

PLATE XXI  
PAINTINGS FROM BEZEKLIK

Bez. v. A-E

FROM the south wall of the long narrow shrine adjoining the larger shrine on its north. Although these animated figures are creations inspired by a degenerate form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, they are highly decorative. Charming in their supple swaying forms they carry symbols of threatening import sanctioned by the repulsive ritual of Tantric philosophy, which professes to advance the aspirant towards the ultimate goal of perfect peace, or, more correctly, torpidity. These female fiends—*dākinīs*—endowed with four arms and four heads, and equipped with appropriate means, seek to capture the individual and, it is claimed, to subjugate his natural evil impulses by encouraging and promoting their practice to the excess that ends in exhaustion. Whence this peculiar and insidious philosophy came, or whether its inspiration may derive from remote forms of belief in spells and charms and from ungoverned, primitive human lusts, is uncertain. Whatever its origin, it became a powerful influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism in about the seventh century A.D.

The implements of their mission, so spiritedly displayed, are the noose (*pāśa*) with which to capture their quarry, the sacrificial knife (*kaḍga*) for sanguinary ceremonies, the skull (*kapāla*) to be used as a cup for blood, and the thunderbolt (*vajra*) which has complicated significance. Besides the four arms, the *dākinīs* are endowed with four heads. At first sight, the expression of the principal face would seem disarmingly simple, but for the hard, cruel tilt of the eyebrows which prompts detection of further and less pleasant implications in the features. The subsidiary faces appear to express either mild surprise or alarm or malevolence. All the faces have been wantonly damaged.

The costume is an effeminate adaptation of that of the warrior guardians—*dharmapāla*. The long, streaming scarves lend animation, accentuating the suggestion of brisk breezes induced by the forward progress of the plunging fish *vāhana*, to which the backward leaning of the shoulders, advanced hips, and swaying skirt add realism. The peculiar imbricated treatment of the sleeves covering the forearms has already been noticed in connexion with Bez. iii. W-Y, plate xvi, and also the scaly character of the foot-covering appearing in Bez. v. I on the present plate. They may have implications associated with the fish; but of the fish as a *vāhana*