

which first suggested to me, on closer study of the photograph shown enlarged in Plate II, that the strange subject of the fresco might possibly be explained by the legend which Hsüan-tsang relates of the Nāga's widow residing in a stream east of the Khotan capital and her wooing by the self-sacrificing minister. We have already had occasion to consider the legend in detail in connexion with the 'Drum-lake Convent'<sup>12</sup>. Seeing that without exception the figures or scenes appearing in the decoration of the shrines excavated by me at this and other sites, whether sculptured or painted, bore a religious or mythological character, the presumption seems *a priori* justified that some legendary scene was intended here also. As far as my knowledge of Buddhist iconography goes, there is no legend affording as suitable an interpretation for our fresco as the one of the Nāga's widow. An observation of local archaeology comes to support the conjecture. The popularity of two other Khotan legends connected with particular sites, those of the sacred rats and of the silk-bringing princess, is attested beyond all doubt by pictorial representations found at Dandān-Uiliq. Hence it is natural to look in the first place among the stories of sacred local lore as recorded by Hsüan-tsang for a clue to this otherwise unexplained scene.

Figures from  
legend of the  
Nāga's  
widow.

Starting then from the figure of the riderless horse, it is clear that it would be most appropriately accounted for by the legend which represented the minister's horse as the bringer of his message and miraculous gift after his own disappearance. The minister himself might be recognized both in the swimming figure with head and shoulders just visible above the water, and in the small nude male which tries to rise by holding to the side of the woman. Such repetition for the purpose of indicating successive stages of a legend is a device as well known to old Indian as to mediaeval art of the West. The disproportion in size between the female and the male figures is another feature easily explained on the basis of the suggested interpretation. The divine Nāginī would, in accordance with a convention which Gandhāra art borrowed from the declining antique, be necessarily shown far larger than the mortal wooing her<sup>13</sup>. Finally, we may reasonably expect to see the watery home of the Nāginī indicated in the painting by a regularly enclosed tank, seeing that the same manner of representation is ordinarily resorted to by the Gandhāra sculptors when their reliefs have to show the dwelling places of Nāgas<sup>14</sup>.

In the face of these features supporting the identification, the difficulties presented by two negative ones should not be ignored. In view of Hsüan-tsang's story, it is strange to miss in a painted representation of it the miraculous drum with which the minister's horse was supposed to have returned, and neither in the original fresco nor in its photograph could I trace any object resembling this. It is further noteworthy that the figure of the woman, however richly adorned, bears no indication of her character as a Nāginī or semi-divine being. In Gandhāra sculpture a snake-hood above the human head would have been ordinarily resorted to to mark the Nāga's consort<sup>15</sup>, while even if this characteristic emblem was unknown to the Buddhist art of Khotan, there was at least the aureole conveniently at the artist's hand to mark superhuman origin. It must, however, be borne in mind that Kashmīr tradition knew Nāgas in a purely human shape<sup>16</sup>. It may also be doubted whether the legend, as heard by Hsüan-tsang, reckoned the Nāginī among divine beings proper, seeing that it related her first husband's death.

Suggestions  
of western  
models.

However this may be, it is clear that the suggested identification of the scene must be

<sup>12</sup> See above, p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> See Grünwedel-Burgess, *Buddhist art*, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Comp. Foucher, *L'Art du Gandhāra*, i. p. 388; Figs. 194-196; Grünwedel-Burgess, loc. cit., Figs. 57, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Comp. Foucher, *L'Art du Gandhāra*, i. p. 384; Grünwedel-Burgess, pp. 106 sq.

<sup>16</sup> See my note, *Rājāḥ*, i. 30; also i. 220.