
The Mahanipata

by

Vittorio Roveda

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About the author

My name is Vittorio Roveda and for the first 30 years of my life I led a life which was the opposite of what I do now. I started my career as a geologist managing a successful small business (*Palaeoservices Ltd.*) consulting worldwide for major American companies that were exploring for oil. I had many interests, such as painting and sculpting holding three exhibitions in Paris, one in Chicago and one in Rome. I was an enthusiastic collector of Ferrari models and real cars. The best phase of that middle period of my life was blessed by my three sons with whom I spent a lot of time.



Later I went to teach Art & Design at the Temasek University of Singapore, and it was there that I had a life-threatening motorbike accident. I was given for dead due to my false reputation of a mad driver (when young). In Singapore, I was so relaxed and greatly enjoyed sliding my bike along the nice roads encircling the town.

My wounds were not fully treatable locally so I was forced to return to London, which was still my place of residence at the time. With my leg in heavy plaster, I was locked at home for 94 days. At the end of this period, I decided to apply to SOAS, (London University) to do a PhD on the carved reliefs of the Corner Pavilions of Angkor Wat that I had visited years before.

My professor, Dr. Elizabeth Moore, gladly accepted giving directions. Thus my life changed and I then returned to Cambodia. For a year I “commuted” between Siem Reap and London but eventually, I settled in a guesthouse there and later rented an apartment with a garden which belonged to the family of my local guide. I bought a Honda scooter to facilitate our daily trips to various sites, while for temples further away from Siem Reap we accepted the invitation of large organizations such as UNESCO and the German restoration organization GAPCO using pick-up trucks and jeeps. It was a marvellous discovery of Khmer civilization for me. I took measurements where possible, sketches of the ruins and an infinite number of HD photographs.

My approach to Buddhism was a happy one; at Angkor Wat monks took me for the usual western professor and asked me lots of questions about the temple. In return, I conversed with them about their life and feelings for their ancient heritage. But the most powerful encounter with Buddhism (Cambodian Theravada) happened during an afternoon when reading in the garden I fell enchanted in hearing a monk singing a chapter of the *Vessantara Jataka* (as I learned later); I cannot describe the emotion embedded in the singing; I was moved and had tears in my eyes and goose pimples! This accident inspired me to look at Buddhism as a philosophy and at Buddha's life and previous existences in the *Jatakas* that were brilliantly painted in all the vihara of Monasteries.

My reading of *Jatakas* was based on the old translation by Cowell (Pali to English; reprint of 1982), although there are modern translations which I did not have time to consult and compare in my study. I undertook to study only the Last Ten Jatakas or *Mahanipata* which are the most important of all the *Jatakas*. The object of the study was to see how these stories had been illustrated (sculpted or carved), and to briefly describe the visual narrative of storytelling.

The study of the ten and the visual narratives they generated in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos left me exhausted and aware that it would be impossible to print it all in a nice book without the support of a well-funded organization. Thus the only alternative has been to put it on my internet site.

On the occasion of completing the *Mahanipata*, I re-ordered the 24 individual papers I wrote in the last 5 years, some of which have already been published on my Facebook site *Khmerimagery* by Vittorio Roveda.

They are the opposite of academic papers, but more like free talks on a series of unrelated topics although together they comprise strong visual evidence of Khmer culture.

My vivid interest in Cambodian culture led me to the total restoration of not only murals of the vihara of the Wat Bakong monastery, but also the decayed architecture. Bakong is one of the oldest Khmer temples, the Bakong. It required the input of architects, water drainage, ceramic reconstructions and the expert hands of the French-Thai team of RSF who completed impeccably the restoration all financed by my Swiss friends of the Olcim Cement company from day one to the end of the full restoration. The enterprise was published 2 years later.

The study of the Last Ten Jataka or *Mahanipata* brought me to critically look at the stories narrated. Because they were put together by Buddha's followers in the first or second century after his death, the real world of the Teacher was almost forgotten and written in a way that is closer to myth than teaching.

Curriculum Vitae

LECTURES

1997-98, Assistant lecturer at SOAS, Southeast Asia department, London

1998, May. Lecturer on Khmer and Peranakan art at the Sotheby-SOAS course on Asian Cultures, London.

1998, November. Lecture on “Khmer Civilisation” at the Linnean Society, Piccadilly, at invitation of Asia House, London.

1998, May. Lecturer on Khmer and Peranakan art at the Sotheby-SOAS course on Asian Cultures, London.

1998, Presented the paper “The use of drawings for the making of the reliefs from Angkor Wat”, at the 7th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, in Berlin.

1998, November. Presented a short lecture on a few Khmer temples at a meeting of The Nginn Karet Foundation for Cambodia, in the apartment of the Lord Major in the House of Parliament, London

1999, September. Lecture on “Khmer art and civilisation” at the Society of Asian Art at the Asian Museum of San Francisco.

1999, October, Lecture on “Narrative reliefs of Angkor Wat” at the Linnean Society, Piccadilly, at invitation of Asia House, London.

1999, May, Lecture on “Narrative techniques in Khmer reliefs” at the East Asia Research Society of the University of Leeds.

1999, May. Lecturer on Khmer art at the Christie-SOAS course on Asian Cultures, London.

2000, May. Lecturer on Khmer art at the Christie-SOAS course on Asian Cultures, London.

2000, August. Lecture on “Visual Narrative in Khmer temples”, at members of JAS and Cambodian researchers in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

2000, October. Presented the paper “Khmer narrative reliefs and Art historical chronology”, at the 8th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Sarteano, Italy.

2000, November. Scholar-guide of a group of 15 persons for a trip scheduled to visit the Khmer temples in Cambodia, Thailand and Laos.

2001 – Ideator and Editor of an integrated study of the temple of the Bayon (Cambodia) with the participation of Prof. Claude Jacques, Prof. T.S. Maxwell, Dr. Olivier Cunin, , Dr. Anne-Valeries Schwayer and Joyce Clark. River Booka Bangkok in 2006.

2002-2005 Given 45 short lectures in Cambodia to students, visiting scholars and tourists.

23 June 2005 - Formal lecture entitled “Homage to Madeleine Giteau: Cambodian mural paintings now: at the EFEO headquarters of Siem Reap.

PUBLICATIONS

1988 - *Khmer sculpture: the Art of the Gods*, 'Arch', Vol.1, No.1,

1997 - *Khmer Mythology*, Thames & Hudson and River Books

2000 - *Preah Vihear, a guidebook to the temple murals.*, River Books Guides

2000 - *The use of drawings for the making of the reliefs from Angkor Wat*, in Southeast Asian Archaeology 1998, Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Hull & Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Hull, 2000, 169-175

2000 – Conceptual and visual contribution to **The Temples of Angkor** in the National Geographic magazine, August 2000, 88-91

2002 – **Khmer narrative reliefs and Art historical chronology**, Proceedings of the VIII International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Sarteano, Tuscany, Italy

2002 – *Sacred Angkor, Narrative reliefs of Angkor Wat*, Weatherhill & River Books, June 2002.

2002 – *Khmer Visual Narrative*, UNESCO's magazine 'Museum', Spring issue,

2003 - *Valmiki and the Ramayana in a relief on Banteay Chmar*, 'Udaya', 4, September 2003

2004 - *The archaeology of Khmer images*, 'Aséanie', 13, June 2004 11-46

2017 – *In the shadow of Rama*, River Books, Bangkok.

2015-2019 - *Khmerimagery* on Facebook site *Khmerimagery by Vittorio Roveda*.

2019 – *Mahanipata* and *Preangkorian art* to be available on an Internet site still to be established in 2023 in Thailand

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Introduction

*This work is the result of my endless study as a private researcher working in isolation because of life events¹. My research is irrelevant after the 2015 perfect publication of Appleton and Shaw's **The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha** in 2 volumes with pictures. Rarely a publication has seriously affected my ideas.*

I have respectfully looked at and discussed of ideas of other scholars; my work presents a lot of new pictures with explanations, that I took over 11 years in Cambodia and Thailand and the very few I received from friends. All pictures are extremely important because the murals are destroyed regularly when the old vihara is replaced by a shining new vihara. The monks have no idea that painted elements are not only Buddhist documents but real documents of Cambodian culture of a specific period. The monk's attitude of no-restoration concord with the Buddhist principle of impermanence. Nobody forbids monks to build a new vihara, but everybody must convince them to preserve the murals.

The Jatakas are a small part of the Buddhist sacred book named the *Tripitaka* (the tree Baskets). The first basket is the *Vinayapitaka*, the second the *Suttapitaka* and the third the *Abhidharmapitaka*. The second basket has five parts while the last, the *Khuddaka Nikaya* include five collections. The *Jatakas* from the tenth of these five collections are the most popular of Buddhist literature because made of very amusing moral tales, easy to read by all levels of education. The Jataka is a story of Buddha's previous lives (547) narrated by himself, who had the omniscience to remember the past, a gift only of a Buddha or Bodhisatta.

They were collected into a compendium in Pali named *Jatakatthavannana* in which they were conventionally arranged from the simple to the complex, following also a conventional numerical arrangement. The Last Ten Jatakas were arranged in the section entitled *Mahanipata*, the section dealing in this paper. Both text and commentary of the Jataka stories were handed down, composed in Pali language, at the time of the Council of Patna held in or about the year 250 B.C. Attempts have been made to pair the Last Ten Jatakas with the ten Perfection of Buddhism (see Appleton and Shaw 2015: 3).

The Jatakas are mythically constructed biographies of the Buddha that have played a fundamental role in the structure and dynamics of the Theravada religion from its beginning. They develop a mythology that is systematic in its structure, rich in its content and closely related to Theravada life. The *Last Ten Jatakas* (*Mahanipata*) of the collection (Garland of re-birth) are legends that convey their message better than any before and shaped the Buddhist popular culture of mainland Southeast Asia, although there is no way of knowing which canonical doctrine they convey in comparison with the doctrinal teachings of the *Nikayas* (Jones, 1979). They were constructed over a few words pronounced by the Buddha mixed with many pieces of folklore that "have floated about the world for ages" (Cowell 1995, Vol. I: XXIII) coming from ideas and superstitions of early times of our civilization.

The Jataka are based on two main Buddhist principles: Karma² and rebirth.

In the Karma doctrine, rebirth seems to be synonymous with suffering, and non-rebirth with the cessation of suffering. It appears also that virtuous living influences the number of rebirths (*samsara*), whilst wickedness brings dreadful consequences and punishment in the hells. Karma is the consequence of the choice of our actions and in the Jatakas, it seems that the doctrine of Karma and

¹ My research became irrelevant after the 2015 excellent publication of Naomi Appleton and Sarah Shaw on the Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha, in 2 volumes with pictures. Rarely a publication has confirmed so much my ideas.

I have respectfully looked and commented on ideas of other scholars; my work presents a lot of new pictures with extensive captions.

² Karma or Kamma (from Pali 'action') is the law of consequence from our actions, which is the driving force behind the cycle of reincarnation or rebirth (*Samsara*). The Karma doctrine is the ethical base of the law of Dhamma.

rebirth is reduced to a doctrine of reward and punishment Since the concept of rebirth cannot be proven scientifically or historically, it falls into the category of mythology (Jones 1007: 39).

It is assumed that the Jatakas were composed in Sri Lanka at the end of the third century B.C E., and represented the most sacred Buddhist buildings. They were already popularly known under the technical name of Jatakas.

The word “Jataka” means “connected with a former rebirth” - a birth story. Each of the 547 stories is composed of 4 main parts; 1. The story of the present narrates some events of the Buddha's life which prompted that specific Jataka and its name; 2. The story of the past, the actual story in prose; 3. The story of the past is composed of poetic verses inserted into the prose. Some of these verses make sense only in the context of that Jataka suggesting they may have been introduced over a long time by different hands. Only the canonical verses are words of the Buddha; 4. The connection in which the Buddha identifies the protagonists of the story, as they are in the present.

It is impossible to say when the painting of the *Last Ten* or any *Jataka* started. It is reasonable to assume it started well after carving. Certainly, the very beginning of painting was in the early vihara of monasteries of mainland South-eastern Asia during the spreading of Theravada, at the time when the early vihara started to have solid walls that could be painted (14-16th centuries?). Initially, the main themes were events of Buddha's life, Buddhist legends and Jataka came later. Reading the old book on the *Previous birth of the Buddha (Jatakas)* by Rhys Davids I have learned something quite interesting. The Jataka's stories are a biography of Gotama, stories of his lineage. This lineage is not in the flesh of the ancestors, but of their “**dead-selves**”. The ancestors die in the flesh but their Self is transmitted to the following generation. The self of our ancestors is reincarnated in us (Need to believe in reincarnation).

It is evident that visual narratives of the *Last Ten Jatakas*, appeared centuries after having been made popular by storytellers and travelling monks, making their oral narrative an ideological declaration of the past deeds of bodhisatta, illustrations of the perfections, the *parami* or *paramita*, probably as follows³:

538 - <i>Temiya Jataka (Muga-pakkha)</i>	virtue of renouncing, a pure heart
539 - <i>Mahajanaka (Manimekhala)</i>	virtue of energy and perseverance
540 - <i>Sama (Sovannasam)</i>	filial piety and compassion
541 - <i>Nemi (Nimi; Nemirich)</i>	virtue of resolution
542 - <i>Candakumara (Khandahala)</i>	extreme patience and restraint
543 - <i>Bhuridatta (Puritoat)</i>	respect of ascetic practices
544 - <i>Maha-naradakassapa,</i>	moral duties
545 - <i>Vidhura-pandita (Vidura Pandit)</i>	extreme wisdom
546 - <i>Maha-Ummagga (Mahosadha)</i>	extreme wisdom
547 - <i>Vessantara (Vessandaa)</i>	extreme generosity

The numerical sequence of the Jataka was probably arbitrary arranged according to the text's properties (length, number of poetic insertions) rather than following a narrative sequence of successive rebirths. They do not represent an orderly chronological depiction of the Buddha's path to enlightenment.

³ I use Cowell Sequential order that may not be temporarily correct.

It is not easy, I find, to allocate each of the ten *paramitas* to its respective Jataka among these ten, while still following the Singhalese order. Temi presumably would illustrate the tenth (*upekhd*), and Vessantara the first (ddna). Luce 1065: 265)

It is known that out of the total of 548 Jatakas only 50 were readable. Those of the first large groups were composed of fables (of animals). Jatakas were invented In India Jatakas in the 4th century as confused Buddhist stories to which were added, legends and evolved in time .unfortunately with the addition of apocryphal parts. Further evolution continued until the 19th century. The Paññāsa Jātaka collection was adapted to fit the local culture and traditions of certain South-East Asian countries. The new parts added were mainly apocryphal texts or simply a phrase that may have changed the original meaning. It would be interesting to know if, besides detection of apocryphal (not authentic)c texts or phrases, the investigation of their chiastic structure would help parts, but probably not in the Last Ten, in the early Jatakas, Would be possible to recognise spurious parts through a study of the chiastic structure of a Jataka as done for apocryphal texts.

2. Previous Authors

The original translation from Pali made by Cowell in association with a group of Pali experts in 1895-1907, reprinted 1960, was used by scholars for a century as the main textual reference, being a clear pure translation in the “academic English and not concerned with the social and cultural conditions of the time they had been written in Asian countries. Another popular translation is that of Kawasaki, Ken and Visakha, teachers and founders of the Buddhist Relief Mission. In 2009 they retold the Jataka as a new translation from Pali with the invaluable assistance of the Venerable Nyanatusita, an expert in Pali. It was published in 3 volumes with some drawings by a Shri Lanka artist.

When it comes to illustrations (murals, *Preah Bots*, manuscripts and carvings) no book exists giving a satisfactory structure of art pictures of the Last Ten in continental Southeast Asia.

The work published in 1996 by Elizabeth Wray, Claire Rosenfield and Dorothy Bailey was outstanding for the time, with original photographs, some taken, as i do, from the excellent collection of Muan Boran (Bangkok) monographs published in the 1980’ on Thai temple’s murals, that by now have disappeared.

Fortunately, in 2015 a new outstanding original translation of Pali of the Last Ten Jatakas or “Birth Stories of the Buddha”, written by Naomi Appleton and Sarah Shaw with many illustrations, has become available. It is a new translation of the Last Ten Jatakas in modern English, brilliant, affirming the Jataka’s subtle roots in the religious and cultural world of the Buddha.

Regretfully I was able to get this book only in 2018 which is 7 years after I started, alone, my research on the same Jataka in Continental Southeast Asia.

The Last Ten Jatakas are well known amongst the people of Southeast Asia. A flow of scholars have published a wealth of excellent papers on the religious, sociological, ethnological and ritualistic meanings of the last of these Jataka, the celebrated Vessantara Jataka. In the visual arts, the Vessantara story has produced a great number of manuscripts, murals and cloth (*Preah Bots*), that are in themselves new ‘texts’ embodying the popular vision and imagination of the story.

3. Regional visual narratives of Jatakas in mainland Southeast Asia

Contrary to the current trend of “demythologising” Buddhism, I think that images of the Last Ten Jataka as painted on murals emphasize Buddha’s canonical narratives, and, with it, the importance of images as a religious-social communication tool. Images are easier to read, sharper and more synthetic than texts.

Visual narratives of the Jatakas go back more than two millenniums in India, being carved on temples of the 3rd century BCE (Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati), attesting to the great antiquity of these stories. In SE Asia one of the earliest occurrences is in the carved reliefs of Borobudur (9th century) mixed with Mahayana themes, and in Cambodia in late Angkor temples (end 12-13th CE.) of Prah Khan, Ta Prohm, Bayon, and on a slab from Angkor Wat carved in the 16th century (Roveda & Yem, 2014: 118).

3.1. Burma

Painted Jataka representation appeared in sequential order on the inner wall in temples of Pagan of the second millennium, ranging in time from the 11th to the mid.13th CE.

It seems that the earliest Mon description of the Ten Great Jatakas occurs in the inscription of the Shezayan pagoda, in the glazed terracotta tiles of the middle terrace of the Thagya pagoda Thaton, and the early carving on boundary stones (*buddhasima*) at the Kalyani Thein, Thaton. G.H. Luce called attention to the fact that there were variants in recopying Pali in old Mon and Burmese manuscripts, due to the careless and copying mistakes by scribes with inadequate knowledge of the language (1956: 301); some are unreliable.

Between 1060 and 1169 many Pagan Jataka murals were decorated also with inscriptions (G.H. Luce 1956: 291). The topmost terrace of the temple of Ananda (Pagan) is devoted to the illustrations of the *Mahanipata*. The order of representation of the plaques does not follow the traditional order of the Ten Paramita, or the Ten Perfections possibly illustrated by these Jatakas (H.G. Luce 1956: 294).

Burma (and Laos) were similarly influenced by Siamese art. In northern Burma, there was a conjuncture with the Siamese Kingdoms of Shukokai and Lanna, resulting from wars against Ayutthaya. Siamese people and artists were made prisoners, and caused reciprocal migrations of painters.

After the classic studies of Luce (*Artibus Asiae* No19: 3/4: 291-307, 1956), there has been a phase of silence on Burmese Jataka, apart from some very popular colouring books, most for children. In 2015 Pyiet Phyo Kyaw has printed a summary and a selection of the Jatakas in Old Burma. In their masterly work on the Great Birth Stories of the Buddha, Appleton and Ash in 2015 have made important new translation and illustrated many Jataka. Unknown to us are ancient texts on Burmese Jatakas. I am sorry to say that when I started this study, several years ago, the only knowledge I can find was from modern popular Burmese translation into English by Soe Myint that were finally summarised and compiled by Myat Min Hliang in 2003, published weekly on the magazine “The New Light of Myanmar”.

The Jatyaka’s numerical sequence of The Last Ten of this Burmese edition differs from that of other regions:

538 - *Temiya J.*; 539 - *MahaZenekka J.*; 540 - *Thuwunnathama J.*; 541 - *Naymi J.*; 546 - *Mathothada J.*; 543 - *Buridat J.*; 540 - *Sanda Kumara J.*; 544 - *Narada J.*; 545 - *Vidhura J.* and 547 - *Wethantaya J.*
As in Thailand, the *Mahosadha J.* has been moved from ninth to fifth place.

The comparatively modern richly carved events of Jataka of Golden Palace Monastery of Mandalay have Jataka carved on the low wood balustrade surrounding a Buddha's throne in a room of the Palace. The carved-gilded reliefs illustrate four popular Jataka.

The oldest murals of Burma are to be found in the cave of Laung U Hmawurma. Mural painting flourished in 12th century Pagan. Although they seem to give preference to life's events of Gautama Buddha, (and guardian Bodhisatta), an example of Jatakas are mentioned and illustrated by Bautze-Picron for whom the Last ten Jatakas (Dasajati) were particularly favoured by Pagan artists at the temple of Lokheyk-pan ((Bautze-Picron 3003, Fig.75, 75) and Abe-ya-dana-hypaya temple (Fig.79). The wars that followed for centuries, contributed to the destruction of monuments that may have been decorated with murals. Good illustrations of carved scenes are in the book of Pyiet Phyo Kyaw and more in Appleton & Shaw 2015.

3-2. Thailand.

Thai visual narratives of the Jataka had a tremendous influence on the art in mainland Southeast Asia since the 19th century. In Thailand the Jataka are referred to as *Mahanipata-Jataka*, the stories of the Lord (Bodhisatta), named *Phra Chao Ha Roi tat* (meaning the glories of the bodhisattva in 500 births). Reduced to 457, the Last Ten are often arranged separately as, *Darajati Jataka*, or *Ohra chao sip chat*, meaning the ten births.

The ever-popular Vessantara Jataka is transmitted separately as *Mahachat* (The Great Birth). Details of its recitation and ceremonial use were started by Gerini in 1892, followed by several modern scholars. Thai murals were the benchmark for all Southeast Asia painters.

From about the middle of the second millennium Thailand, was a Buddhist centre and in its northern provinces many new stories were invented, now named *Paññasa Jatakas* which are not part of the canonical Pali tradition, but original and interesting.

Illustrations of Birth stories in Thailand go back several centuries.

The Mons, who was among the first occupant of Siam, were fond of the Jatakas's stories and used them to decorate the base of the Chedi Chula Paton, near Nakon Pathon.

Later, some of the ancient Jataka and oldest versions of the Jataka of a lower number (from No.18 to No.86) were engraved on stone slabs fixed in the inner corridor of Wat Si Chum (Sokhthai, probably 13th- mid-14th CE). The dating and origin are a source of great debate (Skilling 2008).

Besides the graffiti of Wat Si Chum (3-4th ? century CE), no illustrations are found till the 15th century, of which the only surviving example is the single stucco of Last Ten Jataka of Wat Lai, Lopburi (E. Wray., 1996: Fig.5), which may be a later addition, influenced by late Khmer sculpture. It is assumed that no Jataka representations have survived the 16-17th centuries due to the repeated Siamese wars with Burma.

The earliest Thai murals are from Wat Rachapurana crypt⁴ attributed to 1424 CE (Boisselier 1976: 78, Fig.44-45) showing birds and gilded rows of monks, and those of Wat Mahathat in Ayutthaya,

⁴ The mural paintings illuminate and sanctify the very dark space visible to a very restricted number of people.

displaying hieratic rows of Buddha under the Bodhi tree, dated around 1475 despite being fragmentary. Much later, towards 1600, the murals of the Somdet pavilion of Wat Buddhaisawan in Ayutthaya, (Fig 2 and 3), have some signs of narrative stories (Somsak 2008 and Boisselier 1976: 79, Fig.46-49), with events of the *Mahajanaka Jataka* or the sinking of a ship carrying holy relics and the depiction of the veneration, and some other scratches of Jataka images. Outstanding is of a Holy *Buddhapada* (Somsak, 2008: Fig.6).

The delicate narrative murals cover the walls of Wat Chong Nonsi (in Bangkok), painted around 1600 but slightly retouched later. They depict traditional events of the Last Ten Jataka framed in a zigzag layout (*sin tao*) delimiting saw-tooth bands between images giving rhythm to the narratives. The artists possessed a great mastery in drawing minute illustrations of Jataka's main events, of a delicacy and refinement not seen before or after; simple masterpieces (only traces of a light restoration). The large painting of the *Maravijaya* on the eastern wall is outstanding.

Dated around the end of 1600-early 1700 are the murals of Wat Yai Suwannaram, which illustrate static, hieratic rows of kneeling mythic figures (deva, yaks⁵, man-looking garuda and *nagas*,) turned in reverence attitude towards the presiding statue of the Buddha. The same layout of mythic figures continues in the murals of Wat Ko Kèo Suttaram of Phetchburi, generally ascribed to 1734 Boisselier 1997: 86: fig.55). However, here, the base of the triangular space between the figures is filled with scenes that are narrative (short episodes of Buddha's life).

Also belonging to the Middle or Late Ayutthaya Period are the murals of Wat Mai Prachumphon (Ayutthaya) where the sidewall decoration displays rows of hieratic figures; a large *Maravijaya* scene appears on the entire wall opposite the presiding Buddha, but no Jatakas.

From the beginning of 1800, all royal monasteries of Bangkok show a wealth of intense narratives due to improved social and political conditions with the advent of the Chakri kings. Typical examples of this are the murals of the Buddhasaiwam chapel of Bangkok and a long list of Bangkok temples, especially Wat Suwannaram, Wat Dusitaram, Wat Sutat, etc. The temples of Ratchaburi seem to have their narrative style.

These temples are decorated with scenes of the Last Ten Jataka, known as *Thosachat*, that were illustrated to the almost total exclusion of any other theme.

In Thailand the Last Ten Jatakas do not follow the common Pali Text Society numbering established by Cowell in 1895⁶ The Thai order is: by: *Temiya J.*, *Mahajanaka J.*, *Sama J.*, *Nemi J.*, *Mahosadha J.*, *Bhuridatta J.*, *Kandahala J.(Candakumara)*, *Vidhura J.* and *Vessantara Jataka*. In the present paper, the Pali ordering is followed, meaning that the Mahosadha Jataka is penultimate and not the third as some authors do in Thailand.

In the 18th century painters of *Jatakas* in Thailand could develop different narrative "styles" because painting became almost compulsory on the large and small wall surfaces became available due to the fervour of building new viharas at the time of the rule of the Chakra kings. This event generated different workshops and dynamic paintings of murals with the support of the *Sangha* and royalty.

⁵ The *Yak* or *yaksha* are pre-Buddhist mythological figures, absorbed into Buddhist cosmology where they are benevolent *beings*. On murals they are depicted kneeling in veneration, looking idealized and of different status *Yakha* can take many looks. *Naga* can take the semblances of men; others are giant gods (Indra, green; Brahma, white with 6 arms) or *rishis*.

⁶ In 1895 Cowell and assistants translated in English the 457 Jataka, though previously translated into German by Fossboel.

Finally, it has to be noted that Thai artists established several codified positions for the protagonists of the scenes painted on murals deriving from ballet dance. The depiction of ordinary people or “dregs” (*Phap Kae* in Napat Sirisambhand and Alex Gordon (reprint in Chris Baker 2002: 258), considered remnants/excrement of society in Thai social hierarchy, painted as a deliberate choice of the artists to visually fill and balance the layout, rather than instruct and moralize, besides being taken as signs of the social conditions at the time of painting. The amusement of the painters cannot be excluded.

Since theatre and mural painting drew upon the same literary sources, it was essential that the actors figured in actions would be easily recognizable by the viewer on any occasion.

In India treatises on iconography governed the theatre as well as the plastic arts (Boisselier 1975: 53). Mimicry and adornments are identical. Some features in the painting of a prince or an ogre have the same constant attributes as those in theatre. Thai iconography rules require separating the world of gods from that of humans (the distinction between mythical and real). No prince or Bodhisatta can appear to look like a common man. This is an aristocratic conception of the world, a distant reflection of the social groups of the time. This hierarchy of characters was in contrast with the mimic gestures of common everyday people. Some artists exaggerated this and painted vulgar and immodest gestures.

Neither in painting or theatre does a god or a prince perform a commonplace gesture. This class system of extreme rules influencing the gestural vocabulary, recalls the *mudras and hasta* of Indian treatises. Emotions were not to be shown (Boisselier 1975: 58) and there was no visual vocabulary to express them.

The use of fingers (and feet) as a communication tool goes back to the Indian dance tradition. Arms raised towards the chin with the hand loosely open but with the little finger sticking out vertically was used in Thai painting to represent great happiness (as in the reunion of the Vessantara family), or, in a different context great distress (Maddi being told of the donation of the children).

The form of a figure with a leg gently raised indicates movement or its intention, and a sense of lightness is used only for male figures. There were infinite examples of body language already in Khmer art of the 12th century, especially all the *apsaras* carved flanking the doors of Angkor Wat's top sanctuary (Roveda 2002: fig.98; 116; 145). Also in Cambodia, this gracious display of the fingers comes from the *apsara* religious dance.

There is no facial expression in the figures painted on murals. The face is generally depicted in the profile. When the face is turned to the viewer, only Bodhisatta kings and princes are allowed to show a timid smile under thin moustaches, suggesting satisfaction rather than cheerfulness. The cool rigid expression of Vessantara, Nimi, Temiya, etc. shows the artists' lack of interest in the person and excessive attention to costume (and royal settings). The only figures constantly showing facial and body expressions are the ogres (*Yakka*) that seem to have the conventional look of the mask used in ballet dance and theatrical performances (*Khon*). Since murals' iconography derives from that of ballet dance, the general ambiguity in the use of body language could be due to the absence of oral or musical recitative, and of movements as expressed in dance.

The affected elegance of figures depicted on Thai murals indicates a contradiction between form (rich drapes, gold ornaments and many jewels in the figures of Bodhisatta) and content (Buddhist simplicity detachment from earthly things). This discrepancy reflects the preference of a social group (sponsors, high members of the *Sangha*) in matters of mural decoration.

Detailed studies on the use of colours are unsatisfying because their definition is subjective. It seems that the blue colour is defined as aquamarine, and for the demarcation of registers in Northeastern Thailand murals. On the long series of the Emerald Buddha murals (Bangkok), blue pigments were usually mixed with grey (black and white pigments) to define the sky. In Cambodia, at Wat Sorya, uniquely, the painter/s used Cobalt blue⁷ or Prussian blue, not seen in other Cambodian paintings. In contrast, wood pediments were decorated with glass mosaics with blue tesserae of grand effect. In Thai murals, excessive importance was paid to the use of gold leaves to highlight painted Buddhist events and the costumes of royal personages, including Bodhisatta. Since the early stages of the world's art, gold was used for anything sacred. The Thai had acquired great knowledge from the making of gilded black lacquered cabinets to store manuscripts in monasteries. In Cambodia, gold is rarely used, due to the poverty of the country.

In mainland Southeast Asia, mural painters used the characteristic Asian perspective of superimposed narrative layout. Artists were familiar with narrative layouts from the simplest mono scenic to the most complex networking and labyrinthine mode. The participation of the reader is essential for putting together the images to construct the full story. Knowledge of Jataka, even faint, would facilitate the interpretation.

In the *Ratanakosin* School, there was an elaborate stylization resulting from a new perception of art extended to landscape and often clashing colours or excessive ornamentation. Thai artists excelled in decorative painting which was essential in black and gold cabinets, which usually have a background of gold flowers that the gods dropped like rain over Bodhisatta and Buddha's main life events.

Thai art search for beauty, form and quality of line came before all other considerations (Boisselier 1975: 41). The importance of lines defining forms can be seen in the intaglio slabs of Wat Si Chum and on bronze plaques of Sukhothai, which already possessed mannerisms of poses and gestures (Skilling 2008: 33). Mannerism's examples abound in the carved relief of Angkor Wat western corner pavilions. The purity of lines can be exemplified at Wat Chong Non Si (Bangkok) where continuous lines separate the scenes but connect the entire wall (early 17th century restored in the 1800s.)

The Vessantara Jataka stands out as one of the grandest stories of Buddhism, It was transmitted in many versions and languages across the ancient Buddhist world. It became the most popular of all because of its expression of suffering, drama, conflict, and all the ultimate Buddhist felicities. The main plots are narratives that are easily recognizable and the story is facilitated to be remembered by its reverse structure (see below at the end of the conclusions). Without hesitation, It can be said that Thai murals of the Last Ten Jatakas, stand out for their completeness, elegance and average good preservation.

3.3. Cambodia

In **Cambodia**, Jataka reliefs exist in the 12th century CE in the temple built by Jayavarman VII, namely Ta Prohm, Preah Khan, Ta Nei and Bayon, at the time when Mahayana Buddhism was the state religion. Other rare relief examples are found in the 16th century. Finally during the 19th century painting of Jataka spread from Thailand to Cambodia. Nowadays they are almost compulsory in new viharas. The Bayon's Jataka seems to attest that some Jataka was appreciated by Mahayana, not only by Theravada.

Cambodia has a very large number of modern mural paintings made in the 1980s and 1990s because of the large sponsoring due to improved economic and social conditions, as well as from Cambodian

⁷ Cobalt blue, discovered in France in 1802. It was costly and used from 1870-80 in Thai painting.

people that escaped the Khmer Rouge genocide by immigrating to the USA. They sponsored a large number of paintings in Khmer temples and on Prah Bots. All murals have the amount of the donation in US dollars marked at the corners of the mural.

The money came at random, by stages from people of certain villages paying for murals in the temple of their village or to their most venerated temple.

Sponsors and painters had preferences for the frightening hells of the *Nimi Jataka*, the elegant sensual body of the boy of the *Sama Jataka*; to express the strength of the imperturbable immobility of the young Bodhisatta of the *Vidhura pandita*. For *Vessantara Jataka* the painters liked prince Vessantara, his children, events in the dreamy setting of the hermitage; the four wild beasts that impeded Madri to return home. The adventures of the old Brahmin Jujuk were most appealing to painters for their comical content, especially his death.

Concerning Siamese influence in Cambodia, after the fall of the Angkor (13th century CE) induced, amongst others, by the Ayutthaya armies' invasion of 1432 CE, when the Siamese took back not only gold and sculptures but also made prisoners all the artists, painters and sculptors, storytellers, dancer of the old Apsara dance, making Ayutthaya a rich cultural (Khmer) centre.

After this disastrous invasion, Cambodia fell into total political, social and cultural disarray. In 14-15th centuries there was slow Theravada development, but the early viharas did not have solid walls to be painted. It was only in the 19th century that two Cambodian rulers brought some stability: King Ang Duong (r.1845-1860), who had been educated in Siam, absorbing several aspects of Thai culture; King Norodom (r.1860-1904), who preserved this *status quo*, although open to foreign influence.

Three Siamese elements contributed to the making of Cambodian mural arts (Nafyilians 1997)⁸: political, religious and mobility of monks and artists between the two countries.

The Cambodian court of Ang Duong (second half of 19th century) had been taken hostages to Bangkok, together with its cultured people and artists and artisans. They became heavily influenced by the art of Bangkok ("Ratanakosin style"). The original version of the *Tripitaka*⁹, the Pali Canon, for the first time available in Bangkok, incited great attention from monks. Later, King Mongkut's introduced the religious reformation of the Dhammayut that brought more monks to travel to study in Bangkok.

The Khmer inscription K.892 dated 1857 CE., is the first in Cambodia to enumerate 27 canonical and para canonical texts offered to the library of Wat Ta Tok monastery (de Bernon 2012: 372), including those of the Great Birth, *Mahajati (Vessantarajataka)* and the other 9 of the ultimate ten Jataka.

Around that time some Cambodian local artists, such as Tep Nimit Mak, who had probably studied in Bangkok and absorbed the principles of *Ratanakosin* art, that he adapted to Cambodian culture and tastes. He transmitted it to his few pupils. Tep Nimit did not prefer religious art, but instead in the extended narrative such as the *Ramayana* or *Ramakien* of the murals of the Silver Pagoda in Phnom Penh (painted 1895-1904), influenced by the powerful series of murals of Wat Phra Keo's (Emerald Buddha) gallery in Bangkok's, newly formed capital of Siam.

At the time, there must have been art workshops by painters that influenced one side or another of painting in Cambodia.

Clear evidence of Siamese influence can be seen in some monasteries of Phom Penh (Wat Bawonivet), Battambang (Wat Damrei Sor) and Siem Reap (Wat Bo) (Roveda & Yem 2011)

⁸ Husband and wife highly experienced photographers with good knowledge of Cambodia's history, worked in Cambodia in the 1980' and 1990'; published a rare book on painting of selected vihara, some destroyed by now.

⁹ *Tipitaka* in Pali

King Ang Duong was very fond of ballet dance (Phim and Thompson 1999: 40), renovated the orthodox dance type and paid great attention to costumes and choreography. The semi-nudity of some personages was replaced by silk drapery. The rules for the Royal Ballet were strictly applied to the painting of figures on murals, as visible on the walls of Tralach Leu vihara and in the Silver Pagoda of the royal compound of Phnom Penh that we attributed to Tep Nimit.

During the reign of king Sisowat (1904-1927), Siamese influence on Buddhism and literature which had been transplanted to Cambodia since the reign of King Ang Duong remained intact, although French colonial powers attempted to prevent Siamese domination.

French influence was formalized in 1918 when George Groslier (1887-1945) started the 'School of Cambodian Arts' in Phnom Penh (Edwards 2007: 149). Although the curriculum was focused on Cambodian art, the teaching methods were French. Some Cambodian artists commissioned the decoration of the entire vihara, creating unified coherent visual narratives. I have selected only a few temples of this type: Wat Tralach Leu, Wat Sorya (first half of the 20th century) Wat Sisowat Ratanaran (second half of the 20th century).

3-4. Laos

All information on Laos available is taken from Finot (1917) who mentioned that in Laos the most celebrated Jataka named "Ten Jataka" (*sip xat*) are a special collection of the *Mahânipâta*. Numbered 538-547 in Fausbøll, they are singly named:

Temiya (*Mûgapakkha*), Janâka, Sama (*as Suvannasâma*), Nemi (*Nimi*), Candakumâra (**Khandahâla**), Bhûridatta, Nârada, Vidhurapandita, Mahosadha (*Ummagga*) and Vessantara.

Amongst the Last Ten Jataka, the Vessantara Jataka is the most copied, preached and popular, not only in texts but also in images, being the preferred subject of pagoda painters.

It exists everywhere, and it is found also in six isolated chapters named: Dasavara, Himavanta, Vanappavesana, Jûjaka, Mahâvana, Kumâra.

The *gâthâ* of these sections were joined: *Gâthâ Jûjaka*, *Gâthâ Vanap pavesana*, and in an abridged form into the *Mahâjâti Rom*.

I have not been able to see any ancient Jataka murals in Luang Prabang and Vientiane, all being of modern time. At Luang Prabang, we noticed some ugly modern reproductions of the postcard made in Bangkok representing hell's scenes.

2. Conclusions

The Jataka, in one form or another, were known in Southeast Asia from the early centuries of the first millennium, and travelled around the countries of mainland Southeast Asia, producing slightly different versions. The Jataka stories were brought to Cambodia probably in the 12th century or well before. They were certainly known in the 16th century.

The first images of Jataka's events or of the life of Buddha that could be appreciated not only by westerners but also by local Asians, appeared in the 17th century, in Bangkok and provincial Thailand, with spectacular visual results concerning the Jataka and the biography of Buddha's life.

Nowadays, the illustration of Jatakas seems to have lost importance, reflecting religious and socio-cultural changes bringing a decrease in the building of viharas. The actual decreased interest in Buddhism and lack of sponsors create the rarity of painted illustrations. With the advent of

modernism, consumerism, the global economy has brought the end of the tradition of grand royal sponsors; most people have different priorities. Industrialists and capitalists have little interest in religious things. Now we see a global decrease in the importance and meaning of religious principles in human life.

Gone are the days when Buddhism, like all other religious beliefs, brought us back to a world of teaching religious ethical and moral principles governing human behaviour with intelligence and awareness.

I argue here that, standing in a dark vihara with closed windows (as usual) and lit only by some candles in front of Buddha's main statue, the Jatakas and other Buddhist murals are unreadable and worshipers have lost the skill to be enlightened by the single episode that may be visible. In short, we believe the murals have lost any didactic scope. Murals were made to enrich the space of the vihara, to transform the entire sacred volume into the memory of Buddha's life and previous existences focused on the statue of the presiding Buddha. The statue of the Buddha comes alive by the power of the images of his life and previous existences.

The study of the Jataka brought me to question the teaching scope of the stories painted on walls of viharas.

During my years spent in Cambodia and Thailand, I have noticed that to men/women born before c.1980, the story depicted on murals had sufficient visual content to stimulate their attention and generate a brief story-telling process in their minds, without having an intimate knowledge of Buddhist texts. The lack of education in primary schools makes young students in front of mural paintings unable to identify to which Jataka or episode of Buddha's life the painting belongs (I need to clarify that by Jatakas I refer only to the last Ten Jatakas of *Dasajataka*, *Mahajataka* etc).

The action of gazing high up on the walls to perceive in darkness some narrative scenes or a row of Bodhisatta would be a distraction for modern believer, that limits his devotion to and great respect for prostrating in front of the presiding Buddha statue, or gazing at him as if alive, the teacher of the *Dhamma* when they kneel or sit in a yoga position with various hand's positions (*mudras*).

I conclude that the murals were not painted to be read but only to enrich and make sacred the space, the atmosphere of the *vihara* or *ubosoth*, to transform the entire sacred volume into the memory of Buddha's life and previous existences.

Not to ignore that besides displaying religious images, it must be remembered that the painting of murals was made to obtain maximum merits from the sponsor. The power of images imprinted in the murals is lost in the vihara's obscurity or time-deterioration of the images themselves beside the ignorance of the viewers. Do merits be lost when a sponsored mural is destroyed?

6. Cambodia stone-carving of Jatakas

Some Jataka were carved in the temples of Jayavarman VII, towards the end of the 12th century and early 13th century, when the state religion was Mahayana Buddhism. Two topics were preferred (but I speak of 2 or 3 carving each). The torture of Temiya of the homonymous Jataka in the scene when two men are shifting swords over the head of the young Temiya Bodhisatta. The swords or other torture tools are often deleted. The other topic is that from the *Vessantara Jataka*, particularly the scene of the gifting of the children as visible in the photographs below. One relief of the Sama Jataka I found at Bayon carved over the door on the internal gallery of the second floor. The carving of the Preah Palilai temple is unknown when they were carved. Also, another Khmer temple of the 12th century, Banteay Samre, has Vessantara Jataka on the central tower but the carving could have been made after the iconoclastic destruction of the early 13th century. There has been quite a controversy about the presence of Jataka in Khmer temples insofar Jatakas were not used in Mahayana Buddhism and became frequent in the Theravada period. Alternatively, the hypothesis is advanced that Jayavarman VII was accepting Theravada at the end of his life.

A sandstone slab from the National Museum of Phnom Penh dated 16th century Angkor Wat, was probably carved when the Theravadin took over the temple. It illustrates 3 phases of the Vessantara Jataka.

Despite the meagre evidence, these Cambodian carved Jataka are the oldest of continental Southeast Asia Buddhism.



Fig.1 – Ta Nei – Temiya Jataka, illustration of Temiya defaced as are the swords above his head



Fig.2 **Wat Nokor** - Temiya Jataka. The torturing of Temiya (defaced) by two strongmen



Fig 3 – **Ta Prohm** – In this small-scale relief on the door has Temiya intact and the instruments over his head look like a saw rather than a sword.



Fig.4 – **Ta Prohm**. The gift of the children



Fig.5 **Preah Khan** – Vessantara Jataka. The gift of children
Vessantara poured water over Jujuk's hands to ratify the donation to him of his children carved standing below.



Fig.7 – Bayon. Inner gallery of the second floor. Hidden pediment, untouched by the iconoclastic reaction that has affected all other pediments of the gallery. Below the image of a Bhodisatta is the scene of the *Sama Jataka*, with the king carved to the right of the pediment holding bow and arrow just after having shot Sama. Carved at the centre of the pediment is, the deer that was a pet of young Bodhisatta. Sama mortally wounded is carved on the ground in the arm of his father and caressed by his mother.
(photo Jaro Poncar)

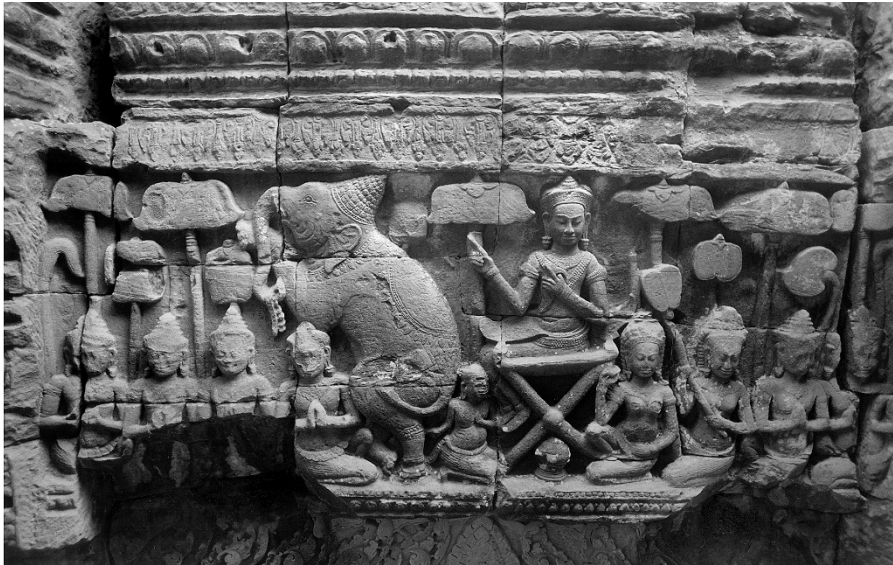


Fig.7 – **Bayon**. Relief of the second enclosure standing over the southern staircase to the Bayon terrace. My interpretation of this perfect large panel is the gift of the white elephant by Prince Vessantara to four Brahmins that had requested it. Vessantara is represented by the figure sitting on the X chair, flanked by a courtier with fans and a dwarf (?). With his raised right arm he gives the order to take the animal away. 12-13th century (photo Jaro Poncar 2001)



Fig.8 – **Thomannon** eastern *gopura*, north pediment. Very degraded pediment illustrating events of the Vessantara Jataka. In the middle register, the two children are shown standing between two unrecognisable figures, though that at the right seems to hold a pitcher with the water pouring over the Brahmin's hands (left figure). On the bottom register, left corner, on a tree Jujuk is sleeping in his hammock suspended between tree's branches. Below are the two children, the one on the right seems to be attended by a *devata* sent by Sakka to help the children by taking the look and functions of the parents that may be the two figures carved in the centre of the register. The right side of the lower register has been eroded. This relief may have been carved well after the building of the temple (13th century). (Thomannon Photo 1998).



Fig. 9 – **Chau Say Tevoda**, southern gopura western face. here more events of the Vessantara Jataka are readable. The top of the pediment is incomplete showing fragments of the scene of Vessantara donating his children to Jujuk. The badly eroded middle register shows to the extreme right a child under a tree being attend by a deva, while on the other side of the same tree is a wild animal trying to climb the tree. At the left corner of the register. Muddi devastated by the news of the children's donation fainted on the ground, immediately attended by Vessantara. and devas The lower register seems to represent the reunion of the family with, at the centre, king Sanjya and his queen each holding a child in the presence of Vessantara and Muddi. (12-13th century)



Fig.10. **Chau Say Tevoda.** Detail of the previous figure (Fig.9). On the middle register is carved to the left, Maddi fainted but was attended to by her husband and devas. At the right-part of the middle register a female figure (a devata?) seems to walk towards a tree on which the Brahmin is sleeping in his hammock (Degraded, not readable but interpreted), under the tree is the boy Jali being attended by a deva sent by Sakka while a dog (or wild animal) is trying to climb the tree. On the lower register, the bearded Brahmin sells the children to the King's father and on the right are carved many figures in (photos 2002) .



Fig.11- **Banteay Kdei.** Large pediment with the image of Temiya being tortured; see detail below.



Fig.12.**Banteay Kdei.** The detail of the previous picture clearly shows the lack of emotion in Temiya's face, despite being continuously tortured by his father's order. In here 2 strongmen are brandishing swords over Temiya's head.



Fig.14 **Preah Palilai**, Eastern gopura, North face. Large pediment carved with two episodes of the Vessantara, textually very distant in time from each other. The top register has Maddi and Vessantara (right) with a child on each lap at the side of a stand-in Bodhisatta. Of the two, the figure on the right is holding the pitcher (missing, eroded) and (left) Maddi (?) figure with a child on her lap. These images may indicate the gift of the children to Jujuk when Vessantara poured the water from his pitcher on the hands of the Brahmin to ratify the donation.

The lower register has a sequence of elephants escorted by soldiers. These visual elements could represent the army going to the Vessantara hermitage to take him back to the capital. Alternatively, the scene may depict when Vessantara, Maddi,

King Sanjaya and his queen together with the two children, returned to the royal palace where a grand celebration will take place.

Note. The difficulty in dating Buddhist carvings in temples originally of Brahmanic religion constructed in the 12th century is the case of Thomannon (see Fig. 8) and Chao Say Tevoda (see Fig.9 and 10) built at the end of Suryavarman II reign(1113-c.1150) carved decoration executed by following kings: Yashovarman II ((C.1150-1165)and/or Jayavarman VII (1118-c.1220) (C.Jacques1999: 12).

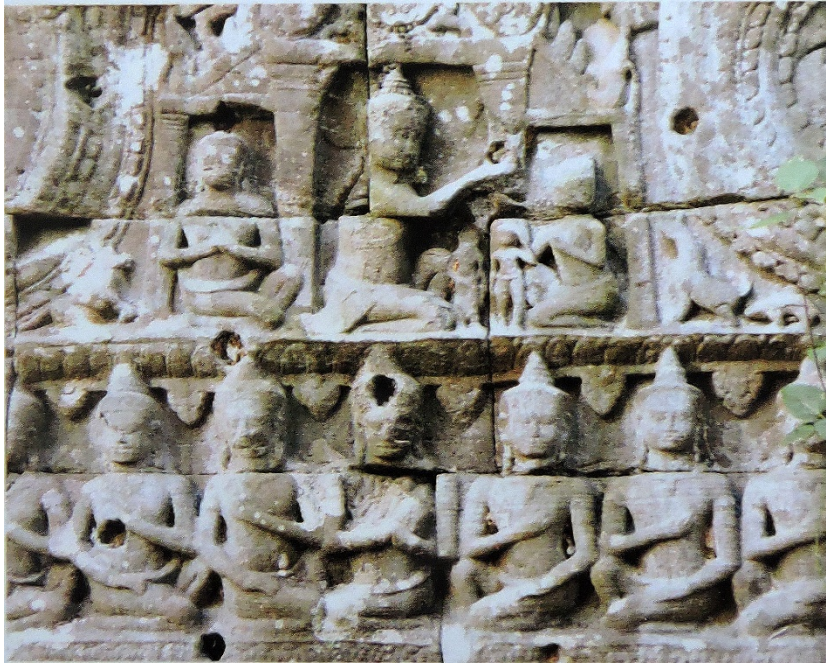


Fig.15 -Ta Nei (Siem Reap). Another complete carving of the donation of the children (late12th-early 13th)



Fig.16. Beng Mealea. A small carving of the gift of the children. Similar broken pieces of the same subject can be retrieved with some difficulty and patience. (temple built in the the12th century)



Fig.17- **Banteay Samrè**— The children's donation is carved on the central tower together with several other Buddhist images. (temple built in the 12 or 13th centuries)



Fig.18 - **National Museum of Phnom Penh** Scenes of the Vessantara *Jataka*. The broken sandstone slab was carved with several scenes within a niche representing a room. They are readable (photo V.Roveda 2009).

From left to right: we can identify:

1- The Vessantara gift of the white elephant.

The relief shows the crowned figure of Prince Vessantara, seated over a square throne, is pouring water over the hands of a begging Brahmins symbol of donation-granting (*Dakkinodakani*) of the royal white elephant that is carved here in very small size to fit the layout. The enclosing room with columns and a pediment seem to be that of the royal residence.

2 - Vessantara's gift of his children to Jujuk to the begging Brahmin (Jujuk) to ratify the gift.

3 - Vessantara's gift of his wife Maddi to the Brahminsakka who, for this occasion was an impersonation of Indra.

Vessantara is not wearing the typical royal heavy gold necklace, but the simple necklace of the ascetic, flanked by a smaller female figure, his wife Maddi, while he is pouring water over the hands of a Brahmin to ratify the gift. In this case, the Brahmin is not Jujuk but his impersonation by the god Sakka (Indra). Notice that the columns and pediment of the room are different from the previous two scenes, being that of the hermitage (built by the gods for Vessantara).

Having tested the unlimited generosity of Vessantara, Indra returned Maddi to her husband and departed rising to his heaven like a sun.

Depictions of the Last Ten Jatakas in Southeast Asia

This section is divided into two parts:

1 – The description and illustration of the Last Ten Jatakas in mainland southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos), is evidence of the local preferences and styles.

2 – The description and illustration of the Vessantara Jataka in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma with general comments on the different versions.

The visual pleasure of images of the Vessantara Jataka can be compared to watching it represented on stage (The Thai 'Kon), or to the enactments or the folkloristic rituals performed in some parts of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand.

The presentation of each Jataka starts with the summary of Cowell's translation (reprint 1060), followed by a list of illustrations when possible arranged by the temple's architecture, following the old sequence of Fussboel and Cowell, presumed related to *parami*.

1	Temiya Jataka	(Muga-pakkha)	virtue of renouncing, a pure heart
2	Mahajanaka Jataka	(Manimekhala)	virtue of energy and perseverance
3	Sama Jataka	(Sovannasam)	filial piety and compassion
4	Nemi Jataka	(Nimi; Nemirich)	virtue of resolution
5	Candakumara Jataka	(Khandahala)	extreme patience and restraint
6	Bhuridatta Jataka	(Puritoat)	respect of ascetic practices
7	Maha-naradakassapa Jataka		moral duties
8	Vidhura-pandita Jataka	(Vidura Pandit)	extreme wisdom
9	Maha-Ummagga Jataka	(Mahosadha)	extreme wisdom
10	Vessantara Jataka		extreme generosity

Because the last of the Ten Jataka has great importance in the history of Theravada in Southeast Asia, the *Vessantara Jataka* that produced the majority of artworks is treated separately for each of the countries of Southeastern Asia.

The description starts with the first Jataka of the Last Ten, the number 538 Temiya Jataka and proceeds by individual Jataka until the Vessantara Jataka the last, number 547.

Supplement

1) Burma's Jataka visual narratives

A basic way to study Buddhism and particularly the Jataka in Burma, and a guiding example of how research should proceed (if not impeded by financial costs) is the study of Gordon H. Luce published on *Artibus of Asiae* 1969/70. It is of fundamental importance to all scholars, not only Burmese, so much so that I thought it imperative to present a very short summary for scholars interested in the Jataka in a country of Southeast Asia, Burma over the short period, from 1006-1116, when the major temples were built. Readers who are especially concerned with the art of **this period when** ancient Burma (the Pyu and Mons) were making a major contribution to the development of Buddhism, and its art, to the entire continental Southeast Asia.

I have been reexamining Luce 3 volumes of the 1970 publication, the Third volume having the illustrations that are most important for the Last Ten Jatakas or Mahanipata, which are the topics of my research.

2) Numeration

People in Burma always speak of the "555 Jatakas"; but modern editions and manuscripts, so far as my knowledge goes, give only 547 (LUCE 1956 III: 264). as in the Singhalese recension. However, by adding three narratives of the Velama series, the *Velama Jataka. No.497, the Mahagovinda Jataka. No.498 and the Sumedhapandita Jataka. No.499*, the number 550 is reached. The Petleik number is always 3 more than the others.

The normal order of the last ten Jatakas (Mahanipata), as shown in Fausboll or Cowell, is as follows:

- 538. Mugapakkha [Temiya]
- 539. Mahajanaka
- 540. Sama
- 541. Nimi
- 542. Khandahala [Candakumara]
- 543. Bhuridatta
- 544. Mahanaradakassapa
- 545. Vidhurapandita
- 546. Maha-ummagga [Mahosadha]
- 547. Vessantara

The numeration varied from temple to temple;

West Petleik plaques c.1060 CE

- 541 Temiya
- 542 Janaka
- 543 Sama
- 544 Nemi
- 545 Mahasodha
- 546 Candakumara
- 547 Bhuridatta
- 548.....[Narada]
- 549 Vidhura
- 550.....[Vessantara]

Ananda Plaques c.1100

- Temi 538-574
- Janak 575-614
- Syam 615-633S
- Nemi 636-646
- Mahos 645-740
- Candakumar 741-749
- Bhuridat 750-754
- risi Nar no numbers
- Widhir no numbers
- Wesantar no numbers.

3) Recipient temples

In Burma the first Jatakas occur in Makuta's pandit inscription at the Shwezayan pagoda, Thaton; in the glazed terracotta of the middle terrace of the Thagya pagoda, Thaton; and in the oldest pillars delimiting the sacred area of a temple, the *baddhasima* at the Kalyani Thein, Thaton. The glazed terracotta on the top terraces of the Ananda temple illustrates the Ten Great Jataka.

Temples with abundant Buddhist visual narratives are:

- I. The **Ananda** temple of Kyanzitttha.- preserves a series of glazed terra-cotta plaques (one per Jataka)-up to No. 537 in number, the writing at the foot of the plaque merely names and numbers the story, e. g. Mitanga jataka 497; some have words of Mon.
- II. **West and East Hpetleik** pagodas. 235 plaques with writing were found at the West Petleik, and 211 at the East Petleik, though most fragmentary. The two series, being adjacent, confuses. What remains of the temple, free of glaze are remarkably clear and sharp. Only name and number are known: the *Velama Jatak* aNo.497 and *Matanga Jataka* No.500.
- III. **Kubyaukgyi** temple, or **Myinpagan**. The latter has the so-called 'Myazedi' inscription, dated c. 1113 CE-. There are also writings in ink below fresco on the outer walls of the dark square corridor enclosing the central shrine.
- IV. **Nagayon** temple. - The Jataka series occur on the inner walls from the centre of the S. wall. It has all the Jataka, recording stopping at No.284.
- V. **Abeyadana** temple. - A late ink inscription on the walls attributes this temple to Kyanzitttha's queen, Abeyadana, Brahmanic, Tantric and non-canonical frescoes are in the corridor reminding one that Thaton Buddhism was not the pure Theravada Only orthodox were the *Devatapannha Jataka* (No.350) and others its series.
- VI. **Pyatsa Shwe** temple. It has Jataka frescoes of about 20 legends between plates No.119 and 201 (listed)
- VII. **Mingalazedi** pagoda(c.1250 CE.). It has a good series of green-glazed Jataka plaques dating about the middle of the 13th century. The topmost terrace is devoted to the representation of the *Mahanipata*. The main series occupies the three intermediate terraces, starting from the middle of the east face.

At present 320 jataka plaques with the writing still exist in the pagoda, apart from the Mahanipata series (Luce, 1965: 297). The normal order of the last ten Jataka (Mahanipata), is that established by Fausboll or Cowell, shown above.

In his book, Luce (Old-Burma- early Pagan, 1970, Vol. III), was able to identify all the Mahanipata Jatakas out from the overwhelming pre-Mahanipata Jataka, without specifying however the number of the Jataka. The most outstanding tablets with Jataka are those of the Phet Leik stupa (East and West), the Nanda Terraces, the mural paintings of Lolka-Htekpan temple. They all have abundant narrative terracotta glazed plaques or tablets fully illustrated but partially interpreted by Gordon Luce in his masterwork of 1970. I have reproduced here only my few sketches of recognised Jatakas, high lightening the central scene of the Sama Jataka that is produced in G.H. Luce Plate 356 but difficult to read and I wanted to highlight its beauty.

In the same plate 356 were are also two easily decoded Jataka's events from that of *Mahajanaka* saved by *Manimekkala*, painted with large strokes of white or light blue, we cannot say, the picture being in black and white, possibly a rough restoration by the monks. The other is a scene of the *Chandakumara Jataka*, with the personages depicted in very elegant costumes and layouts. Only on very few occasions, I was able to expand the interpretations of Gordon Luce, from the examples that I think are most representative of Jataka in use at the time in Burma.

HPETLEIK PLAQUES 96-118

Plates 97-112) un-interpreted, probably pre-Mahanipata Jataka

113) pre-Mahanipata Jatakas plaques, except:

Plate 113b) probably *Bhuridatta Jataka*. In the episode when Bhuridatta 's brother was asking the king to obtain the snake, his brother. Behind him is the other brother tall *rishi* of a Shiva sect, with a long beard, a large chignon and with a *trisula* in his right hand.

Plate 115 a) *Temiya Jataka*. The young Bodhidsatta Temiya (in a shrine) is assisting his father (the King) in imaking wrong judgements leading to the men being impaled.

Plate 115 b) *Mahajanaka Jataka*, with Mahajanaka climbed to the top mast of a ship sinking full of water.

From the air, from the top left comes to the goddess Manimekhala to save Janaka from drowning.

Plate 115 c) *Sama Jataka*, scene of the narrative of the king killing Sama. Sama is represented, only taking care of the frightened deer carrying the water pot on his back and the king holding his bow and arrow energetically shooting in the direction of the animal, not of Sama. In my opinion, this is a sort of "censorship" of the original textual narrative to avoid people seeing the body of a boy dying on the ground killed by a poisonous arrow shot by a voyeuristic criminal king (the ruler of the country). Kings did not want to be perceived as a killer of innocent youths, especially one who was supporting his parents, in this specific story.

Plate 115 d) *Narada Jataka*, with Narada flying down from the Brahma heaven to condemn Angati to hell and to help Ruja, the King's daughter who had tried to dissuade her father from being debauched and start a new life following a proper moral attitude.

Plate 116 a) *Mahosadha Jataka*, when Mahosadha holding Kevatta crouching on the ground, is displaying his superiority and victory. The battle was dissolved.

Plate 116c) *Temiya Jataka*, when the slaves of his father were ordered to frighten the boy by menacing him with poisonous snakes.

Plate 117-118. Luce's text indicates "Hell scenes" for 8 plaques. Evidently, they are all part of the *Nemi Jataka*.

SHWEZIGON Plates 174 -175.

12 Jataka plaques with pre-Mahanipata series with the possible exception of one I have recognized:

Plate 175 c) *Mahosadha Jataka*, scene of Mahosadha keeping Kevatta crouched to the ground, as in 116a).

NANDA TERRACES PLAQUES, Plate 324

Plate 324 b) probably a “censured” *Sama Jataka*, where Sama is not to be seen anywhere, being depicted only the king with bow and arrow, two deer, and the goddess Basundari in the foliage of a tree. By the term “censured” I mean that Sama, the essential protagonist of the story, is not present, to avoid the memory of a deranged King killing an innocent Bodhisatta boy.

Plate 324d) *Mahajanaka Jataka*, when Mahajanaka climbed to the top mast of sinking a ship full of water. In the air, from the top left flies the goddess Manimekhala to save Janaka from drowning.

Plates 324 c,e,f) Pre-Mahanipata Jataka tablets

Plates 325 a-e) Pre-Mahanipata Jataka

Plates 326 a,e) Pre Mahanipata Jataka

Plate 326 b)? Vessantara returns home riding an elephant with his *mahout* and a servant holding a parasol.

Plate 326 c) *Sama Jataka*, simply illustrates Sama going with his two deer to the pond to collect water in a jar on the back of one of the deer, probably his pet-deer. No traces of the killer king, I believe some sort of censure, avoiding people to see or visually being reminded of the dying golden Bodhisatta, by the hands of their king.

The corpse of a boy could also remind the death of a young son in a lay family (see my comment plate 115)

Plate 326 f) *Bhuridatta Jataka*. When “Alambayana sees Bhuridatta” is inscribed on the tablet.

The image reminds me of Alambayana seeing Bhuridatta coiled on the anthill (and respecting the Uposaka).¹⁰ Alambayana thought that by capturing the snake he could become a snake-charmer and earn lots of money.

Plates 327a), b) and c) *Bhuridatta Jataka*; when “Alamba makes Bhuridatta dance” is written in the inscription and does not need explanation.

These 3 tablets illustrate three events of the *Bhuridatta Jataka*, starting from when the Bodhisatta took snake form, is shown in different situations from coiled around the anthill to reciting the Uposaka in tranquillity. Other events led to his freedom and return to human form, thanks to the intervention of his brothers and sister.

¹⁰ In early Buddhist tradition this meant taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and adopt the Five Precepts

Plate 327d) *Vessantara Jataka*. The inscription reads “they give nurses the baby” when two *devatas* descended from Indra’s heaven each to nourish the two Vessantara children mistreated and abandoned by Jujuk.

Plate 327e) *Vessantara Jataka*. The inscription reads “Vessantara looks at the gift-houses” This note makes difficult the interpretation. It is a scene that could have happened at the very beginning (or very end) of the story when Vessantara received a gift himself.

Plate 327f) *Vessantara Jataka*. “The brahmans ask for the elephant” and Vessantara donates them his magic white elephant.

Plate 328 a) *Vessantara Jataka*. When the Prince watches the Brahmins (3) going away on his precious white elephant.

Plate 328 b) *Vessantara Jataka*, it seems that the two children are already on the chariot, when Maddi was greeting Vessantara before departing, Difficult interpretation., unknown in the text where, Vessantara, Maddi and children leave altogether to exile.

Plate 328c) *Vessantara Jataka*, When Prince Vessantara, on his chariot, is pouring water on the hands of a Brahmin to confirm the gift of the chariot.

Plate 328d) A man, probably the *mahud*, rides an elephant, leaving on the ground a tall person holding a vessel (?) that could be Vessantara or Maddi. Tentative interpretation.

Plate 329-334. NANDA TABLETS

all tablets of the ground-plinth are on events of Buddha’s triumph. No Mahanipata Jataka..

LOKA-HTEIKPAN PAINTINGS Plate 355-356

On these 2 pages, Luce text reproduces 6 paintings of Jatakas of which the Sama Jataka is illustrated in its integral form that I traced here (see my comments Plate 115)

Plate 355b) *Vessantara Jataka* when Vessantara and Maddi are presented with their chariot to depart, which is very elegant and refined. It has a parasol at the centre and one white steed. In the register below are 3 grazing deer that later had to replace the horses,.

Plate 357 a) *Mahajanaka Jataka*, The painting showing Jataka hanging to the top of the mast of his sinking ship. Manimekhala will arrive to save him and take him to firm land.

Plate 357 b) *Sama Jataka*. A very elaborate painting showing the murder of Sama but with the goddess Vasundari ready to exit from the tree’s foliage to help the boy return to life. To the extreme left is the tent erected for the protection of hunters, in this case, king Piliyakkha, while on the right of the main scene is a hut with the blind father and mother of Sama. The central scene illustrates Sama lying dying on the ground and above him, the king jumping in the air making sure having shot the poisonous arrow at Sama, while deer are fleeing (see my comments Plaque 115). Exceptionally, the full story appears only in painting, certainly by different artists and sponsors.

NOTE. Visual narrative Old-Burma-Early Pagan. Regretfully the hundreds of photographs of Luce cannot be reproduced for copyright issues. The reader is thus invited to view the original Vol.III.

After the excellent works of Gordon Luce (1956 and 1970), from the end of the 20th(the 1960s) century, Myanmar suffered a political and economic crisis that has influenced the continuation of research, but from about 2010 there has been a revival of activity and several academic publications, unfortunately, some on Burmese. The few on the Mahanipata that I was able to get are summarized below.

Bob Hudson published on the Internet 2016 an entire paper devoted to what I tentatively define Pre-mahanipata (the hundreds of Burmese Jataka preceding the Last Ten Jataka or Mahanipata (No.539-457) on the stucco Jataka of pagoda near Kyuase (Myanmar). I cannot use this i paper due to the absence of Mahanipata. It is an important contribution to the [rare] knowledge of early Jatakas in Burma, with a different technical way of narration (incision on stucco)

Dr Pyiet Phyo Kyaw put on the Internet one summary paper named *The Glazed Plaques of 550 Jatakas in the Dhammarajaka stupa*, full of art historical high points on the development of Buddhist art in Burmah hot points. The pictures show several plaques of which I tentatively recognized, starting from the first page with Jataka pictures.

1 - Twante Yoke Sone Stupa

Terracotta Reliefs with narrative scenes. I regret being unable to decode any of the 12 plaques.

2 – Thi Kya Phaya, Taton. *Terracotta plaques of Mahanipata Jatakas are inlaid in the terraces of Thi Kya Phaya, Taton* where:

the 3rd *terracotta plaque*, may represent the *Temiya Jataka* when The young Temiya was quietly sitting (in a hut?), flanked by two men the objects they are holding being cutaway
The 5th may indicate the Vessantara Jataka, the scene of the rage of Mithila people in seeing the white elephant going away with Brahmins on his back.

3 – Pagan period. Terracotta reliefs pictures are taken from Gordon H.Luce (1970: III).

4 - Shwezigon. After some pages with photographs clarifying the location of Jataka in the Shwezigon temple, and some close up of paintings in the Ananda temples.

5 - Ananta frescoes probably with unidentified Mahanipata

6 - Dhammarajaka Stupa - *Glazed Plaques of 550 Jataka reliefs found in Dhammajataka Stupa.* Out from this page, I have identified only 5 Mahanipata Jataka as follows, starting reading from the top left:

2 Temiya Jataka

6 Sama incomplete?

10 Sama complete

11th Buridatta Jataka, when Alamba finds Buridatta as he observes the Uoposatha.



1 and 2 pictures explain what I call "censored Jataka". In the painting from Ananta the depiction of the *Sama Jataka*, shows Sama temporarily dead on the floor, and the king jumping high, over everybody (or effect of Asian perspective) to release his bow energetically with extended arms



against the image of Sama in the pond with his pet deer (repetition of the story) On plaque 324 (see above), the absence of Sama and in 236, that of the king, may be an artifice to have the king higher than all in the killing of Sama scene, or a reluctance in depicting Sama.

In the plaque from the Dhammarajaka stupa, everything is calm, the king has a small bow not armed with it. The deer seem to look at him, and in the foliage's branches of the tree is the goddess Basundari. Sama is not depicted. It cannot be excluded the possibility that the second example deals with a pre-Mahanipata Jataka or legends. There seems to be a problem with the representation of Sama in some of the Pagan temples of their time. The pictures taken from Internet are much enlarged therefore not sharp

7 - *Mingalarzedi Stupa*. After several pages devoted to the beautiful painting of Jataka of the Ananda temple (none identified), the paper presents a large picture of the *Glazed Plaques of 550 Jatakas found in Mingalarzedi Stupa* with 12 panels of which I have identified:

The 4th plaque shows the *Sama Jataka*, with the body of the young Bodhisatta lying dead on the ground near some animals that resemble robust deer. On a clearly defined small tree to the right of Sama, is hiding the goddess Basundari who will come out to restore to life Sama lethally wounded by the poisoned arrow of king Philiakha.

The 5th plaque shows the *Temiya Jataka*, when the young Bodhisatta Temyia was flanked by two men, one holding a sort of knife or sword. According to the text, both men will swirl their swords over the head of the young Bodhisatta, to frighten him and force him in vain to cry or speak-

The 7th plaque may show the *Mahajanaka Jataka* when the Bodhisatta was deposited by Manimekhala on the ritual stone of the royal park

The other plaques I cannot identify probably also because they may be pre-Mahasaccata atakas or legends?

11th Buridatta Jataka, when Alamba finds Buridatta as he observes the Uoposatha. Compare with pagan fig.6.6



Plaque 4 - The body of Sama lies on the ground near some animals resembling heavy deer. In the tree, the goddess Basundhari is waiting to intervene and bring back to life the young Bodhisatta.

Plaque 5 – Temiya is flanked by two men with knives or swords.

Plaque 6 – Bhuridatta Jataka, when the Bhuridatta is the only one capable to answer to king Sacca questions in the Heaven of the Thirty Free.

Plaque 9 – When the Bodhisatta Janaka has been redeposited by the goddess Manimekhala on the sacred stone of the royal park

I am very indebted to Dr.Pyiet Phyo Kyaw, Yangoon, for allowing me to use some of his material from an The Internet presentation entitled “Glazed plaques of 550 Jataka Reliefs found in Inga Laszedi stupa” 2015.

Also in their important recent work on the Great Birth Stories of the Buddha, Naomi Appleton and Sarah Shaw have studied the Mahanipata in Southeast Asia. Amongst others, 38 pictures of the terracotta plaques of the Ananda temple, as well as 12 rare skillfully glazed terracotta tiles from the Schwedagon pagoda with unusual events of the Ten Last Jataka, accurately drawn, on a darker background, unseen before (photographs by Lucy Shaw). The text is a modern English full translation from Pali.

Personal view.

In the Pagan temples examined here based on Luce (1970) is remarkable to conclude that the location of terracotta plaques representing Jataka are placed in the most difficult sites to be seen by worshippers, in several temples of the Pagan area, the list will be quite high.

Secondly, are the plaques appropriately representing the Jataka that they are presumed to illustrate?

Several pictures of Mahanipatas are difficult to identify amongst a multitude of pre-Mahanipata Jataka. Why some Pagan temples have carved plaques of Jataka and other paintings?

As for some Thai and Cambodian temples of the 19-20th century whichever the decoration of the walls of a Buddhist monument, It seems to me non of interest to Buddhist accounts and laypeople, either because located in an inaccessible part of the temple, or because they do not have clear clues of the story(carved or painted) and therefore cannot understand, or because, as in Thai art, they are too far away on the walls, or are too artistic, with many liberties taken by the painters. in the layout, a situation copied in Cambodia from the end of the 19th century.

I discuss my opinion on the lack of teaching/educating function of murals, or in Burma, the terracotta plaques variously glazed, I conclude that all decoration is there to demonstrate the wealth of the vihara or to create a sacred mystical atmosphere where the believers can meditate or pray to kneel on the ground, The Jataka were essentially for reading, recitation and chanting by the monks or emotionally move acolytes by community chanting in the street displaying large banners as for the Vessantara Jataka.

Personal view on the Mahanipata

In this paper, I present my personal views on the Mahanipata that will best be understood by scholars who are familiar with the Last Ten Jataka tales. I have to thank DYour Dropbox storage has reached 100% capacity and is no longer syncing. To get your Dropbox back to shape, upgrade your Dropbox today and get up to 3 TB (3,000 GB) of space and powerful sharing features.r. Dawn Rooney for the extensive editing of this paper and constructive discussions.

Some years ago I undertook a study of the Last Ten Jatakas known as 'Mahanipata' (Great Birth Stories) and examined their visual narrative in the context of contemporary Buddhist cultures in mainland Southeast Asia.

The Mahanipata includes the last ten Jatakas out of a set of 547¹¹ [tales](#) describing the final lives of the [bodhisatta](#) who was born [Siddharta Gautama](#) and became the [Gautama Buddha](#). Out of the 547, only the last 50 Jatakas were intended to be intelligible by themselves, without commentary.

In my view as a Western scholar, it is hard to imagine when the Buddha had the time to narrate Jatakas and still preach his doctrine. In the beginning, it was not necessary to write them down because the original words of the Master were transmitted orally. The first written form was not completed until the 2nd century BCE. It was intended for proselytes and for distribution of the Buddhist Law (Precepts) throughout the world.

The doctrine (Dharma) was subtle, and difficult to understand by the agrarian population, military conscripts, and others. What young or old man would be willing to abandon the comforts of home to join the life of a wandering ascetic even though he realized that desires were transitory and fleeting?

Social conditions in the Ganges Valley were prosperous and members of the society could recognize the need to escape and join a new doctrine. Other religious teachers purported to have found release from the inevitable cycle of rebirths (Snellgrove 2003:99). At some point, the arrival of Buddhism seemed to be a revolt against Brahmanism (Mubd Subhendu, 1917: 20). These precepts caused the Buddha to doubt his teaching success and he considered keeping them to himself. He wished he had someone that he could confide in about his indecision. Udraka and Arada, his previous teachers, were dead, and his five companions who renounced him would deride him.— There was Niganta Nagaputta¹², leader of a non-conformist sect repudiating all religious assumptions of his time, and had many points in common with Buddhism. So Nagaputta insisted that the Buddha started teachings. Buddha started teaching his conclusions.

The *Last Ten Jatakas* spread from India where they originated and were of great interest to people abroad. Their oral narrative was an ideological declaration of past deeds of the bodhisatta before they became formalized on paper. The narrative served as examples of the perfections (*parami*) which in the Last Ten atakas are 10: [renunciation](#), [vigour](#), [benevolence](#),

¹¹ According to the Dictionary of Buddhism, the Pali Jataka contains 550 birth-stories arranged in 22 books (Damien Keown 2000: 125).

¹² Nagaputta, became Mahavira, leader of reactionary group known as Jainism

[absolute determination](#), [insight](#), [morality](#), [patience](#), [equanimity](#), [reality](#), and [generosity](#). These tales were told and retold again and again travelling in time and space and they became an integral part of Buddhist culture throughout the world and through ages.

It is believed that the Buddha was used to explaining and commenting on the events happening around him throughout his career. His approach was to describe similar events that had occurred in one of his own previous births. The experience of one lifetime and also those of many lives were always present in his mind. He often used these experiences to explain moral principles.

The success of the Buddha's teaching was probably due to his impressive personality and possibly to his aristocratic connections (Snellgrove 2003:99). He created groups of various proselytes who had the same faith but no specific plan or formal dogma. When the Master died, each group lacked guidance as no written record of the Blessed One's words existed. Thus, it became imperative to preserve his teachings in writing. Also, it was necessary to integrate and codify the disciplinary rules of the order to void schismatic revolts. The problem was to find an authoritarian person to complete the task.

The most suitable person was Ananda, the Buddha's constant companion and confidant. However, he did not write down any of his Master's teaching because he had not yet achieved *arhatship*¹³, having cared for the lesser more than for himself. He was excluded from the First Council when Mahakasyapa, great friend and follower of Buddha, ordered 500 monks to determine the future of the Order. Ananda withdrew in solitude and after obtaining *arhatship* he responded by defining the *Vinaya* (rules of the Sangha) and contributed to the texts that were transcribed by Avaghosa¹⁴ in the 2nd century BCE. It is likely that Buddhism had a small beginning but assumed great popularity when King Bimbisara Ashoka, the Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty (d.238 or 232 BCE), promoted the spread of Buddhism throughout India, Asia, and Sri Lanka in the mid-3rd century BCE.

In conclusion, to understand the Jatakas, I guess that when the Buddha started to narrate the first of the Last Ten Jatakas he knew that his Dharma teachings were not meant to be understood by most of his audience. To get their attention, he recited some verses¹⁵ together with minimal prose that alluded to a story which could be mentally or instinctively understood by all .

By transmitting the oral narrative into verse and prose which expressed the theory of Buddhism, the story became an ideological declaration of the past deeds of the bodhisatta. These illustrated the perfections, *parami*, and the virtues that a bodhisatta must acquire on his path to Buddhahood following his practice of [renunciation](#), [vigour](#), [benevolence](#), [absolute determination](#), [insight](#), [morality](#), [patience](#), [equanimity](#), [reality](#) and [generosity](#)¹⁶.

These stories evolved to full literary form in the first century CE and became the precursors to the various legendary biographies of the Buddha that were composed at later dates.

¹³ *Arhat* one who has attained the goal of enlightenment

¹⁴ Ashvagoṣa(Avaghosa in moder writing) was a second century fervent Buddhist who wrote dramatic works on Buddhist themes such as the *Buddhacarita*, the best life of Buddha, the *Saudaramanda* and the story of Sariputta. Many other writings are attributed to him, but it seems that isi production was limited to work mentioned and, especially the Life of Buddha, the first biography of the Master. It is quite improbable that he could have any relationship in the stesure of the Jataka

¹⁵ **verse** has come to represent any division or grouping of words in a **poetic** composition, with groupings traditionally having been referred to as *stanzas*

Although many Jatakas written in an early period describe the previous lives of the Buddha, very little biographical material about Gautama's own life has been recorded.

The Jatakas were undoubtedly memorized reverently and repeated by the disciples. Then, after The Buddha's death, 550 of them were gathered in one collection, known as the *Book of the 550 Jatakas or Births*. A study in the translation, migration, adaptation, and appropriation of the Jatakas reveals numerous problems, mainly due to inaccurate translations and interpretations (Subhendu Mund 2017:22).

My personal views on the Last Ten Jatakas are:

No.538. Temiya Jataka: The Bodhisatta was forcibly subjected to the cruelty of his father since infancy. He showed his rejection of his father's behaviour by pretending to be autistic. It comes to fruition in the final outburst by lifting the chariot. Following this action, his soul is healed and soon he assumes a missionary role by converting the men that his father had ordered to kill him. Additionally, his father did not feel any compassion which is one of the principles of Buddhism. The Temiya story may be connected with modern theories in that the autistic boy could not remember his previous life. However, he developed communicative and language skills at the age of 16 and this may be the most powerful factor contributing to an optimal outcome.

No.539. Mahajanaka Jataka: The Bodhisatta Janaka, the hero, is motivated by vengeance to leave his country, another attitude that is rejected by Buddhism. Eventually Manimekkala, the deity who rescued the Bodhisatta from drowning, dropped Janaka haphazardly on a stone in a park of a Principedom that needed a successor to the deceased king. Janaka accepted the appointment to the king willingly, and with this power he could return to his real country seeking vengeance and reestablish order in alliance with his mother.

No.540. Sama Jataka: The symbol of filial devotion is expressed in this Jataka. It is interrupted by a perverse king killing Sama. It is easy to see a homosexual king committing a premeditated murder of a youth, action openly ignored in this narrative. When he saw the 16-year-old Sama, with his fresh smooth body, disrobe and enter the pond for his evening bath in his scanty dressing, he became insane. King Piliyakkha, who was a psychopath, could not control his surging passion. He had to kill the boy and use him as a hunting trophy. The king's libido sensed the attractiveness and biological fitness of the young boy with his golden skin and other pleasurable features (sexual?). He struggled to find his pleasure by killing the boy and having him for himself only.

No.541. Nemi Jataka: Seemingly, the horrible hells did not affect the Bodhisatta Nemi emotionally, who was apparently untouched by the suffering and tortures of sinners. In the narrative, Nemi never intervenes to alleviate the suffering of the damned as in the Thai narrative equivalent of Prah Malai.

No.542. Canda-kumara Jataka: A similar narrative appears with the cruel father-King who wants to kill his family, including Canda-kumar, his son and heir apparent. This behaviour is also a strong reaction against heretics or Brahmanism and its rituals. Canda never commented on the events and he would accept his fate to die by burning together with his family if the god Indra would not intervene to end the meaningless sacrifice.

No.543. Bhuridatta Jataka: The weakness of kings and the importance of advisor-ministers is illustrated perfectly. This Jataka is the narrative of an outcast and destitute Brahmin and his son. They wake up at dawn and see a group of marvellous, semi-naked maidens bringing flowers to Bhuridatta. They played in the water with a glorious gem granting all desires and illuminating the entire area with their radiance. When girls and youths saw the two Brahmins, they changed their royal *naga* bodies into that of a snake and plunged into the depths. Bhuridatta, suspecting that the Brahmin and his son

could be a snake charmer and hunter, invited them to visit the marvellous world of the *nagas*. Later, after much suffering and humiliating performances in public, Bhuridatta regained his human form thanks to the magic intervention of his brothers and sister. The narrative ends with the explosion of the magic powder thrown away by one brother. The use of magic is unacceptable to Buddhism, but it was used to free the Bodhisatta.

Other less desirable examples of the Buddha's teachings are also found in the following Jatakas: No.544. **Narada Jataka**: The king is presented as the most deplorable example of a debauched man; the story ends with the king asking for a loan of 500 Dinars from a Bodhisatta loaded with gold. In the No.545. **Vidhura pandita Jataka**:- I believe it is a eulogy to speaking the truth in an eloquent convincing way. Finally, No.546. **Mahasoda Jataka**: This is a long composition of two narratives emphasizing the shrewd ability to deceive your enemy.

No.547. **Vessantara Jataka**: This illogical story is discussed in the chapter on the reverse narrative of this Jataka. What Vessantara gave away or donated at the beginning of the story led to him losing his father and the chance of become king. At the end of the story, Vessantara returns to his city, is soon appointed king, and regains all that he had lost. Vessantara's extravagant generosity, almost self-indulgence, ignored the possibility to harm people and receivers, and disregarded the personal feelings of others. This attitude in the Jataka transforms giving into a mechanism for merit-making. Giving is not self-interest, rather it is believed to be rewarded which is akin to donating in exchange for spiritual benefits. Looking at this last Jataka, I find it difficult to allocate the right *parami* to each of the 10 of them, and thus miss the morale teaching of some of the Jatakas.

Because the Mahanipata Jatakas resembled myths and legends, they remained popular since the beginning of Buddhism. As in other world religions, I conclude that the idea of religion as myth also applies to the Jatakas. The stories and particularly the last ten Jatakas belong to the cultural patrimony of humankind. Each culture had its preferences for some Jataka. For example, the oldest images of the Jatakas in India are seen at Sanchi and Amaravati and were carved between the 1st and 2nd century CE. It is uncertain, however, whether the story on the carvings corresponds to that of the Jatakas of modern translations.

In Cambodia, the earliest Jatakas were carved in the late 12th century and were selected only. The Temiya (2 examples), the Vessantara (5 or 6 examples), and the Sama Jataka (one example) were carved in the temples of Jayavarman VII (r. 1181-c.1220 CE). The reason of selected examples and their meanings are unknown. Perhaps no other Jataka story had yet reached Cambodia; or, perhaps, the Theravada sect was only partially accepted in Cambodia because Mahayana Buddhism dominated at that time; another possibility is that the only choice available was a few Jataka that was transmitted by Theravadin missionaries and pilgrims. Also, at the temple of Preah Palilai, the Vessantara and the Temyia were carved amidst a large variety of images of the Buddha meditating or in *Bhumisparsa* mudra representing events of his life.

In Thailand, the first evidence of the Jatakas is found in the late 17th to 18th centuries CE, in temples at Ayutthaya. After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, the Jataka stories appear in mural paintings in temples in the successive capitals of Thonburi and Bangkok. The Thai murals are the most complete and satisfactory examples of the Jatakas in Southeast Asia.

In Myanmar, little is known of the spread of the Jatakas. Modern scholars, however, will surely soon find them in temples even before Pagan (1044-1287 CE).

In Indonesia, although some Jataka stories were carved at the temple of Borobudur, it is beyond the scope of my personal view presented in this essay.

Despite my heretical view on the Jatakas and the beliefs they generated, I think they are a masterpiece of human thought and a fundamental part of a great religion that gained worldwide veneration and respect. The narratives have given rise to vibrant forms of Buddhist art in India, China, and parts of Southeast Asia and the Jatakas are a large contribution to the genre of Asian literature.

538. Temiya Jataka

Mugapakkha jataka

Cowell No.539

Temiya, the son of the King of Benares, decided never to succeed his father as king after having seen the horrors of severe judgment, torture and killing imposed by the royal rule. He was terrified by his father's apparent cruelty. To avoid becoming the king he decided to pretend to be a crippled mute, unable to use his limbs or voice.

His mother and nurse tried to feed him delicious foods and fruits or make him play with toys, but he remained unmoved. Then they tried to terrify him into a verbal reaction by using fire, wild elephants, blasting sounds, letting snakes coil around his body, pouring honey on him for the insects to eat, and having a man rub his sharp sword on his head threatening to cut it off, and so on. At sixteen they tempted him with beautiful maidens but he remained uninterested. At this point, the king believed Temiya was too inept to succeed him on the throne and listened to fabricated predictions foretelling disasters for the country and him. He thus ordered that his son be killed and buried in a graveyard outside town. Temiya was taken in a chariot and removed of all his regal ornaments before being slain.

Freed from his yoke of royalty, he felt relieved and, in a trial of strength, he seized the back of the chariot, lifted it high with one hand, and showed he was powerful enough to overcome his killer. When he identified himself as a Bodhisattva and gave a sermon¹⁷, the killer fell to his knees and expressed his devotion.

At the news of this event, the parents went in a procession to visit him, hoping to lure the prince home. Temiya welcomed them and explained the reasons for his behaviour. The king accepted his reasoning, and returned to the town where he distributed gifts; he also built a large ashram for those who wanted a meditative life aspiring to enter Nirvana.

¹⁷ I assume that the sermon expounded by the Bodhisatta refers the Five Precepts.

Temiya Jataka illustrations in Cambodia



Fig.1-Kampong Tralach Leu. This is perhaps one of the oldest depictions of this Jataka (end 19-early 20th centuries).



Fig.2 – Wet Soriya. Composition with several events of the *Temiya Jataka*.



Fig.3 - Wat Sisowat Ratanaram. Much better preserved and younger is the mural painted between two windows on the vihara (early-mid 20th century).

Reading starts from the Royal Palace where the king, flanked by his son, is inflicting unjust tortures and punishments on his people. To the left, Temiya remains unmoved by acts of violence near him; in this case after the threat of wild elephants, poisonous snakes, and the swords of 3 men on the site of Temiya. In the upper part of the picture, Temiya comes to life and throws in the air the chariot and converts his presumed assassin.



Fig.4 - Wat Soriya . Detail of the torture with snakes. The elephants are gone and the image of the 3 soldiers with swords is cut out at the base of the picture



Fig.5 - Tep Pranam in Longvek, *sala chan*. This painting of chipboard on the slanted inner roof displays the assassin digging the burial for Temiya, who in the meantime has come to life and swirls the chariot to impress his presumed assassin.



Fig.6 –Wat Bo Veal (Battambang). Temiya shows his power to his assassins.



Fig.7 – Wat Bakong, degraded mural of the porch of the temple (before restoration)



Fig.8 - Wat Kein Sway Krav. Detail of the lifting of the chariot



Fig.9 – Wat Rocha Koi. Temiya not perturbed when menaced to be squashed by an elephant while playing with other boys.



Fig.10 – Wat Swai Romeat. Conventional depiction of Temiya lifting the chariot



Fig. 11 – Wat Pol Chen. An assassins whirls Temiya before he wakes up, demonstrating his power and convert the presumed killers by reciting a sermon.



Fig.12 – Wat Stung Trend. Almost monochrome conventional depiction of Temiya



Fig..13 – Conventional depiction of Temiya lifting the chariot near the assassin digging the grave.

Illustrations of the *Temiya Jataka* in Thailand.



Fig.14 – Wat Chong Nonsi. This illustration of Temiya being menaced to death by a king's strong man. This is the oldest painting of this Jataka in Mainland Southeast Asia, being from the end of the 17th century.



Fig.14 – Wat Chong Nonsi – A much-degraded mural showing Temiya lifting the chariot



Fig. 6 – Wat Dararam. A large depiction of the Temiya Jataka with the King giving wrong judgement to his people. The scenes of Temiya being submitted to cruel tests are absent. Notice the presence of the characteristic scene of Temiya lifting the chariot in the upper left part of the picture.



Fig.17 – Wat Saket(Bangkok). Leaning forward from the main door of the royal palace, King Kasi emits wrong cruel judgments while holding his baby son in his arms. To the left Temiya is shown lifting the chariot close to the grave-digger. Above this is the hermitage built by Vissakam



Fi.18 - Wat Yai Intararam. Complete depiction of the Temiya Jataka. Details are shown in the following pictures (Fig.16 and 17)



Fig.19 – The tortures



Fig.20- The lifting of the chariot



Fig.21 – Wat Nai Rong. A rather complete illustration of the Temiya Jataka. Temiya is depicted on the bottom left of the picture being inflicted torture and at the top lifting the chariot



Fig.22 – Bangkok National Library. Gilded wooden cabinet



Fig.23 – Bangkok National Library. Gilded wooden cabinet

Illustration of the Temya Jataka in Laos



Fig.24 – Wat Hieng Thong. Temyia lifts the chariot then discusses with Punaka and at the end he is venerated by the *yakka*.

Illustrations of the Temiya Jataka in Burma

The text and the carving of the Golden Palace Monastery of Mandalay do not indicate or illustrate Temiya (Temiya in Burmese) energetically lifting single-handed the chariot of his presumed assassin, the coach master. Instead, he simply delivered him a sermon causing him to have great respect for the prince and bring him back to the palace where the prince explained he detested becoming king. The queen and her entourage came to him when he had become a hermit. He delivered a sermon, and they all decided to join the arhat (*rahans*) hermit's life. The King joined them later when they all passed away they became celestial beings on respectively-deserved planes.



Fig.25 – Mandalay Golden Palace. On the left half of the panel are carved several scenes of Temiya remaining undisturbed in front of a mad elephant or frightening large men. At the centre of the panel, a palace scene is evident with the queen holding a baby in her lap, with the King making a gesture (of approval or concern?). Besides the city fortified gate, a chariot and his coach master are carved and far away Temiya stands alone. All photographs & copyrights V.Roveda



Fig.26 – Details of the previous figures



Fig.27 – Shwaidagon side wooden shrines. Temiya and his presumed killer are on a chariot; the lifting of the chariot scene is missing. On the above register to the left of the picture is the Royal family probably welcoming Temiya who has become a hermit, the example followed by several members of the family that decided to retire in the wilderness of the green forest where is Temiya in the orange robe of a Buddhist monk (Photo V.Roveda).



Fig.28 – modern