

## PLATE XXVI

## VAISRAVAṆA'S PROGRESS

THE excellently preserved painting (Ch. xxxvii. 002) which this Plate reproduces on a scale of slightly over one-half presents to us the triumphant progress of Vaiśravaṇa, Guardian of the North and the principal of the Lokapālas, or Protectors of the Four Regions. The important position which the Lokapālas still enjoy in popular Buddhist worship of the Far East is clearly marked by the frequency of their representation among our Ch'ien-fo-tung paintings. This again fully agrees with the early origin of their conception as attested by Indian art and tradition, and with what numerous frescoes and sculptures brought to light by recent excavations in Chinese Turkeṣtān show as to their popularity in Central-Asian Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

The foremost place among the Lokapālas of our paintings is occupied by Vaiśravaṇa, the Protector of the Northern Region. This is fully accounted for by the early Indian notion which identified this particular 'world-protector' with Kubera, the Hindu god of wealth, King of the Yakṣas. A further reason may be sought in the special worship which Vaiśravaṇa as *genius loci* enjoyed at Khotan, a main seat of Buddhism in Eastern Turkeṣtān and one in close relations with Tun-huang.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the frequent appearance of his figure in our banners, Vaiśravaṇa's pre-eminent position is attested by the fact that, alone among the Protectors of the Regions, he is found in pictures attended by his demon host and in triumphant procession.

With one of these pictures, the small Kakemono-shaped silk painting reproduced in Plate XLV and a work of high artistic merit, we shall concern ourselves below. The other shown by our Plate, if not so careful in design and execution, is yet remarkable for its spirited composition and displays points of distinct iconographic interest. It represents Vaiśravaṇa riding in full gallop across the ocean accompanied by a numerous host representing his army of Yakṣas, or demons. He is seen, as always, in the guise of a warrior king, and wears here a young and strongly human appearance. Mounted on a white horse with scarlet mane and tail, he turns back in the saddle and with his mouth open seems to call to his followers. The right hand is raised, while the left grasps the reins. The straight nose and eyes give a distinctly Western look to his face, and in agreement with this are the light blue iris of the eyes and the dark brown colour of the hair, including a recurved moustache and tufts of beard and whiskers.

A long close-fitting coat of scale armour,<sup>53</sup> coloured yellow with scarlet straps and border, reaches down below the knee. A leather skirt-piece ornamented with flowers is secured round the waist and hips, and below the coat floats out a long olive-green under-robe. A high three-leaved crown covers the head; its shape and the long streamers flying up from behind it distinctly suggest derivation from Persian models. There are more indications also of Iranian influence in details of this and other Lokapāla pictures; but this is not the place to discuss them.<sup>54</sup> Broad streamers of flame rise from Vaiśravaṇa's shoulders and take the place of a nimbus.

There are points of interest also in the accoutrement of Vaiśravaṇa's horse. Its head, which is very small in proportion to neck and body, is protected by a frontlet of scale-armour. Above the head-stall is fixed a pair of black and white feathers. The numerous pompon-like knobs or tassels which hang from the breast-band and crupper belong to a type of 'horse-millinery' which is well known from Buddhist paintings of Central Asia and India and is

<sup>51</sup> For a brief summary of the facts bearing on the iconographic history of the Lokapāla figures in their transition from India and Central Asia to China, cf. e. g. *Serindia*, pp. 870 sqq., where the principal authorities are indicated.

<sup>52</sup> See *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 158, 252 sq.

<sup>53</sup> The treatment of the scales, apparently represented

by three-armed crosses, is peculiar and differs from the several methods of scale armour which other Lokapāla figures (see e. g. Plate XLVII) usually display. But it is found again on Vaiśravaṇa's armour in Plate XLV and may possibly be meant for a special kind of mail.

<sup>54</sup> For some of such indications, see *Serindia*, pp. 871 sq., 874.