

he symbolizes the way of salvation, and for Chinese eyes this may seem appropriately replaced by the vision of a heavenly abode. The large paintings show us how completely the hope of Sukhāvātī, the Buddhist Paradise, has effaced the desire of Nirvāṇa in the minds of pious Chinese.

The succeeding scene represents the Bodhisattva's miraculous Descent or Conception as revealed to his mother in her dream. In a court of the palace of Kapilavastu Queen Māyā is shown lying asleep upon a couch placed within a projecting apartment. Its green rush-blinds are partly rolled up. The infant Bodhisattva is seen kneeling with hands clasped on the back of the traditional white elephant, which gallops towards Māyā; two attendants kneel beside him. The whole group, enclosed within a circular space, is carried on a cloud and thus clearly marked as a vision.<sup>80</sup>

The bottom scene, which, unlike the rest, is not to be found among the very numerous representations of Gautama's Nativity in Graeco-Buddhist sculpture, seems to show Māyā's return to her father's palace after the dream.<sup>81</sup> Māyā, distinguished by a golden ornament on her head, is seen walking with a woman attendant from the palace of Kapilavastu. Both wear wide-sleeved over-jackets in which they muffle their hands.

In the companion banner (Ch. lv. 0010) on the right we see scenes which continue the story of the Nativity in chronological sequence. The top scene shows Māyā asleep in the same pavilion and pose as in the 'Descent' scene, but with three figures kneeling outside to the left on a cloud and in adoring attitude. The interpretation is uncertain. The succeeding scene, though also absent in the Gandhāra reliefs, is quite clear in its character. It presents to us Māyā on her way to the Lumbinī garden. She is seated in a gaily coloured palanquin carried by four bearers, whose rapid movement is excellently expressed. Two more men carry trestles on which to set the palanquin down.

Immediately below we see the miraculous birth of Gautama Bodhisattva, a familiar subject in Buddhist art of all times and regions. The child's issue from the mother's right flank and her pose grasping a bough are in close conformity with Indian tradition. But the ingenious use made of Māyā's wide-hanging sleeve discreetly to screen the act of birth seems characteristically Chinese. The infant is springing downwards where a woman attendant kneels to receive him on a cloth. A white lotus appears where he is about to fall.

The 'Nativity' series is completed in the lowest panel by the famous incident of the Seven Steps, with lotuses springing up beneath where the Infant Bodhisattva has set his feet. To the right stands Māyā, with her hands muffled in her long sleeves and her head turned back towards the young child. To the left of him stand two women attendants with bowed heads and hands raised in wonder or adoration. Enough of the landscape remains to show that the scene was laid in the same grounds as the preceding two. The Chinese inscription in the cartouche confirms the interpretation.

The scene of the Seven Steps appears also at the bottom of the silk banner (Ch. 00114), which is shown in the middle of the Plate reduced to one-third of its size. It is painted in a more ornate style than the other two, but lacks their sense of life and space. Here the child steps forward with an air of difficulty but determination, the left arm stretched upwards. Four ladies bend over him in surprise and adoration. Behind to the left appear a fifth lady and a man wearing a belted yellow robe and tailed cap. Their identity is doubtful.

The scene is preceded by the Bath of the Infant. The newly born Bodhisattva stands in a golden laver, raised on a stand between two palm-trees. Their tops are lost in a curling mass of black cloud, and in this there appear, ranged archwise, the heads of the 'nine Dragons of the air', gazing down on the infant with open mouths. A well-known Buddhist tradition makes Nāgas or divinities of the thunder-clouds, i. e. 'Dragons' in Chinese eyes, perform the laving of the New-born. The descent of the water, which their mouths are

<sup>80</sup> This is in complete accord with the original Buddhist tradition which presents the descent of the white elephant not as a real event, but as a dream of Māyā; cf. Foucher,

*L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*, i. p. 292.

<sup>81</sup> For a textual reference supporting this interpretation, cf. *Serindia*, p. xxiii, *add.* to p. 855, note 50<sup>a</sup>.