am preparing a separate study that discusses the overall iconographic program of the manuscript.

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- 44 It reads:  
*deyadharmo 'yaṃ pravaramahāhānayāyinyā-jāpurapāṭakāvasitā naiśūpadri-vadhu/-sāhokāyā yadatra puṇyaṃ tadbhavatvācāryāyādhyāyamātāpitṛpūrvaṅgamaṃ kṛtvā śakalasatvarāṣeranuttarajñānaphala/vaptaya iti||'*
- 45 The Sam Fogg manuscript may have been prepared by the same people as the British Library AsP Manuscript Or.14282; J.P. Losty, 'The Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) Eastern India, Kodondamaṇḍala', in *The Art of Enlightenment: Buddhist Manuscripts from the Himalayas, India, China, Japan and Southeast Asia: An Exhibition*, London, 2008; Jinah Kim, 'Painted Palm-Leaf Manuscripts', 2015, [www.samfogg.com/exhpdf.php?id=16](http://www.samfogg.com/exhpdf.php?id=16).
- 46 There are at least eight illustrated manuscripts bearing Govindapāla's regnal years: 1) Govindapāla's 4th regnal year, Hodgson Ms 1, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 2) Gomindrapāla's 4th regnal year, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, Varanasi, 3) Govindapāla's 16th year, National Archives of Nepal, Acc. No. 5.83, 4) Govindapāla's (*ātita-samvat*) 18th year G.9989A, Asiatic Society Kolkata, 5) Govindapāla's (*hatarājye samvasa*) 22nd year, Indian Museum AT/66/29/D, 6) Govindapāla's (*gatarājye samvat*) 30th year, Sam Fogg collection, London, 7) Govindapāla's (*ātitarājye samvat*) 32nd year, and 8) \*Govindapāla's 32nd year, Musée Guimet MA 5161 (Fournier collection). Only the first three seem to have been prepared while Govindapāla ruled in certain capacity.
- 47 For example, see the discussion in Eva Allinger and Christiane Kalantari with an appendix by Gudrun Melzer, 'Art, Mobility and Identity in the Western Himalayas: Notes on Some Rediscovered Manuscripts in Western Tibet and Nepal and Their Artistic Context', <http://asianart.com/articles/allinger2/index.html> accessed June 20 2016.
- 48 Christian Luczanits, 'From Kashmir to Western Tibet: Many Faces of a Regional Style', in Rob Linrothe (ed.), *Collecting Paradise: Buddhist Art of Kashmir and its Legacies*, New York, 2014: 121-124.
- 49 Checkered patterns are remarkably common for lower garments in pictorial depictions of figures in Western Himalayan sites, but not seen in the art of Bihar and Bengal. See, for example, the textile patterns seen in Alchi's Murals in. Roger Goepper, *Alchi : Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary: the Sumtsek*, New York, 1996. I thank Max Meehan for this astute observation.
- 50 We can trace some of the actual travel routes that are suggested by these objects, and the trans-Himalayan trade routes and pilgrimage routes must have been actively traversed during the period of *phyi-dar* (second or later transmission of Buddhism to Tibet, beginning in the late 10th century). I thank Rob Linrothe for his insights on the possible travel paths between the Western Himalayas and Bengal. Historical connections between the Tibetan plateau and Bengal, especially Vaṅga (Southern Bengal), can be, and should be, documented and explained more thoroughly as suggested by Bautze-Picron more than two decades ago. Claudine Bautze-Picron, 'Crying Leaves: Some Remarks on 'The Art of Pala India (8th-12th Centuries) and Its International Legacy'', *East and West* 43, no. 1 (1993).
- 51 See, for example, John Huntington and Dina Bangdel, 'A Case Study in Religious Continuity: the Nepal-Bengal Connection', *Orientalism* 32, no. 7 (2001); John Huntington, 'Early Tibetan Painting and the Bengal Connection', *Orientalism* 34, no. 8 (2003); Steven M. Kossak, 'The Development of Style in Early Central Tibetan painting', in Steven M. Kossak and Jane Casey Singer (eds.) *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings From Central Tibet*, New York, 1998.