

# Three More Folios from the Harivarmadeva Manuscript Dated Regnal Year 8

Claudine Bautze-Picron

Three folios belonging to the 'Baroda manuscript' of Harivarmadeva surfaced recently in a public sale of objects from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in New York where they had been acquired in 1938 from the gallery of Nasli M. Heeramanek;<sup>1</sup> they add thus to the 33 folios preserved in the Baroda Museum and in a private European collection which we had the opportunity to study in an earlier paper (Bautze-Picron 1999). Moreover, one of these three folios includes two illuminations, one on each side, whereas all other known folios include only one painting.

Let us shortly remind that these illustrated folios were once part of a very long manuscript, having 587 folios, of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā; its last folio, preserved in the Baroda State Museum, mentions that the manuscript was offered by a certain Rāmadeva, a follower of the excellent Mahāyāna, during the regnal year eight of Harivarman. A second manuscript from the same reign, which is dated in the year nineteen, is preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi.<sup>2</sup> Although the definitive dates of Harivarman's reign remain unknown, it is assumed that he ruled towards the end of the eleventh century or/and the beginning of the twelfth, thus one can suggest this date for the two manuscripts (Bautze-Picron 1999: 188).

All folios known so far had only one single illustration integrated in the central part; however, one of the three new folios has an illumination on either side (Figs. 1 & 2). The composition of all folios follows the same pattern (Fig. 7): it is divided in three fields of text that are bordered or separated by narrow rectangular panels. The two central ones are pierced for the rope binding the manuscript; they are adorned with motifs probably borrowed from fabrics and are painted in a dominant colour, red or dark blue. The margins at the extremities contain the depiction of a *stūpa* (Figs. 5 & 6).

These four margins or panels are all of the same size, they are all framed by the same yellow border, and quite evidently, they have been coloured in a much elaborated thought-off composition: the central fields

share the same basic colour, which contrasts sharply the colour of the margins. Basically, only two colours have been used, red and blue, alternating as background for the margins or the rope fields; moreover, when the background of the margins is red, then the background of the rope fields is blue, vice-versa. A yellow frame borders all fields. Similarly, only white and yellow colours have been used for the depiction of the *stūpas*, white on red and yellow on blue.

These three basic colours, red, blue and yellow, are also those used in the central field bearing the representation of the Buddha, a Bodhisattva, a Tārā, or a worship scene. The figure is painted in a pale colour, clearly profiled on a white (or red) aura which is drawn on the plain background – white on red background usually (Figs. 2-4), more rarely red on dark blue (Fig. 1). Small red strokes indicate the flames on the white background of the aura (or yellow on red aura).

Eventually, like here on Fig. 1, loops and tassels are painted white in the upper part of the field, stressing thus the importance of the character painted below them.



Fig. 1 Six-armed Avalokiteśvara. Courtesy: David Weldon



Fig. 2 Avalokiteśvara making the gesture of generosity with his left hand and holding the *utpala* in the right hand. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York

## IDENTIFICATION

### FIGURE 1

Avalokiteśvara stands, with a slight bending of the body but facing the devotee. He is six-armed, presenting the following display of gestures and attributes (from down to top) in the right hands: *varadamudrā*; holding the *tridaṇḍa* and an attribute similar to a branch (?), and in the left ones: holding the water-pot (*kamaṇḍalu*); holding the stalk of the red lotus or *padma* which is painted at the level of the head above the left shoulder, and probably holding the manuscript (which I suspect from the position of the slightly closed hand).

The Bodhisattva is flanked by a yellow-coloured female attendant, either the Tārā or Bhṛkuṭī, at his right, and the red-skinned Krodha Hayagrīva, at his left. Both attending figures are slightly turned towards the Bodhisattva. The Krodha is shown, wearing his skirt made of a tiger-skin and hair standing on end; these elements as well as his wide-open eyes reflect his awesome nature. Both attendants complement each other in reflecting specific aspects of the Bodhisattva's personality. The female attendant holds apparently an attribute (either the *utpala* or the *tridaṇḍa*) drawn with a few golden strokes near the lower right hand of the Bodhisattva; would she be the Tārā, she would then reflect his endless compassion towards all living creatures whereas the Krodha has for function to

protect the field occupied by the Bodhisattva; if one is a peaceful being, the second one has a terrifying nature. Both appear regularly in the manuscript, attending to the Bodhisattva (Bautze-Picron 1999: figs. 9, 11, & 16).

I would suggest considering this side of the folio to be the obverse, due to its iconography that fits within what can be suspected of the overall program illustrated by the other available folios.

### FIGURE 2

On the back of the representation of Avalokiteśvara, is painted a rather unconventional depiction of a rather enigmatic character. As a matter of fact, it reverses the traditional and 'correct' position and displays the gesture of generosity with the left hand while holding the *utpala* in the right hand. The reasons for such a radical transformation remain obscure; one could speculate about the meaning of such a reverse painting, but a 'mistake' by the artist cannot be ruled out. Moreover, and this also constitutes a feature particular to this illumination, the face is profiled and not seen from the front as it is always the case; this character bears a long skirt, as female deities do – and thus, due to the presence of the *utpala*, one could suggest an identification with the Tārā; however, the breast is not clearly drawn and, besides, the upper part of the body is bare, which is never the case as far as female deities are concerned – and thus, one could likewise suggest to recognize here Mañjuśrī. Also the colour of the carnation, here golden or yellow cannot be considered to be a decisive factor:



Fig. 3 Mañjuśrī attended by two further Bodhisattvas. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York





Fig. 4 Samantabhadra. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York

the artists retained on the whole four colours, i.e., mainly white/pinkish but also golden/yellow (as seen in a depiction of Mañjuśrī, for instance: Bautze-Picron 1999: pl. 13.37), red which is usually reserved to the depiction of Hayagrīva,<sup>3</sup> and, but very rarely, green used in the rendering of the (green) Tārā (Bautze-Picron 1999: pl. 13.11).

FIGURE 3

Mañjuśrī leans, cross-legged, on a throne, displaying the gesture of teaching and holding the *utpala* supporting the manuscript (indicated through a thick horizontal red stroke) and being attended by two further Bodhisattvas. The manuscript includes a second similar illumination, but of Avalokiteśvara (Bautze-Picron 1999: pl. 13.14) which is also present in a manuscript preserved in the British Library (*ibid.*: pl. 13.15; Losty 1989: fig. 51). The throne depicted on these illuminations is very particular: the Bodhisattva is actually depicted as if lying on a bed seen from above and with a bed-head seen from the front and shaped as having four lobes ending into elaborated butts; the bed-head is painted behind the bed and is not organically attached to one of the extremity, as it is in the reality. The Bodhisattva is supported by two red square and circular cushions. Such a throne can also be encountered in the depiction of the Tārā (Losty 1989: fig. 65, e.g.), who presents then also the gesture of teaching: there

is thus apparently a relation between the gesture, the reclining attitude and the use of this elongated seat. Further research will perhaps tell us the reason(s) backing this simultaneity.

The two attending Bodhisattvas listen to the teaching given by Mañjuśrī, with hands displaying the gesture of argumentation (*vitarkamudrā*). The Bodhisattva wears a crown with three superimposed levels of alternating red and blue colours; through its shape, it is similar to metal *tiara* known to us from Nepal where they are worn by priests, or going back in time, to similar crown worn by Vajrasattva or a hierophant in sculpture from the Pāla period (Bautze-Picron 1995: 61-62, figs. 5, 7, 10 & 22). The same ornament appears above Mañjuśrī's head in another folio of the manuscript (Bautze-Picron 1999: 192, pl. 13.37).

FIGURE 4

Samantabhadra is a Bodhisattva who is extremely rarely depicted in India. He sits on the elephant which is his vehicle, displays the gesture of teaching, and holds the *utpala* or blue lotus painted above his left shoulder. He usually forms a pair with Mañjuśrī who sits on the lion: as such, both will be preserved in the esoteric art from Central Asia up to Japan where they are commonly encountered under the names of Fugen and Monju. The concept must have arisen in India but is there rarely illustrated. A second depiction of Samantabhadra paired to Mañjuśrī is known from the book-covers of a manuscript dated in the first part of the twelfth century and preserved in the



Fig. 5 Left margin of folio with Fig. 3. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York

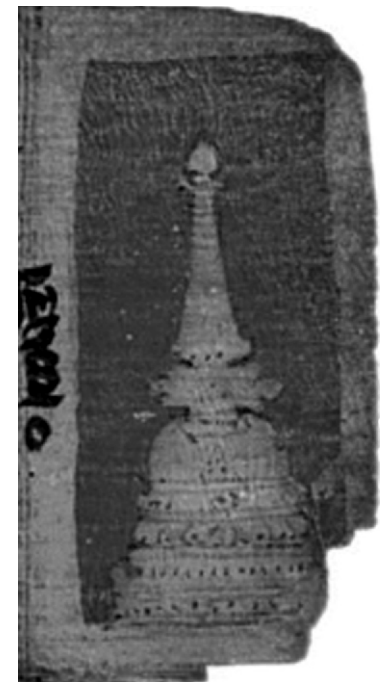


Fig. 6 Left margin of folio with Fig. 4. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York



Fig. 7 The composition of folios of Harivarmadeva. Courtesy: Sotheby's New York

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and a third image of this Bodhisattva is illustrated in a Nepali manuscript dated AD 1015 where it is said to be located in China (Foucher 1900: 120-121, pl. VI.2).<sup>4</sup> From the Boston example, one could conclude that the Harivarmadeva manuscript might also have included a Mañjuśrī teaching and seated on the lion who must have been paired with this Samantabhadra, unless the image represents also such a 'famous' image of the Buddhist world, a topic which has been present in the murals of central Asia and in the manuscripts from Eastern India: this topic constitutes practically a geography of the major Buddhist sites in Asia in putting together images which are worshipped in those sites. The Nepali manuscript mentioned above give the name of the deities who are illustrated as well as the place where their images are being worshipped. This is not the case here, but the diversity of the deities to be depicted could imply that such a program was here illustrated all through the manuscript.

**THE MANUSCRIPTS FROM HARIVARMADEVA'S REIGN**

Two illustrated manuscripts have been so far attributed to the reign of Harivarmadeva (c. AD 1073-1127), one, the 'Baroda manuscript' dated in the year 8 of the reign, and a second one dated in the year 19 which is preserved in the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi, hence the name 'Rajshahi manuscript'. Very little is known about this ruler whose name entered the annals, like those of most Indian kings, in being mentioned in copperplate inscriptions relating the donation of land. Belonging to the dynasty of the Varmans, he ruled in the region of Lalmai-Mainamati, Comilla district in Bangladesh.

The site of Mainamati was since the late Gupta period a major Buddhist centre with numerous monasteries being built on the hill, and it is thus not surprising that illuminated manuscripts were produced in the region. Another illuminated manuscript that can be attributed to this region is preserved in the British Library, London; it reproduces a text eulogizing Avalokiteśvara, the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* and is also richly illustrated (out of 63 folios, 53 bear a painted scene). This manuscript includes also depictions of *stūpas* on the fields preserved for the rope binding; due to the very strong similarities with the two Harivarmadeva manuscripts, in particularly the 'Baroda manuscript', I would suggest the same geographical origin for the manuscript in the British Library, and a slightly later date (Losty 1989: 1; Bautze-Picron 1999: 188).

These three manuscripts form a coherent stylistic group that can be properly differentiated from the stylistic idiom of the ateliers located in Bihar, in particularly at Nalanda, and in East

Bihar and North Bengal. Their style, with a selection of a limited pallet, with the colours applied uniformly on large surfaces, the fine rendering of details such as the hair, the eyes, the characters clearly drawn on the plain background, reminds of the style of the stone sculpture in the region during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. And quite understandably, through their geographic origin, they also share similarities with some of the contemporary murals of Pagan (Burma). Again, although a fairly large number of illuminated manuscripts have been preserved in Tibetan monasteries, most can be attributed to the ateliers of Bihar and probably also north Bengal, whereas only these three illustrated manuscripts can be so far properly identified as a production from the region of Mainamati, Comilla which makes them particularly precious.

**NOTES**

1. Sotheby's 2007, lot 24, pp. 44-45 where they are partly reproduced. I wish to thank Mr. David Weldon and the authorities of Sotheby's New York for the photographs put at my disposal.
2. Six folios are there illustrated, for which see Bautze-Picron 1999, pp. 160 (with further references), 186-7 & 192-3, pls. 13.32-35 & 40-41 ('The Rajshahi manuscript').
3. But see the Raktalokeśvara represented in the manuscript: Bautze-Picron 1999, pl. 13.20 & p. 190. In this illumination, Hayagrīva is painted in a slightly lighter red colour.
4. For the book-covers in The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, dated in Gopāla IV's reign, year 4, see Pal & Meech-Pekarik 1988, fig. 22, e.g.

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