

Gudrun Bühnemann

## The Buddha's (Return) Journey to Lumbinī (*lumbinīyātrā*)\*

One popular theme in Newar Buddhist art is the representation of Śākyamuni Buddha riding standing up on a serpent king while being attended by Hindu deities in service to him. An example is the twentieth-century mural on the façade of the main shrine of Patan's Uku (Oku) Bāhāḥ (also known as U Bāhāḥ or Śrīrudravarma Unkulī Mahāvihāra) (fig. 1). The Hindu divinities are lined up in a procession and perform specific services, from left to right: Mahādeva sounds his rattle drum; Nārāyaṇa blows his conch; a dark-complexioned Yama wields his staff; Varuṇa pours water; Agni carries an incense burner; Vāyu holds up his banner; Kubera scatters wealth from his bag; Sarasvatī rolls out a carpet; Brahmā sweeps the road; while Nairṛta, here shown as a Rākṣasī displaying a sword and shield in two of her four hands, leads the procession. Indra holds a parasol steady over the Buddha from behind as the latter advances mounted on a snake (commonly identified with Śeṣanāga, the king of snakes). The solicitous divinities include the well-known triad of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu. Except for Sarasvatī, the divinities can also be classified as one or the other of the directional guardians (*dikpāla*).

The mural illustrates a strand of the Buddha legend specific to Newar Buddhism. It is known as the *lumbinīyātrā*, which is understood as the Buddha's (return) journey to his birthplace after his enlightenment. Śākyamuni's *lumbinīyātrā*, described in Newari and Sanskrit texts and represented in painting, metalwork and woodcarving, has not always been recognized by scholars as such, and has not been studied in detail.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will trace the history of the *lumbinīyātrā* theme by examining descriptions in texts and artistic representations. I will then discuss elements of the *yātrā* which are also found independently in other contexts. In conclusion, I will offer some thoughts on the significance of the *lumbinīyātrā* theme.

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<sup>1</sup> For some remarks on the motif in connection with the raising of a banner (*dhvajavaropana*), see Yoshizaki 1992.

THE *LUMBINĪYĀTRĀ* IN SANSKRIT AND NEWARI TEXTS

The divinities' activities in honour of the Buddha as portrayed in the mural in Uku Bāhāḥ correspond in large part to those described in a popular song in the Newari language, except that in the song it is Yama (not Nairṛta) who leads the way. Because of its significance for the *lumbinīyātrā* theme the song is quoted here in full in the translation by S. Lienhard (1974: 37, 129):

Homage to the venerable Buddha arriving at the grove of Lumbinī (refrain).

He arrives and causes Brahmā to sweep the ground (before him); Sarasvatī to spread a carpet; Kubera, the king of the town of Alakā, to throw about money and wealth; (1)

and causes the God Vāyu to fly his banner; the god Agni to burn incense, the king of the Nāgas, Varuṇa, to make streams of water flow; (2)

Mahādeva to beat the drum; Nārāyaṇa to blow his conch; King Yama to take his staff in hand and clear the way; (3)

Indra to hold an umbrella over (him); crowds of monks to fan (him) with chowries; heaven to rain a shower of flowers. He arrives with feelings of joy. (4)

He arrives borne by Śeṣanāga, together with Nairṛta, Jñānākara and others, and accepts their worship. (5)

(This song was composed in) the year “forest-elephant-jewel”, (when) the glorious Surendra was King. The singer, a poor man, (says): (I take) refuge in the Teacher. (6)

The song, composed in 1864, is among the oldest textual sources for the legend of the Buddha's return visit to Lumbinī. It continues to be sung by *bhajan* groups in Nepal today, and its description of the various ways in which the gods honoured the Buddha has been very influential in promoting the *lumbinīyātrā* theme and in shaping its representation in art. Selected stanzas are occasionally inscribed on modern paintings. However, the earliest references to the Buddha's journey to Lumbinī appear in the works of Pandit Amṛtānanda (died 1835), written in Sanskrit. In the *Dharmakośasaṃgraha*, which the Pandit wrote in 1826, we find a brief summary of the Buddha's life, of which the *lumbinīyātrā* is an integral part. Amṛtānanda specifies that “Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara and the *lokapālas* beginning with Indra” served the Buddha on his journey to Lumbinī (*lumbinīyātrā*) (19a.6-7). The supplemental chapter 17 to Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita*,<sup>2</sup> which Amṛtānanda likely completed in

<sup>2</sup> The four chapters (14-17) Amṛtānanda authored and partially compiled from other texts were edited and translated by E.B. Cowell in 1893 and 1894. (For some of

December of 1829,<sup>3</sup> bears the title “Lumbinīyātrika” and describes the Buddha's visit to his birthplace in quite great detail (17.26-27). Stanza 24 lists the directional guardians following the Buddha, but here it is the *dikpālas* and not the Buddha who are on Śeṣa(nāga). Moreover, the formation of gods also appears in the context of the Buddha's journey to Kapilavastu, which precedes his visit to Lumbinī. The stanza lists the divinities as Vidhi (= Brahmā), Īśa (= Śiva), Acyuta (= Viṣṇu), Antaka (= Yama), the lord of waters (= Varuṇa), Śrīda (= Kubera), the lord of Bhūtas (*bhūteśa* = Īśāna), the lord of winds (= Vāyavya), Nairṛtya (= Nairṛta) and the (god of) seven flames (= Agni), all of whom can be classified as directional guardians. There is no mention of the services they perform to honour the Buddha. Stanza 26 specifies that the Buddha proceeded to Lumbinī along with monks, citizens, Brahmā, Rudra and others, with great joy and accompanied by the sounds of musical instruments. In Lumbinī the Buddha visited sites such as the *plakṣa* tree under which he was born and gave religious teachings. In another, yet unpublished work,<sup>4</sup> probably also written in the 1820s, Amṛtānanda provides two brief references to the *lumbinīyātrā* in the context of descriptions of the Hindu divinities emanating from a form of Avalokiteśvara called Sṛṣṭikartā Lokeśvara. Added to the descriptions of Brahmā's and Varuṇa's iconography is a marginal insertion in which Amṛtānanda, apparently as an afterthought, notes that “on the venerable Śākyasiṃha's journey” (*śrīśākyasiṃhasya yātrāyām*) Brahmā carries a broom (*saṃmārjanī*), and Varuṇa *dūrvā* (grass) and a water jar (*kuṇḍa*). Here “the venerable Śākyasiṃha's journey” is likely to refer to the Buddha's journey to Lumbinī, in which Brahmā appears with a broom in hand and Varuṇa pours water from a jar. The peculiar iconography of Brahmā and Varuṇa in the context of the *yātrā* was added here since it deviates from the common iconography of the two deities as Sṛṣṭikartā Lokeśvara's emanations.

Another work describing the Buddha's journey to Lumbinī is Nisthananda Bajracharya's *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, first published in 1914. This book, written in the Newari language, is a compilation of different sources and

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Amṛtānanda's sources, see Hahn 2010: 136-141.) For a German translation of this chapter, see Schmidt 1923: 120-126, and for a more recent annotated Japanese translation, see Hokazono 1982.

<sup>3</sup> For this date, see Vogel 1972: 217.

<sup>4</sup> The work is found among the Hodgson Papers (British Library, London, shelfmark “Mss Hodgson”), vol. 27, fols. 91-92. I would like to thank Iain Sinclair for providing a transcript of part of this unpublished work, which he is editing for publication in a monograph (e-mail message, dated August 30, 2009).

includes summaries and free translations from texts such as the Bhadrakalpāvadāna and the Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha. The description of the Hindu divinities attending upon the Buddha appears on p. 554,6-16, towards the end of a chapter purporting to be a translation of chapter 39 (titled “Sakalānandarājyābhiṣekaparivarta”)<sup>5</sup> of the Bhadrakalpāvadāna. There is, however, no mention of the *lumbinīyātrā* in this (or any other) chapter of the Sanskrit text of the Bhadrakalpāvadāna.<sup>6</sup> It remains unclear whether Nisthananda took his description of the *lumbinīyātrā* in his Lalitavistara Sūtra from a yet unidentified Sanskrit or Newari manuscript of the Bhadrakalpāvadāna or whether he added it from an unidentified source in order to account for a popular strand of the Buddha legend.<sup>7</sup> Nisthananda describes the divinities and their specific functions in the *yātrā* as follows: Brahmā recited hymns from the Veda; Nārāyaṇa blew his conch; Mahādeva functioned as a guardian, holding his trident; Indra, king of the gods, followed the Buddha, providing shade with a jewelled parasol consisting of thirty-two leaves; Yamarāja, staff in hand, marched in front; Varuṇa poured water; Kubera walked ahead, scattering gold-dust, puffed rice and rice grains; Agni waved incense; the god Nairṛtya (= Nairṛta) purified the ground with the five products of the cow (*pañcagavya*); Vāyu, holding up his banner, purified the ground with air; Śeṣa, the king of serpents, let the Buddha place his feet on his soft body so that he did not have to walk on the ground; the group of Gandharvas played instruments; and other gods showered flowers. The description ends with the remark that “in this way the Buddha slowly reached the Lumbinī grove”.

In contrast to the Newari song cited above, which suggests that the divinities congregated to serve the Buddha upon his arrival in Lumbinī, Nisthananda narrates that the Hindu divinities accompanied the Buddha on his way to the Lumbinī grove while performing various services. He further portrays Brahmā as reciting the Veda and not as sweeping the ground, and thereby deviates from most textual and artistic sources. Nisthananda also makes no mention of Sarasvatī, who according to

<sup>5</sup> The chapter is numbered 38 in some manuscripts; see the table in Tatelman 1997: II/lxvii and the synopsis of the chapters of the Bhadrakalpāvadāna in Oldenburg 1894: 70.

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank J. Tatelman for making available a preliminary version of his edition of the Sanskrit text of this chapter, for which he used a number of Sanskrit manuscripts.

<sup>7</sup> The *yātrā* is not described in the Sugatasaurabha, an epic poem on the life of the Buddha in Newari by Chittadhar “Hṛdaya” (1906-1982). This work, which the poet began in 1940 and completed in 1947, is based on Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita (without Amṛtānanda’s supplements) and on material on the life of the Buddha written in Hindi.

other sources rolls out a carpet. In this way Nisthananda's account is closer to the representation of the *yātrā* in the scroll painting in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the book cover reproduced in Kramrisch 1964: 117, pl. 100a, and the book cover in the Newark Museum (fig. 6) discussed below.

Two of Amṛtānanda's works (Buddhacarita 17.30 and Dharmakośa-saṃgraha 19b.6-7) and Nisthananda's Lalitavistara Sūtra (p. 555,3) specify that after visiting Lumbinī the Buddha proceeded to the Svayambhū(caitya) in the Kathmandu Valley. The Sanskrit text of the Bhadrakalpāvadāna,<sup>8</sup> which does not include a reference to the Buddha's *lumbinīyātrā*, states that the Buddha journeyed to the Caitya after visiting Kapilavastu (chapter 38/39, stanza 120), where the coronation of Rāhula's son Sakalānanda took place. The Buddha's visit to and worship of the Svayambhūcaitya is described in chapter 1 of versions of the Svayambhū-Purāṇa.<sup>9</sup> This strand of the legend serves to legitimize the worship and enhance the importance of a site very sacred to Newars, whereas the legend of the Buddha's visit to Lumbinī highlights a place of special significance in his life in an area where few Newars live. In both his introduction to the Newari song quoted above and elsewhere, Lienhard erroneously situates the description of the Hindu divinities' worship of the Buddha, which is the subject matter of the song, in the time when the Bodhisattva descends from Tuṣita heaven in order to be reborn in Lumbinī (Lienhard 1974: 129; see also Lienhard 1995: 47, n. 132 and Lienhard 2002: 56). He assumes that the song was inspired by Mahāvastu II.11, which describes the gathering of Brahmanical divinities when the Bodhisattva enters Māyā's womb. It is, however, clear that the *lumbinīyātrā* refers to an event after the Buddha's enlightenment and not before his birth.

Another not uncommon error is the misidentification of the *lumbinīyātrā* theme as "Dīpaṅkara Buddha's procession" (Slusser 1982: II, caption to pl. 175; I/284; Pal – Meech-Pekarik 1988: 133; Owens 1989: 69). Referring to the story of Sumedha, a prior incarnation of Śākyamuni, who prostrates himself before Dīpaṅkara and unties his long hair for the Buddha to tread on, Slusser (1982: I/292f.) asserts that "uniquely in Nepal and in the period of the Three Kingdoms, representations of this event invariably depict Dīpaṅkara standing not on the boy's hair but on the undulating body of a serpent, which *vāhana*-like appears to carry

<sup>8</sup> I refer to the preliminary draft of the chapter J. Tatelman kindly sent me.

<sup>9</sup> The Buddha's visit to Svayambhū is also summarized in Padmagiri's Vamśāvalī, p. 20. This chronicle does not refer to the *lumbinīyātrā*.

him along”. Crediting “Deepak Bhattacharyya, Calcutta”, she refers to a “manuscript entitled *Dīpaṅkara-vastu-paṭala*”, specified as an “uncatalogued work in the Nepalese Archives, probably from the seventeenth century, but copied from an earlier version”, which allegedly specifies *Dīpaṅkara* as “‘one who moves on a snake vehicle’ (*nāgayāna calamāna*) and ‘one who is carried by a snake’ (*ahināyaka*)”. Given these vague references, it is impossible to verify the information, and other evidence supporting this assumption has not been found. “*Dīpaṅkaravastu*” is known as the name of a section of the *Mahāvastu*. However, the standard printed version of the text makes no reference to *Dīpaṅkara* on a snake mount. The confusion of the *lumbinīyātrā* scene with *Dīpaṅkara* Buddha’s procession is likely to have been caused by the fact that the cult of *Dīpaṅkara* Buddha overshadowed that of *Śākyamuni* Buddha in Nepal and that *Dīpaṅkara* is the processional Buddha *par excellence*, whose *yātrā* is well known. The standing posture of *Śākyamuni* in the *yātrā* must have further led to his misidentification as *Dīpaṅkara* Buddha (which is occasionally repeated by less knowledgeable tourist guides in Nepal). The appearance of a monkey holding a jackfruit among the divinities in the procession may have also contributed to the confusion, since it calls to mind the story of the monkey *Jñānākara* in the *Kapīśāvadāna*/*Kapīśāvadāna*<sup>10</sup> offering the fruit to *Dīpaṅkara*. I assume that the monkey’s inclusion in the *yātrā* (occasionally two or more monkeys are shown in artistic representations) merely reflects the desire to include different kinds of beings in the procession and to incorporate a reference to this well-known story.

#### REPRESENTATIONS OF THE *LUMBINĪYĀTRĀ* IN ART

In contrast to the limited extant textual material on the *lumbinīyātrā*, we find a large number of artistic depictions of the scene. They may date back to the seventeenth or eighteenth century but appear to have become popular from the late nineteenth century onwards. Among the oldest representations of the *lumbinīyātrā*, or at least of the theme at an early stage of development, is a carving on a wooden window in Kathmandu’s *Chuṣya Bāhāḥ* (also called *Guṇākara Mahāvihāra*) (fig. 2), reproduced in Bajracharya 2004: 5. Some of the woodwork in the *Bāhāḥ*, including the struts, has been dated to the seventeenth century (Kooij 1977: 41), but the carving discussed here appears to be much later, perhaps from the middle or end of the nineteenth century. Since the *Bāhāḥ*

<sup>10</sup> For a study of this *avadāna*, see Both 1995.

was repeatedly renovated it is difficult to determine the woodcarving's date. Four divinities accompany the Buddha, who stands on a snake. Mahādeva, Brahmā and Nārāyaṇa are visible to the right and appear to be walking, while Indra, to the left, is holding a parasol over the Buddha. A Rākṣasa stands behind Indra, blowing a trumpet. This representation is somewhat similar to the oldest dated one, from 1898, on the tympanum (*toraṇa*) of Kathmandu's Lāyḱū Bahī (also known as Rājakula Vihāra or Śrīnaka Vihāra) (fig. 3). To the left, three four-armed divinities are visible, namely Mahādeva and two gods bearing Vaiṣṇava attributes. To the right is Indra, again holding a parasol over the Buddha. Locke (1985: 265) identifies the scene as the "Buddha's welcome at Lumbinī", while Slusser misidentifies it as illustrating Dīpaṅkara Buddha's "world-wide progress to teach the Law" (1982: II, caption to pl. 483).

The two woodcarvings present a front view of the Buddha, who is standing and displaying the gestures of wish-granting and protection. In later representations of the *yātrā*, the Buddha is portrayed, in profile, as walking, and often as carrying a begging bowl.

In depictions of the *lumbinīyātrā*, the number of divinities paying homage sometimes exceeds thirty. In later art, the ten directional guardians clearly form the core group. The divinities serve the Buddha in specific ways, but the services they perform vary somewhat from one representation to the next, as do the places the gods occupy in the procession. Common features are that the Buddha travels upright on a snake and that Indra holds a parasol over him. With a few exceptions Brahmā sweeps the road with a broom.

In Patan's Golden Temple (Kvā Bāhāḥ, Hiraṇyavarṇa Mahāvihāra) a representation of the *lumbinīyātrā* in gilded copper relief appears on the right side of the façade of the main shrine of Śākyamuni Buddha. Other, more standard scenes from the Buddha legend, ending with the *parinirvāṇa*, are seen on the left side. This two-part relief dates from 1909. Gail (1991: 37, with pl. XXX) briefly describes and reproduces part of the scene on the right-hand side, which he considers to be a representation of Hindu deities in a random sequence, dancing and playing musical instruments. More than thirty inscribed figures, including animals, Apsaras and directional guardians, participate in the procession. In the last section of this relief we see familiar divinities: Sarasvatī plays her lute; she is separated from the remaining divinities by several other figures. Bhairavarāja (i.e., Nairṛta) displays a sword and other attributes. Vāyudeva holds his banner aloft. Agni carries an incense burner. Kuberaṛāja scatters coins. Varuṇarāja pours water from a pot.



Yamarāja rolls out a carpet, and Nārāyaṇa blows his conch. Brahmā sweeps with a broom, and Maheśvara pours water from a jar, while two two-armed gods (labelled merely *devaloka*) are walking in front of Śākyamuni, who is riding standing up on a snake. Indra walks behind the Buddha, holding a parasol over him, and is followed by the standard group of five monks (fig. 4).

The *yātrā* is also depicted in line drawings in sketchbooks – for example, in manuscript 440 in the private collection of Ian Alsop (Santa Fe), dating perhaps from the early twentieth century (fig. 5).<sup>11</sup> In the inscribed line drawing, the following divinities, from left to right, serve the Buddha: Varuṇa pours water; Mahādeva sounds his rattle drum; Nārāyaṇa blows his conch; Agni carries an incense burner; Vāyu holds up his banner; Brahmā sweeps the ground with a broom; Kubera scatters coins; Sarasvatī rolls out a carpet; a Rākṣasa (= Nairṛta), both arms raised, leads the way; Indra holds a parasol steady over the Buddha from behind. The Buddha, flanked by two monks wielding yak-tails, is riding standing up on the body of a serpent. Yama, who is included in most other sources, is here missing.

A possibly mid-nineteenth-century or early-twentieth-century painted scroll, preserved in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (acc. no. 2000-2-10),<sup>12</sup> shows Indra, as usual, holding a parasol over the Buddha, who together with Indra and a monk stands on a snake. A procession of nine divinities and twenty-two other figures (including donors) is lined up in front of the Buddha. The divinities are, from left to right: Mahādeva, Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa, Agni, Sarasvatī (?), Nairṛta, Varuṇa, Vāyu and Kubera. Brahmā is holding a water jar along with other implements but does no sweeping, and none of the gods is rolling out a carpet. Different types of trees separate the figures. Somewhat similar are the representations of the divinities on a painted wooden book cover in the Newark Museum (an inverted image is printed in Pal – Meech-Pekarik 1988: 110, pl. 34a) and on a book cover of a manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*<sup>13</sup> reproduced in Kramrisch 1964: 117, pl. 100a, now in the Mu-

<sup>11</sup> A similar line drawing appears in sketchbook M.82.169.2, preserved in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; it dates from the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century. The somewhat similar drawing in manuscript 82.261 in the Newark Museum inexplicably omits Varuṇa.

<sup>12</sup> The painting, possibly from Bhaktapur, can be viewed at: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/93622.html?mulR=27674> (last accessed August 17, 2012). Its dimensions are specified as 9 inches x approximately 15 feet (22.9 x 457.2 cm).

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear whether the book cover from an anonymous owner reproduced in Kramrisch 1964: 117, pl. 100a and ascribed to the early eighteenth century, corresponds



seum of Fine Arts, Boston (acc. no. 65.1670) and ascribed to the seventeenth century. The divinities on the book cover in the Newark Museum (fig. 6) are: Mahādeva, Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa, Agni, Yama, Varuṇa, Kuberā, Vāyu and Nairṛta. Indra is standing behind the Buddha and holding a parasol over him. Again, none of the gods is portrayed as sweeping the road or rolling out a carpet.

In a painting of the *lumbinīyātrā* (fig. 7) by the renowned artist Anandamuni Shakya (1903-1944) from Itum Bāhāḥ, Kathmandu, the Hindu deities offer the following services (front of the procession, from left to right): Nairṛta brandishes a sword; Yama wields his staff; Agni carries an incense burner, and Vāyu holds up his banner. Brahmā sweeps the ground with a broom; Varuṇa pours water; Sarasvatī rolls out a carpet; Mahādeva sounds his rattle drum; Nārāyaṇa blows his conch; and Kuberā scatters coins. Two seated monkeys, each holding a jackfruit, watch from a distance. The participants in the procession and the services they perform are identical with the ones seen in the sketchbook (fig. 5), except that Yama is missing in the latter and a few details, such as the number of arms of the divinities, differ. Anandamuni Shakya's painting has been reproduced commercially and has influenced later visual representations of the *lumbinīyātrā* theme.<sup>14</sup>

Gellner reports that when he carried out his research in the Kathmandu Valley in the 1980s he saw the *lumbinīyātrā* painted “on many walls” in Patan (1992: 97). Nowadays paintings of the *yātrā* are occasionally seen on the façades of *vihāras*. The mural in Uku Bāhāḥ has already been described. Another mural of the *yātrā*, forming part of a set of scenes from Śākyamuni's life, is found on the façade of Sikhamu Bāhāḥ (Tarmūla Mahāvihāra), next to Kathmandu's Kumārī House. This mural, which dates from approximately 1982, is reproduced in Locke 1985: 259 and has been recently touched up. Another mural of the *yātrā* is found on the façade of a building adjacent to the main shrine of Banepa's Nhū Bāhāḥ.<sup>15</sup> Yet another mural of the *yātrā* was previously seen above the

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to the one mentioned in Sakya – Vaidya 1970: 9. The authors note that a manuscript containing the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* from a private collection in Patan came with wooden book covers, one of which showed “the reception of Lord Buddha on his return to Lumbini, his birth place”. The manuscript is from Indradeva's time (twelfth century) but the painted book cover could have been attached to it much later.

<sup>14</sup> One of these later representations is reproduced in Shrestha 2008: 425. For a reference to Anandamuni's painting, see Sinha 1976: 173. Commercially available prints of the painting are sometimes inscribed in Newari with the phrase “Lord Buddha has come to the Lumbinī grove” (*bhagavān buddha lumbinibanasa bijyāḥgu*).

<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank Iain Sinclair for the information and for sending me photographs. The mural is reproduced in Locke 1985: 471 but the details cannot be discerned.

entrance to Makhan Bāhāḥ (Ratnakīrti Vihāra) in Kathmandu. It is reproduced in Slusser 1982: II, pl. 175 but misidentified in the caption as “Dīpaṅkara Buddha’s procession”. It is also reproduced in Pal 1974-1978: II, pl. 10, who in the caption dates the entrance to the nineteenth century. However, the mural itself may only date from the 1960s.

Paintings of the *lumbinīyātrā* are still being commissioned and the theme continues to be executed also in woodcarving. The Nrityamandala Mahavihara in Portland, Oregon, which is the first Newar temple in the West (consecrated in November 2009), installed a painted woodcarving of the *lumbinīyātrā*, acquired at the *audyogika kṣetra* at Patan, dedicated to the promotion of handicrafts, to decorate the plinth of the altar in the temple, located in the courtyard of the Mahavihara complex. A diorama of the *lumbinīyātrā* (fig. 8) of about one metre in length has been put on show in Nāg Bāhāḥ, Patan on the full moon day of the *indrayātrā* festival and during the month of *gumlā* (*śrāvaṇa/bhādra*).<sup>16</sup> From left to right a blue-complexioned Nairṛta, holding up a staff, leads the way; Varuṇa, of green complexion, pours water from a jar; a yellow-complexioned four-headed Brahmā sweeps with a broom; Nārāyaṇa, of green complexion, blows his conch; a white-complexioned dancing Mahādeva sounds his rattle drum; a white-complexioned, white-robed Sarasvatī, with hands lowered and perhaps offering flowers, stands in front of the Buddha. As usual, Indra holds a parasol over the Buddha, who is standing on a snake.

Devotees have also enacted the *lumbinīyātrā*. Ratna Jyoti Shakya (1980: 21-25) describes how the members of Patan’s Uku Bāhāḥ, on the one occasion of the Buddha Jayantī festival, imitated the procession of the deities when welcoming the Buddha on his arrival in Lumbinī. Shakya provides interesting details about the robes worn and roles played by Indra, Brahmā, Sarasvatī, Kubera, Varuṇa, Mahādeva, Nārāyaṇa, Vāyu, Agni, Yamarāja and Rākṣasa/Nairṛtya (= Nairṛta), whom members of the Bāhāḥ impersonated, and specifically states that Indra carried a parasol, Brahmā swept the road and Sarasvatī rolled out a carpet. A photograph (Shakya 1980: 22+) shows the participants wearing their respective costumes.

<sup>16</sup> I would like to thank Iain Sinclair and Manik Bajracharya for this information, communicated to me in July 2009.

ELEMENTS OF THE *LUMBINĪYĀTRĀ* THEME SHARED  
WITH OTHER LEGENDARY MATERIAL

As noted before, the earliest textual references to the *lumbinīyātrā* are found in Pandit Amṛtānanda's works, dating from the 1820s. Amṛtānanda was familiar with the tradition according to which the Buddha visited his birthplace after his enlightenment, but details of this visit had not yet become standardized. Amṛtānanda's works, as far as they are accessible, do not describe the Buddha as travelling to Lumbinī on a serpent king and provide only limited details about the specific functions the divinities perform in his honour. In contrast, the description of the *yātrā* in the Newari song of 1864 contains all such details, as also seen in more recent artistic representations. In Amṛtānanda's time the *lumbinīyātrā* strand of the Buddha legend must have been still in the process of formation, absorbing, as it gradually took shape, elements from extant legendary material and influences from older representations in art. I shall now examine some of these elements and possible influences.

### 1. The Snake as a Mount

That the Buddha travels standing upright on a serpent king is a standard feature of artistic representations of the *lumbinīyātrā*. Such a representation of the Buddha is specific to Nepal and may seem unusual at first. Given the importance of serpents in the mythology of Nepal, however, it is not surprising to find Śeṣanāga in service to the Buddha, especially in a context in which other major Hindu gods participate in his worship. Indeed, the snake as a mount of Śākyamuni is also found independently in other contexts. Chapter 1 of the version of the Svayambhūpurāṇa published as the Bṛhatsvayambhūpurāṇa describes how Śākyamuni Buddha, starting from Jetavana monastery and accompanied by his entourage, went to the Kathmandu Valley to worship the Svayambhūcaitya. On their journey, the Buddha's disciples and monks rode animal mounts, such as bulls, elephants, rams, horses, peacocks, geese, *garuḍas* and snakes (p. 22,6-16), but there is no reference to the Buddha himself travelling on a serpent king. However, the text inscribed in Newari on an early-nineteenth-century painting illustrating mythological stories from the Svayambhūpurāṇa (the painting was commissioned by B.H. Hodgson and is now preserved in the Musée Guimet, Paris) states that Śeṣanāga requested the Buddha to step onto his body when he saw that Ānanda had mounted a lion and that all the other monks were also travelling on mounts (Lienhard 2009: 35, 43). Scenes 5

and 6 of the painting (Lienhard 2009: 55, see also p. 14-15, 34) (fig. 9) depict the Buddha and Śeṣanāga. In scene 5, Śeṣanāga (apparently offering his services) is seen in front of the Buddha, who is walking on foot, while his disciples are seated on various animal mounts. In scene 6, the Buddha is seen standing on Śeṣanāga as a monkey offers a jackfruit to him. It should, however, be noted that the painting in the Musée Guimet does not feature a reception of the Buddha at the Svayambhūcaitya by gods of approximately the same number as in the *lumbinīyātrā* scene.

One scene from the episodes in the Buddha's life painted on the wooden book covers of a manuscript and reproduced in Pal 1974-1978: II, pl. 47, and Pal – Meech-Pekarik 1988: 133, pl. 50, shows the Buddha, in profile, walking on a serpent king and bearing a begging bowl, followed by Indra holding a parasol over him from behind. A monk wielding a yak-tail and Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā and Mahādeva walk in front. The inscribed text in Newari erroneously reads: *bodhisatva brahmā pramukha-na devalokana caṃkrama jātrā yānā* || “The Bodhisat[t]va (and) the gods led by Brahmā performed the *caṃkrama yātrā*.” The scene seems to represent the Buddha's descent at Sāṃkāśya. Pal ascribed the paintings on the book covers to the eighteenth century but they appear, on the basis of stylistic features, to belong to the nineteenth century. A similar scene is painted on the inside of a wooden book cover from Nepal (Buescher 2011: 15, fig. 11).

A somewhat similar scene (inscribed *rupinījātrā*) from a painted scroll depicting events in the Buddha's life is reproduced in Pal 1974-1978: II, pl. 146. The Buddha is portrayed, in profile, as walking on a snake, followed by an entourage that includes several Hindu gods. Indra holds a parasol from behind, while Brahmā, Mahādeva and Nārāyaṇa walk in front of the procession. The scroll dates from 1694 CE.

The snake as a mount of divine figures may have been part of a folk tradition. As mentioned before, according to stanza 24 of the “Lumbinīyātrika”, Amṛtānanda's supplemental chapter 17 to the Buddhacarita, it is the *dikpālas* (and not the Buddha) who are standing on Śeṣa(nāga) on the Buddha's journey to Kapilavastu (which precedes his visit to Lumbinī).

An unusual, possibly eleventh-century Pāla sculpture in the National Museum, New Delhi,<sup>17</sup> (fig. 10) shows a seated Avalokiteśvara with min-

<sup>17</sup> Acc. no. 60.1501. The sculpture is published in Sharma 2004: fig. 90 and described on p. 143-145. A photograph is also found in The Huntington Archive, Digital Database Collection, scan no. 0000021.

atures of the five Tathāgatas above his head. Below the stalk of the lotus on which he is seated can be seen a snake on which six smaller figures are standing, apparently worshipping the Lokeśvara. The identity of the six figures remains unclear, but the formation is vaguely reminiscent of the procession of divinities in the Buddha's *lumbinīyātrā*. The closest textual reference is in a *sādhana* of Halāhala-Lokeśvara, where a large snake is described as supporting a red lotus on which Halāhala-Lokeśvara is sitting.<sup>18</sup> Although the iconography of this form of Halāhala-Lokeśvara does not correspond with that of the sculpture, it points to an iconographic tradition according to which a snake supports a lotus on which Avalokiteśvara is sitting. It may then have occurred to the artist to depict worshipping deities standing on the snake. In this context I may also mention a relief from the Kuṣāṇa period, which shows several figures standing on a large snake positioned below a meditating Buddha (Tiwari – Tiwari 2008-2009: pl. 17.1).

Thus it is possible that the representation of the Buddha travelling on a serpent king, as found in the *lumbinīyātrā*, was inspired by such images.

## 2. The Reception of a Buddhist Figure by the Directional Guardians

References to Lumbinī as the Buddha's birthplace appear in major life-stories of the Buddha, and there are many old representations of the birth scene in Indian art. We early on find short descriptions and artistic depictions of Brahmanical divinities worshipping the Buddha as a new-born child. In the *lumbinīyātrā*, the group of worshipping divinities usually consists of the directional guardians plus Sarasvatī and Śeṣanāga. In this connection it should be mentioned that the Himavatkhanda (chapter 64.41-45), attributed to the Skandapurāṇa, narrates how the directional guardians served the Buddha (here introduced as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu) at the time of his *upanayana* when he was seven years old: Brahmā handed him a staff, and Hara an alms-bowl, while Indra gave him a parasol, and Varuṇa and Vāyu fanned him with yak-tails. The remaining directional guardians, too, were joyfully ministering to the Buddha's needs.

The Bṛhatsvayambhūpurāṇa describes how Śākyamuni (who in this version of the Purāṇa is apparently travelling on foot) arrived at the hill

<sup>18</sup> See Sāadhanamālā, no. 28 (I/68,15 in Bhattacharyya's edition and p. 103,10 in Sakuma's edition). I would like to thank R. Sakuma for this reference.

on which the Svayambhūcaitya is located and how the grove (*vana*) of trees there immediately manifested auspicious signs. Upon his arrival Hindu divinities received the Buddha and performed special services for him (p. 24,11-25,18): Brahmā took up a position in front of the Buddha, fanning him with whisks (*vyañjanair* [read: *vyajanair*] *vījayan*) while reciting the Vedas. The lord of the Bhūtas (i.e., Śiva) rushed ahead, keeping evil people away and scattering grains of unhusked rice (*akṣata*). Indra was positioned behind the Buddha and held a jewelled parasol over him. Agni burnt various kinds of incense for the Buddha. Yama kept (wicked people) at bay with his staff. Nairṛtya (= Nairṛta), the lord of Rākṣasas, drove away evil people and Māras. Varuṇa sprinkled the path with scented water from a golden vessel. Vāyu held up his banner, Kubera worshipped with jewels, and Mādhava (i.e., Viṣṇu) blew his conch shell, while numerous other beings worshipped in various ways.

This description of Śākyamuni's reception by the divinities at the grove surrounding the Svayambhūcaitya is similar to the one described in connection with the Buddha's journey to or arrival at the Lumbinī grove. One minor difference is that the reception at the Caitya according to this text does not include Sarasvatī and does not specify the Buddha as travelling on a serpent king.

A description of the Hindu divinities performing similar services for a Buddhist figure is also found in another context, as attested in two chronicles. The *Vaṃśāvalī* compiled by Amṛtānanda's nephew Guṇānanda in the last quarter of the nineteenth century describes the same series of services performed for Avalokiteśvara-Matsyendranātha when being transported to the Kathmandu Valley. The description of this event is as follows (p. 145f.):

... Brahmā swept the road, reciting Vedas as he did so; Vishnu blew the sankha; Mahādeva sprinkled kalas-water on the road; Indra held an umbrella; Yama-rāj lighted the incense; Varuna sprinkled water from a sankha, and rain fell; Kuvera scattered riches; Agni displayed light; Nairitya removed obstacles; Vāyu held the flag; and Īśhān scared away devils. In this manner all the gods showed their respect, while bringing in Āryāvalokiteswara-Matsyendranātha.

A somewhat similar description from another, unidentified *Vaṃśāvalī* is summarized in Lévi 1905-1908: I/350. The similarity of the account pertaining to Matsyendranātha-Lokeśvara to the description of the services the divinities performed for the Buddha during the *lumbinīyātrā* is striking. Minor differences are that Yama and Sarasvatī are not mentioned in the two chronicles, whereas Īśāna is. More significantly, Śeṣanāga is not featured. It seems that the description of the direc-

tional guardians performing a variety of services for a Buddhist figure was incorporated into different contexts and included in accounts of important events. It is impossible to say in which context it appeared the earliest. It is, however, its inclusion in the Buddha's *lumbinīyātrā* that made the scene popular.

### 3. The Specific Functions of Indra and Brahmā as the Buddha's Attendants

Depictions of Brahmanical divinities attending upon Śākyamuni at important events in his life are already found in Pāla art. One common feature of the *lumbinīyātrā* is that Indra holds a parasol over the Buddha; in addition, Brahmā is frequently sweeping the road with a broom. The roles of these two gods can be traced to older representations in art. Particularly relevant in this context are representations of Indra and Brahmā waiting upon the Buddha as he descends from the heaven of the *trāyastriṃśa* gods (the heaven of the thirty-three gods) to Sāṃkāśya after instructing his mother Māyā, who had been reborn in this heaven. The Buddha's descent was already being depicted in the art of Gandhāra. Within Pāla art, an eleventh- or twelfth-century sculpture from Bengal preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, for example, shows Indra holding a parasol over the Buddha, and Brahmā a yak-tail (fig. 11).<sup>19</sup> The yak-tail is held very low and resembles a broom, which reminds us of Brahmā in the *lumbinīyātrā*, who is there seen sweeping the road with a broom. Specific descriptions of the Buddha's descent in the company of Brahmā wielding a jewelled yak-tail and Indra holding a hundred-ribbed parasol over him are found in the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya<sup>20</sup> and

<sup>19</sup> The sculpture is described in Haque – Gail 2008: 161 (no. 78); see also pl. 473. Numerous representations in Pāla (and a few in Gupta) art show the Buddha being attended by Brahmā wielding a yak-tail, and Indra a parasol. They are not listed here for reasons of space; some information can be found in Allinger 2010. Two additional examples in which Brahmā holds the yak-tail very low so that it resembles a broom are (1) a sculpture in the Ashutosh Museum, Kolkata (The Huntington Archive, Digital Database Collection, scan no. 0006326) and (2) a painting from an illustrated manuscript of a Prajñāpāramitā text from Nālandā, preserved in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (The Huntington Archive, Digital Database Collection, scan no. 0059519). For a discussion of Brahmā's yak-tail and Indra's parasol, see Bautze-Pieron 1996: 111, 116 with fig. 11 and 14.

<sup>20</sup> See the passage in the Tibetan translation of the Mūlasarvāstivādinaya, vol. XLIV (Ne): Vinayakṣudraka 156,2,1 (85a), summarized in Panglung 1981: 192f. and translated into English in Rockhill 1885: 81. References to texts and images pertaining in general to the Buddha's descent at Sāṃkāśya can be found in Schlingloff 2000: I/476-487.



in Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā* (14.5cd-6). Thus the specific functions of Indra and Brahmā in the *lumbinīyātrā* can be traced to earlier sources and had long been established.

#### 4. Hindu Divinities Forming a Procession in Honour of the Buddha

None of the textual sources state explicitly that the divinities in the *yātrā* formed a procession, although such a formation is commonly depicted in works of art. Some of them portray the Buddha as being welcomed by Hindu divinities who are lined up in a procession in front of him, while others show the Buddha as part of a procession of Hindu divinities who attend upon him. A formation of Hindu divinities suggestive of a procession to honour the Buddha can be traced to representations in earlier art. One example is a twelfth- or thirteenth-century sculpture from Bengal, preserved in the Dhammarājika Mahāvihāra outside of Dhaka, which shows the Buddha flanked by seven figures on each side, including Gaṇeśa, on the occasion of his *parinirvāṇa* (fig. 12).<sup>21</sup>

It thus appears that the *lumbinīyātrā* theme shares elements with other legends and draws on patterns from older artistic representations. These patterns resurfaced after a very long gap in time.

#### ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *LUMBINĪYĀTRĀ* THEME

As for the significance of the *lumbinīyātrā* theme, David Gellner has already noted the obvious subordination of the Brahmanical/Hindu deities to the Buddha (1992: 96f.). Although the scene fully acknowledges the existence of the Hindu divinities, it must have offended some Hindus to see their major deities perform servant-like duties for the Buddha – especially Brahmā sweeping the ground. Some modern representations of the *yātrā* clearly assign a low rank to some of the Hindu divinities. In Anandamuni Shākya's painting (fig. 7) (and in later paintings influenced by it) Nairṛta, Yama, Agni and Vāyu are portrayed with only their lower bodies covered, and those also with tiger-skins. A large painting by the well-known *paubhā* painter Prem Man Chitrakar (born in 1944) and his former student Deepak K. Joshi (born in 1963), painted in the 1980s, previously adorned one of the interior walls of the Newar temple

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed description of the sculpture, see Haque – Gail 2008: 199-230 (no. 530) in connection with pl. 38.

in Lumbinī. The services the divinities performed for the Buddha in this painting were the ones detailed in the above-quoted song in the Newari language, of which some text<sup>22</sup> was inscribed below the painting. The painting was removed in 2009 because the monk in charge felt it to be controversial. It was then replaced by a smaller commercially available reproduction of the *yātrā*, which was hung on the same wall.<sup>23</sup> The smaller size probably made the replacement seem less offensive.

The *lumbinīyātrā* theme became popular in art from the late nineteenth century onward, and the earliest textual references to it date from the 1820s. In 1768 Prṭhvī Nārāyaṇa Shāh conquered the three Malla kingdoms. Under the Gorkha invaders Hinduism was officially established in the Kathmandu Valley. The *lumbinīyātrā* theme may have been a reaction on the part of Newar Buddhists to what was perceived as Hindu encroachment. The *yātrā* theme represents, on the surface, an acknowledgement of the major Hindu divinities. At the same time it subordinates them, reassuring a Buddhist observer that Hinduism is merely a part of Buddhism. Representations of the *yātrā* became popular at the same time as a form of Avalokiteśvara called Sṛṣṭikartā (“emanator”) Lokeśvara was being popularized.<sup>24</sup> This Lokeśvara emanates the major Hindu divinities from different parts of his body. Both images, that of Śākyamuni Buddha being attended by the Hindu divinities in the *lumbinīyātrā* and that of Avalokiteśvara emanating Hindu divinities, convey the message of the superiority of the most important Buddhist figures over Hindu divinities.

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<sup>22</sup> Stanza 1 and the last part of stanza 4 were inscribed below the painting.

<sup>23</sup> I would like to thank Christoph Cüppers for providing this information (e-mail message, dated August 9, 2009) and for sending photographs of the original painting.

<sup>24</sup> On the earliest images of this Lokeśvara, see Bühnemann 2012: 351-352.

- Fig. 6 A book cover showing the *lumbinīyātrā*; Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey (acc. no. 2003.61.4a-1) (photograph: Gudrun Bühnemann)
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Fig. 1: Mural, Uku (Oku) Bāhāh, Patan



Fig. 2: Carving, Chuṣya Bāhāh, Kathmandu





Fig. 3: Tympanum, Lāyākū Bahī, Kathmandu (detail)





Fig. 6: Book cover, Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey





Fig. 7: Painting by Anandamuni Shakya (commercial reproduction)



Fig. 8: Diorama, Nāg Bāhāḥ, Patan



Fig. 9: Svayambhūpurāṇa painting, Musée Guimet, Paris (detail)





Fig. 10: Avalokiteśvara, National Museum, New Delhi



Fig. 11: The Buddha's descent, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, Bangladesh





Fig. 12: Parinirvāṇa, Dhammarājika Mahāvihāra, Kamalapur, Dhaka, Bangladesh