

to illustrate the Western Paradise as described in the *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra* as well as the legends and meditations connected with it which are treated in this very popular work.¹⁵ This explains the regular appearance on the sides of these paintings, wherever their lateral edges are preserved, of scenes belonging to identical cycles.

Legend of
Bimbisāra
and Vaidehī
in side-
scenes.

Jātaka story
of white
rabbit.

Host of
celestial
attendants.

Triad of
Amitābha.

Arranged in quasi-predella fashion, those on one side illustrate successive episodes of the well-known legend, connected with Śākyamuni's life as a Teacher, of King Bimbisāra and his wicked heir Ajātaśatru, which is related in the first part of the Sūtra. On the other are represented the meditations of Bimbisāra's Queen Vaidehī on different objects in the Paradise of Amitābha, as set forth in the second part of the text. The few remarks for which space can be spared here, on points of iconographic interest in these side-scenes, may as well be offered at once. The legendary subjects are treated entirely in Chinese secular style, just as in the banners with scenes from Śākyamuni's life. The observations made above concerning the costume of the figures appearing in the latter apply equally to the side-scenes in our Amitābha Paradise pictures. Those which represent movement usually show vigorous drawing, while the scenes illustrating Vaidehī's meditations necessarily suffer from monotony and the Queen's motionless pose.¹⁶ Among particular scenes two may be singled out for special mention as relating directly to Gautama Buddha. One shows him as the white rabbit of a well-known Jātaka story, offering himself to a hunter to save him from starvation.¹⁷ In the other he is seen rising with the upper part of his body behind a hill as he presented himself on Mount Gṛdhra-kūṭa from a distance to encourage King Bimbisāra in captivity. The latter scene is of importance, as a competent Japanese critic has traced back to it a famous subject of Buddhist art in Japan, the so-called Yamagoshi-Amida.¹⁸

If we turn now from the simplicity of these side-scenes with their few figures and general bareness to the Sukhāvātī representation in the middle, we must feel doubly struck by the magnificent pageantry and profusion of detail which characterizes the treatment of the main subject in all these Paradise paintings. In examining these rich and well-nigh overcrowded compositions, we best realize what justified M. Petrucci's observation that 'Tun-huang presents to us Buddhist iconography precisely at the moment when it was most abundant and most sumptuous'.¹⁹ Bewildering as the first impression may be, it soon becomes clear on closer examination that this host of celestial beings and all the accessories of their elaborate staging are arranged on well-defined lines, which with only slight changes govern the composition in all our pictures of Buddhist Heavens, whoever is their presiding Buddha. It needs scarcely to be pointed out that the grouping is strictly symmetrical throughout, and that a scheme so uniformly observed presupposes prolonged evolution before even the oldest of the Sukhāvātī representations of this series was painted.

An interesting little drawing which has found its way into our collection, and to the true character of which M. Petrucci has first drawn attention,²⁰ shows us the simple main outlines of the plan which underlies all these compositions. It marks in the centre the lotus seat of Amitābha, with Avalokiteśvara

¹⁵ The *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*, translated into Chinese in A. D. 424, has been made accessible by Professor Takakusu's English version in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, II, in *Sacred Books of the East*, xlix (1894).

¹⁶ The number of individual scenes is not everywhere the same, nor their sequence identical. For particularly numerous scenes, see Ch. 0051, 00216 (with inscriptions); v. 001; xxxiii. 003; liii. 003; lvi. 0018. In many cases the episodes represented still await exact identification by an expert, e. g. in Ch. 00216 (*Thousand B.*, Pl. XXX).

¹⁷ See Ch. 00216. xiv; 00457. ii; v. 001. ii; lv. 0047. ii;

lvi. 0018. ii; lvi. 0034. i.

¹⁸ See Ch. v. 001. i; xxxiii. 003. ii; lv. 0033. i. For the derivation of the 'Yamagoshi-Amida', traditionally ascribed to a vision of the celebrated priest Eshin of the tenth century, cf. *Kokka*, No. 302, p. 3; also Pl. I-III.

¹⁹ Cf. *Annales du Musée Guimet*, xli. p. 126.

²⁰ See Ch. 00186 (Pl. CIII); Petrucci, *Annales du Musée Guimet*, xli. pp. 126 sq. As Miss Lorimer justly points out to me, the drawing may well have been intended to serve as a substitute for a proper painting of the Western Paradise on the part of a votary unable to afford the cost.