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Aspects of the Authenticity and Orthodoxy of the Sacred Site Bodh Gaya: Focusing
on the Bodhi tree, Mahabodhi temple, and Buddhapāda

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Aspects of the Authenticity and Orthodoxy of the Sacred Site Bodh Gaya:

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Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, Cunningham conducted excavations at Bodh Gaya, the site of Śakyamuni's enlightenment. The findings, along with the current temple complex, reveal that Bodh Gaya has undergone continuous expansion and restoration, since the reign of King Aśoka in the third century BCE. Therefore, the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya today bears little resemblance to its original form. Nevertheless, despite these transformations, Bodh Gaya has remained a sacred place for Buddhists for more than two millennia.

This study focuses on Bodh Gaya, a sacred pilgrimage site, during a period when Buddhism was declining in India. The study aimed to investigate the authenticity and orthodoxy of the Bodh Gaya site despite significant expansion and restoration efforts. Three key artifacts are analyzed to address this issue: the Bodhi tree, the Mahabodhi temple, and the Buddapāda. In addition, the study explores the connections between Bodh Gaya and other prominent Buddhist centers in neighboring countries, particularly Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Bagan). The analysis reveals that many regional characteristics seen in the sculptural representations were influenced by the patronage of foreign Buddhist patrons. These patrons played a crucial role in sustaining Bodh Gaya. Consequently, Bodh Gaya came to be recognised by pilgrims from neighbouring countries not only as a sacred site but also as being of great significance in affirming the authenticity and orthodoxy of Buddhism.

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Keywords: Bodh Gaya, Bodhi tree, Mahabodhi temple, Model, Buddhapāda

1. Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, A. Cunningham (1814-1893) conducted excavations at Bodh Gaya, the site of Sakyamuni's enlightenment;¹ however, several issues have been observed with his records and restoration plans.² Regardless of the accuracy of the record, the excavated remains indicate repeated expansion and restoration of Bodh Gaya by patrons, from King Aśoka in the third century BCE to those in the present day. Therefore, it is evident that the current appearance of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya (figs. 1-1, 1-2, 1-3) bears little resemblance to its original form. Nevertheless, despite alterations in its appearance over time, it is irrefutable that Bodh Gaya has been regarded as a sacred place by Buddhists for more than two millennia.

Bodh Gaya has been discussed from a variety of perspectives:³ beginning with iconographic studies of railing pillars, Buddhist images,



Figure 1-1 The Mahabodhi temple, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, photograph by the author

¹ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report for the Year 1871-72*, *Archaeological Survey of India Report for the Year 1880-8*, and *Mahābodhi or the Great Buddhist Temple under the Bodhi Tree at Buddha-Gaya*.

² Malandra, "The Mahabodhi Temple"; Barba, "The Brahmanical Temple of Bodh Gaya,"; Willis, "Bodh Gaya: From Tree to Temple."

³ For travelogues, excavation reports, and scholarly literature on Bodh Gaya, including epigraphy, archaeology and art history, the bibliography in the *Precious Treasures from the Diamond Throne* by Schaik, S. van et al. is extensive. In addition, Sarao's *The History of Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya* does not make many references to archaeological materials, but it does comprehensively cover the historical changes in Bodh Gaya from ancient to modern times.

and the deciphering of inscriptions,⁴ then in the context of the decline of Buddhism in medieval India,⁵ Buddhist networks around Bodh Gaya and the Bay of Bengal, including Sri Lanka and Burma,⁶ the evolution from the cult of the Bodhi tree to the temple complex in the process of site's development,⁷ the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Bodh Gaya,⁸ as well as the study of Mon, Burmese and Chinese inscriptions excavated at the site.⁹ This study concentrates on the sacred pilgrimage site, Bodh Gaya, during the period of Buddhism's decline in India. Specifically, it explores various measures to ensure the orthodoxy and authenticity of Bodh Gaya's sacredness during expansion and restoration efforts. Attention is drawn to the following three focal points: the Bodhi tree, Mahabodhi temple, and Buddhapāda. Analysis of antiquities also



Fig. 1-2 The Bodhi tree behind the Mahabodhi temple
Photograph by the author



Fig. 1-3 Two Buddhapadas next to the railings
Photograph by the author

explores the links between Bodh Gaya and Buddhist centers in neighboring India, particularly Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Bagan dynasty).

Prior to moving to the main problem, it seems prudent to elucidate the rationale behind my decision to devote attention to the above-mentioned three items. During, and even after, the time Buddhist centers were declining in India, the Mahabodhi Phaya (fig. 2) was founded in 1255 in Bagan, which was, albeit on a small scale, based on the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya.



Fig. 2 The Mahabodhi Phaya, Bagan, Myanmar
Photograph by the author

⁴ Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de Bodhgayā*; Huntington, *The 'Pāla-Sena' Schools of Sculpture*.

⁵ Verardi and Barba, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India*; Amar, "The Buddhakṣetra of Bodh Gaya," and "Sacred Bodh Gaya: the Buddhakṣetra of Gotama."

⁶ Dehejia, "Bodh Gaya and Sri Lanka"; Frasch, "A Buddhist Network in the Bay of Bengal."

⁷ Willis, "Bodh Gaya: From Tree to Temple."

⁸ Singer, "Tibetan Homage to Bodh Gaya," and "Homage to Bodh Gaya in Tibet."

⁹ Gonkatsang and Willis, "Tibetan, Burmese, and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodh Gaya in the British Museum"; Inamoto, "10th and 11th Century Chinese Inscriptions Found at Bodh Gaya and Donative Objects by Chinese Pilgrim Monks to India."

The Wat Chet Yot (also known as Maha Pho wihan aka Maha Chedi) was founded in 1453 in Chiang Mai. The Mahabuddha Baha was constructed in the fourteenth century and completed in 1601 in Patan, Nepal. While Bodh Gaya was experiencing various challenges and new pseudo-sacred sites were being established in Southeast Asia and other neighboring Buddhist countries, foreign Buddhists made intermittent endowments of various scales, ranging from architectural structures, such as shrines or monasteries, to smaller votive plaques. The numerous devotional activities, including the restoration of the temple complex at Bodh Gaya and the establishment of new sacred places abroad, indicate that the people wanted to retain the authenticity of Bodh Gaya. In other words, it could be said that Buddhism, which spread from India to various regions, has become largely localized for its believers. However, in order to prove the authenticity and orthodoxy of their Buddhism, the existence of the original home of Buddhism in India, and in particular Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment, was essential. They attached a special significance to this sacred place.

For instance, it is widely acknowledged in Sri Lanka that a branch of the Bodhi tree was transported from Bodh Gaya and replanted in Anuradhapura in the third century BCE. Over time, the site evolved from a simple enclosure around the Bodhi tree to a more elaborate structure that housed a statue of the Buddha, although there are some differences in the descriptions in the chronicles and Buddhist scriptures.¹⁰ However, it is interesting that no evidence suggests the construction of a temple replicating the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, as seen in Bagan, nor are there any archaeological remains of such a structure.¹¹ In other words, it could be hypothesized that Sri Lankan Buddhists found the authenticity of their Buddhism not in the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, but in the Bodhi tree which took root in Sri Lanka.

Another object of worship in Sri Lanka, Buddhapāda, can also be considered as evidence of authenticity. The chronicles and Buddhist scriptures contain accounts of the Buddha's arrival on the island, as well as the episode of the Buddhapāda he left behind on that occasion. The *Sripada* is the most renowned and is frequently depicted in murals across Sri Lanka and other regions where Sinhala or Theravadin Buddhism has taken root. Furthermore, during ancient times, Buddhist art from the Andhra region in India was continuously introduced to Sri Lanka, and stone slabs depicting Buddhapāda in a style reminiscent of those found in Andhra were also unearthed in Sri Lanka.

In India, early Buddhist art provides examples of Buddhapāda in narrative reliefs, where they function as symbolic representations alluding to the Buddha, as well as on some stone slabs. However, no evidence of Buddhapāda depicted on stone slabs has been found for the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. In contrast, multiple Buddhapāda appear at Bodh Gaya in the Pala-Sena period (c. eighth-thirteenth century). The production of

¹⁰ *Mhv.*, chs.19; 35.89; 36.26, etc. (Geiger, *The Mahavamsa*, 128-35, 252, 257, etc); *Mhbv.*, ch.12, Dumindāgamanakathā (Strong, *The Mahabodhivamsa*, 144-71).

¹¹ This is likely due to the establishment of a Buddhist monastic community from Sri Lanka during the Gupta dynasty in Bodh Gaya, which retained a degree of authority even during the Pala-Sena dynasty. A detailed analysis of this topic would require a separate article.

Buddhapāda was not observed in other regions during the Pala-Sena period; these sculpted objects were exclusively found in Bodh Gaya. Further, inconsistency is noted in style (single footprint or a pair of footprints) and iconography of Buddhapāda. A. M. Quagliotti discussed a limited number of examples of Buddhapāda from Bodh Gaya in her book,¹² but no comprehensive analysis was provided. This indicates the need for further consideration. We will now proceed to the next chapter, wherein we shall briefly trace the accounts that describe Bodh Gaya from the perspectives of Chinese and Tibetan monks.

2. Bodh Gaya in the Travelogues by Buddhist monks and in the Donative Inscriptions

2.1 *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms by Faxian*

Prior to describing Bodh Gaya in the travelogue, Faxian (337-422) provides an account of the geographical features of the area, including Mount Pragbodhi,¹³ where Śakyamuni is said to have halted before attaining enlightenment. This is followed by a series of episodes pertaining to his enlightenment and the subsequent seven weeks. He also notes the presence of stupas and images at each location where these events are believed to have occurred.¹⁴ Subsequently, the text refers to the three monasteries of Bodh Gaya, recounting several episodes of King Aśoka.¹⁵ Due to the monk's teachings, the king repented and continuously visited the Bodhi tree to atone for his misdeeds and receive the eight precepts. Aware and jealous of his veneration for the Bodhi tree, his wife had the tree felled. In response, the king constructed an enclosure around the stump of the tree, poured milk onto the remains, and vowed to regrow it. Furthermore, it is stated that the tree was alive at the time of Faxian.¹⁶

Thus, we may summarize that, by the fifth century, there were stupas and monasteries in Bodhgaya, and the episode of King Aśoka building an enclosure around the Bodhi tree was known. However, it should be noted that there is no mention of the Mahabodhi temple attached to the Bodhi tree or Buddhapāda at Bodh Gaya.¹⁷

2.2 *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions by Xuanzang*

In Xuanzang's travelogue, dating back to the seventh century, *Da Tang Xiyu Ji* (or *the Great Tang dynasty record of the Western regions*) notes that the village of Gaya near

¹² Quagliotti, *Buddhapadas*, pp.64-72.

¹³ Buddhist scholar Junjiro Takakusu observed that the shadow cave, where the Buddha is said to have imprinted his shadow, had already been transformed into a Hindu shrine dedicated to Durga Devi. Additionally, he noted the presence of a large tamarind tree on the right side of the cave (Takakusu, *Photographs of Indo-Buddhist Sites*, Photo 6, Commentary, p. 4).

¹⁴ T., vol. 51, 863a-b.

¹⁵ Ibid., 863b-c.

¹⁶ Ibid., 863c.

¹⁷ Faxian's travelogue contains some episodes pertaining to Buddhapāda; one is the section of Udyāna in north-west India (T., vol. 51, 858a) and the other is observed in the episode of the Buddha leaving his footprints on a mountain peak known as Adam's peak to the north of Anuradhapura to convert a Nāga king (ibid., 864c). Regarding the Bodhi tree transported from Bodh Gaya to Sri Lanka, it is recorded that at the time of Faxian it had reached a height of 20 lengths and a shrine was constructed beneath it, containing an image of the sitting Buddha (ibid., 865a).

Bodh Gaya was sparsely populated, with only a thousand Brahmins residing there. It also mentions the Aśoka stupa on Mount Gaya, where the Buddha once preached the *Ratnamegha sutra* (宝雲經), as well as the Shadow Cave on Mount Pragbodhi.¹⁸ Then it provides a description of Bodh Gaya. The temple complex comprised a series of sacred sites, as well as various structures, including stupas and shrines, erected by donors, including domestic and foreign monarchs, ministers, and local rulers.¹⁹ Furthermore, he laments that the Vajrāsana is situated amidst the railings encircling the bodhi tree, yet it is obscured from view because of the decline of Buddhist law and the covering of earth and sand.²⁰

The Bodhi tree reached a height of several hundred feet in the Buddha's time; however, it was frequently cut down to a height of four or five feet.²¹ On the day of the Buddha's nirvana, monarchs, priests, and common people from various provinces would gather to make offerings. It is noteworthy that Xuanzang's account of King Aśoka's episode differed from that of Faxian's. He stated that King Aśoka, who had embraced non-Buddhism, felled the Bodhi tree and then proceeded to cut it into pieces. These were piled up a few dozen paces to the west of the tree and burnt by Brahmins to enshrine a deity. However, before the fire and smoke had fully dissipated, two new trees sprouted amid the raging flames. The king then regretted his action and poured frankincense on the trees, which resulted in the tree returning to its original state the following morning. The queen, who was non-Buddhist, had the trees cut at night. When King Aśoka prayed and offered frankincense once more, the tree resumed its growth, and the king constructed a stone hedge around it, which is said to have reached a height of over ten feet and still exists.²²

Apart from King Aśoka's episode, it also mentions an incident concerning Śaiva King Śaśāṅka in the early seventh century. The text states that King Śaśāṅka attempted to fell the Bodhi tree in order to suppress Buddhism. However, he was unable to dig out the roots, upon which he set it afire to eradicate it.²³ A few months later, King Pūrṇavarman of Magadha (a descendant of King Aśoka) poured milk from thousands of cows onto the tree, resulting in the tree growing to the height of a length the next morning. Subsequently, he constructed a stone wall surrounding the tree, measuring two lengths and four feet in height, to prevent it from getting cut in the future. Xuanzang additionally states that the Bodhi tree was concealed within the stone enclosure, with only the top of the tree visible

¹⁸ T., vol. 51, 915a.

¹⁹ Ibid., 915c. A monastic complex located outside the northern gate of the Bodhi tree is referenced in the *Records of the Western Regions*. This complex was constructed by the Sinhala king with permission from the Indian king (ibid., 918b-c). Similar accounts are also found in the records of Wang Xuance (fl. seventh century)(王玄素), who was dispatched as an ambassador to India by the Tang Emperor Taizong in the late seventh century (Zhong Tianzhuguo xingji 『中天竺行記』; Fayuan zhulin, vol. 29 『法苑珠林』 29 「王玄策行傳」). Both refer to this episode, believed to have occurred between the Sinhala King Sirimegavanna (尸迷佉拔摩) and the Indian King Samudragupta (三謨陀羅崛多王).

²⁰ T., vol. 51, 915b.

²¹ Ibid., 915b.

²² Ibid., 915c.

²³ Ibid., 915c.

at the time of his observation.²⁴

Another notable anecdote is that the aforementioned king Śaśāṅka, who tried to burn the Bodhi tree, also ordered his minister to destroy the Buddha statue and install a statue of Śiva in its place. However, the minister assembled a group of devout individuals to construct a wall in front of the Buddha statue to conceal it, offering a lamp to it, and painting an image of Śiva on the wall.²⁵

Xuanzang provides a comprehensive description of the Mahabodhi temple, situated east of the Bodhi tree. The temple was estimated to be 160–170 feet in height, with a base spanning more than 20 paces. It was plastered with lime and adorned with multiple tiers of niches containing golden statues. The eastern side of the structure featured a multistoried building with three-story eaves. The pillars, beams, and windows were embellished with gold and silver carvings and inlaid with jewels. Three doorways were set up for the entrance, and the statues of Avalokitesvara and Maitreya, both cast in white silver, were seen on either side of the outermost doorway. Xuanzang also refers to King Aśoka, who initially constructed a modest shrine, which was later expanded with the assistance of Brahmins.²⁶ Buddha's image enshrined in the temple, which is in *bhumisparśa mudrā*, was created by Maitreya, who disguised himself as Brahmin.²⁷ It should be noted that a large stupa was situated at each of the four corners of the railings surrounding the Bodhi tree, which Śakyamuni walked through before reaching the Vajrāsana. Additionally, there were numerous sacred sites within this hedge,²⁸ suggesting that the hedge surrounding the Bodhi tree covered a vast expanse.

2.3 A Biography of Dharmasvāmin (Tib., *chag lo tsa ba*)

During the thirteenth century, Muslims expanded their reach to eastern India. While Buddhist centers were destroyed, Bodh Gaya was still visited by Tibetan monks and common people,²⁹ as will be discussed in detail below. The record of Dharmasvāmin (Chag Lo-tsa-ba, 1197-1264), who stayed in Bihar from 1234 to 1236, is particularly

²⁴ Ibid., 915c.

²⁵ Ibid., 916b.

²⁶ Xuanzang states that the elder brother constructed the temple structure, and the younger one dug the pond (T., vol. 51, 916b). However, the biography of Dharmasvāmin states that the youngest of the three brothers built the temple.

²⁷ The Brahmin requested that the monks refrain from opening the doorway for six months following his entrance into the shrine. However, upon opening the doorway with four days remaining, the monks discovered a seated image of the Buddha in *bhumisparśa mudrā* with the upper part of the right breast unpainted. The unfinished section was subsequently filled with various jewels, and the image was adorned with rare treasures, including beads set with precious gems and a crown (T., vol. 51, 916b).

²⁸ Ibid., 917a-b.

²⁹ See Mori, "The Sacred Sites and the Pilgrimage of Tantric Buddhism in India." Furthermore, it is notable that a considerable number of Tibetan monks visited Bodh Gaya during the same period. This is evidenced by the fact that 17 individuals, whose names have been identified, and an additional nine, whose names remain unknown, are documented to have visited the site (Vitali, "In the presence of the Diamond throne: Tibetans at rDo rje gdan," 161-3). Vitali notes that the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* lists the names of ten Tibetan monks who visited Bodh Gaya between the first and third quarters of the tenth century (ibid., 200-1). These include Tsa mi lo tsa ba Sangs brgyas grags and Rgwa Lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, even after Rin chen bzang po (958-1055), numerous pilgrims continued to visit this destination.

useful.³⁰ When he visited Vajrāsana at Bodh Gaya, he found no one at the Mahabodhi Temple,³¹ and the inner doorways leading to the main image were concealed with brick walls. These walls had been plastered over to protect the main image from Islamic forces. Another image was installed in front of the temple. Furthermore, the outer doorways were coated with mud and plaster, and an image of Śiva was painted on them to prevent their destruction by pagans.³²

It is especially noteworthy that the relics at the Vajrāsana include not only the Bodhi tree, but also a statue of Buddha, the *gandhola* (Tib., Dri'I gtsang khang; Skt., Gandhakutī), a canine tooth of the Buddha, seat of the Śakyamuni image at the Turnang temple, pair of Buddhapāda, and railings by Nagarjuna and the Tārā shrines.³³ One particularly notable feature is the *gandhola*, a structure originally erected by King Aśoka. The structure's spire, visible from a distance of two days' journey, provides compelling evidence that it is the Mahabodhi Temple.³⁴ Dharmasvāmin also states that in front of the eastern gate of this *gandhola* is a three-aisled structure; behind it is the Bodhi tree, which is supported by two trunks. Underneath the tree is the Vajrāsana. Furthermore, King Aśoka constructed a fort-like structure with a spire to the east, and brick walls in the south, west, and north. Due to this peculiar structure, only the shimmering leaves at the tip of the Bodhi tree were visible; further, there was a large bowl-like object with a row of vajras at the base of the Bodhi tree, from which the tree appeared to grow.³⁵

Dharmasvāmin states that King Ashoka as well as the youngest of the three Brahmin sons were responsible for the construction of the *gandhola*. What is particularly intriguing is the process by which Buddha's image, enshrined in the *gandhola*, was created. According to legend, the statue was created without a sculptor, with the son leaving the required material inside the shrine as instructed by his mother, who was an incarnation of Tārā. However, the son opened the doorway a day earlier than specified, resulting in the image remaining unfinished, without the little fingers.³⁶

The most distinctive accounts in Dharmasvāmin's record pertain to the Buddhapāda at Bodh Gaya, which was not referred to by Faxian and Xuanzang. According to tradition, the Buddha left his footprints to provide tangible evidence of his existence to future generations. Dharmasvāmin explicitly describes a stone slab bearing a pair of footprints, as square in shape, white in color, and roughly textured. Further, he

³⁰ Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*; Tasaki, "The Buddha Gaya in the Early 13th Century: Translation of Chapters 4 and 5 of Dharmasvamin's Pilgrimage to India."

³¹ The temple complex at Bodh Gaya is inhabited by 300 individuals following Sinhala Buddhism. There are 12 temple structures, with one situated in front of the north gate. Each of these temples houses about 10 monks, on average (Tasaki, "The Buddha Gaya in the Early 13th Century," 79).

³² Tasaki, "The Buddha Gaya in the Early 13th Century," 73.

³³ Ibid., 74. It is also important to note that the term "Vajrāsana," as used by Dharmasvāmin, does not refer to the Vajrāsana structure itself, but rather to the larger temple area that surrounds it.

³⁴ Ibid., 75. Dharmasvāmin provides the following account: the Maha Bodhi temple was 35 elbows high (*khru*) and only the white, shimmering spire was visible even from a distance.

³⁵ Ibid., 75.

³⁶ Ibid., 76-7. With regard to the Buddha's image, it is recorded that both eyes were inlaid with emeralds, but these were removed by Turkish soldiers (ibid., 77).

states that the stone slab was placed in front of the votive stupa outside the eastern gate.³⁷ Additionally, he notes that there had been a proposal to build a shrine to preserve this Buddhapāda; however, it was ultimately left in the open, as constructing a shrine would have necessitated appointing caretakers and requiring offerings from worshippers. This, in turn, would have resulted in reducing the number of individuals able to view the site, thereby contravening the Buddha's original intention.³⁸ In a pen drawing from the late nineteenth century under the British Empire [British Library, WD2060f.68], a stone sculpture with a pair of footprints is depicted as enshrined in a four-pillared structure devoid of walls. It is noteworthy that votive stupas, the Buddhapāda, courtyard, and the Maha Bodhi image were all aligned at the temple complex during Dharmasvāmin's visit.³⁹

Rwa lo tsa ba (1016 -?) of the eleventh century, some two centuries before Dharmasvāmin, also provided comprehensive documentation of Buddhist images enshrined in various temples at Bodh Gaya. He mentions that a temple was constructed by the Brahmin Sabhecakra in front of the Bodhi tree, with a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha at the age of thirty years enshrined inside it.⁴⁰

2.4 The Sacred site Bodh Gaya and Donative Inscriptions

As previously observed, the records of Bodh Gaya by pilgrim monks mention numerous episodes pertaining to King Aśoka, the Bodhi tree, and dedicative donations, both domestic and from overseas, of the architectural structure and statues. Several inscriptions also indicate that Bodh Gaya received substantial support from individuals in foreign countries, including Sri Lanka, Tibet,⁴¹ Myanmar, and China. Cunningham's 1892 report lists Burmese and Chinese inscriptions, while others in Bengali and Tibetan have also been identified. In recent years, some inscriptions have been revised and translated anew (Schaik et al. 2021),⁴² which further elucidates the reality of the association of Bodh Gaya with neighboring Buddhist countries. Due to space constraints, we focus only on some of the inscriptions from the post-Gupta period to the decline of Buddhism in India.

Evidence of donations from Sri Lankan people, such as railings, can be observed even in the early antiquities.⁴³ In the post-Gupta period, during Xuanzang's visit, some inscriptions indicate that donations were also made by a monk from Lanka's royal family. Additionally, a shrine was constructed at the location of the Vajrāsana, and another building within the temple complex underwent restoration.⁴⁴ In the Pala period (the eight to the twelfth century), several gifts of seated Buddha statues were bestowed upon the

³⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁸ Ibid., 78-9.

³⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁰ Schaeffer, "Journey to the Seat of the Buddha," 228.

⁴¹ Regarding the Tibetan inscriptions from Bodh Gaya, see Gonkatsang & Willis, Tibetan, Burmese, and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodh Gaya in the British Museum." They have recently uncovered a donation of paving stones by six Tibetan laymen.

⁴² Schaik et al., *Precious Treasures from the Diamond Throne: Finds from the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment*.

⁴³ Tsukamoto, *A Comprehensive Study of the Indian Buddhist Inscriptions*, vol.1, 138.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140-141, 147-149 [Bodh-Gaya15, 16, 31].

site by Sri Lankan donors, particularly between the ninth and tenth centuries.⁴⁵ Furthermore, some inscriptions confirm donations made to the sangha of Simhala based in Bodhgaya during the subsequent Sena period (the eleventh-thirteenth century).⁴⁶

Sri Lankan Buddhists are not the only ones actively supporting Bodh Gaya. The Bagan dynasty (1044-1287), which espoused Buddhism, played a pivotal role in the preservation of the Mahabodhi temple. As is well known, an inscription on the Shwesandaw Paya indicates that King Kyanzittha (r. 1084-1112) dispatched personnel to rehabilitate Bodh Gaya,⁴⁷ which was in a state of disrepair. His son continued this initiative. Strong support from Bagan is also evident in the chronicle of Sri Lanka. The *Cūlavamsa* compiled in the thirteenth century states that Vijayabahu I (1058-1114), who ruled Polonnaruwa in the mid-1070s, invited Buddhist monks not from India, but from Rāmañña, to restore the lineage of the Bhikkhus on the island (Cv., ch.60.4-8).⁴⁸

During the twelfth century, while the Pala dynasty, which had hitherto protected Buddhism, was weakened, image-making for both Buddhist and Hindu deities continued in Bihar, as evidenced by the artifacts. However, in the thirteenth century, the sacred site of Bodh Gaya required restoration, which was supported by the Bagan dynasty. Even during the Islamic invasions, pilgrims from Bagan continued to visit the sacred site and donate.

2. The Bodhi tree worship in Bodh Gaya: from early Buddhist art to votive plaque

2.1 Reliefs on the architrave of the stupa gateway and railing pillars

The sculptural representations of the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya in early Buddhist art can be observed mainly in the scenes of Śakyamuni's enlightenment and King Aśoka's visits. Countless examples of early Buddhist art depict these narrative contexts; therefore, we limit our discussion to a few representative cases.

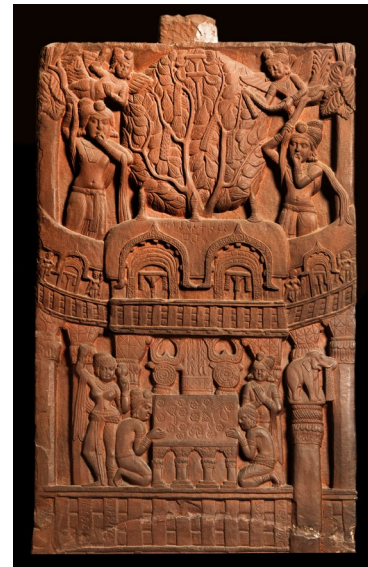


Fig. 3 Śakyamuni's enlightenment, Bharhut, 1st century BCE, © Indian Museum, Kolkata

⁴⁵ Ibid., 142-143, 144 [Bodh-Gaya 19, 20, 24].

⁴⁶ Ibid., 150-152 [Bodh-Gaya 36].

⁴⁷ Blagden, "A third inscription found at the Shwesandaw Pagoda, Prome."

⁴⁸ Geiger, *The Culavamsa*, 214-5.

First, a relief (fig.3) of the so-called Prasenajit railing pillar from Bharhut depicts a Bodhi tree surrounded by an architectural structure, above which its branches spread with flourishing foliage. Two umbrellas with garlands can also be observed in the upper part of the tree. At the front, two male figures are worshipping with their heads and hands touching an elaborate throne on which flowers have been scattered. Additionally, behind the throne, on either side of the trunk of the Bodhi tree, is the *triratna* motif. The relief of the eastern gateway of Sānci stupa 1 (Fig.4) portrays a nobleman worshipping the Bodhi tree. Although the tree trunk is not visible, branches grow vigorously upward from the chaitya window of the structure. As in the previous example, an umbrella with garlands is depicted at the top of the tree and a sacred throne, surmounted by a *triratna* motif, below the structure.



Fig. 4 Nobles worshipping Bodhi tree, Sanchi stupa 1, 1st century CE., in situ, Photograph by the author

There are several examples of relief from the Andhra region. As seen in the drum slab depicting the Bodhi tree and the five worshippers praying towards the empty throne under the tree, the Bodhi tree is enclosed by a balustrade (British Museum, Acc. no.1880,0709.79).⁴⁹ The relief from Kanaganahalli in Karnataka shows a Bodhi tree with flourishing branches and leaves growing above the structure.⁵⁰

2-2. Terracotta votive plaque

Particularly noteworthy in the later centuries is a terracotta plaque with a votive inscription from Kumlahar in the ancient city of Pataliputra (fig.5: Bihar Museum, inv.no.4419). It is interpreted as representing the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, and its surroundings.⁵¹ Upon entering the main gate, one observes a high-rise, high-tower-style structure with a



Fig. 5 Terracotta plaque depicting the temple complex, Bihar, Bihar Museum (inv.no.4419), Photograph courtesy of the Bihar Museum

⁴⁹ Knox, *Amaravati*, 120/pl.60.

⁵⁰ See Zin, “Kannaganahalli in Sātavāhana Art and Buddhism,” 2018a, *The Kannaganahalli Stupa: An Analysis of the 60 Massive Slabs Covering the Dome*. 2018b: 119, 193.

⁵¹ The Kharosthi script, usually found in north-west India, is used in the dedicatory inscription, (Konow, “The Inscription on the So-Called Bodh Gaya Plaque”), and Ono Genmyo points out that it may represent the Kaniska stupa at Taxila (Ono, *Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, 215), while Murata Jiro suggests that it represents a temple with a tall tower at Bodh Gaya (Murata, *History of Asian Architecture*, 79-80). The person who discovered it, Spooner, also thought it was the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya (Spooner, “The Bodh Gaya Plaque”). The tablet is dated to around the third century AD, but there is no concrete evidence. For the dedicatory inscription, see below (Siddham, The Asia Inscriptions database, INBG00040).



Fig. 6 Terracotta votive plaque, Bodhgaya, Pala dynasty. © Indian Museum (Acc.no.B.G.153/A20570)

found not only in the interior of India, but also in Myanmar, Thailand, and other regions of Southeast Asia. The plaque (Fig. 6) excavated from Bodh Gaya depicts a seated image of Buddha in the main shrine with a Bodhi tree behind the structure. The votive tablet from Bagan (fig. 7) represents the eight great events of Sakyamuni Buddha and seven weeks after his enlightenment; again, the central Buddha with the right hand in *bhumisparsa mudra* is seated in the shrine with the Bodhi tree behind the structure,⁵² suggesting that Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's attainment, was very significant for Bagan. As is well known, the composition of the main image of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra*, with scenes depicting significant events of Śakyamuni around it, is found not only in the Pala dynasty but also in the temples at Bagan, which were influenced by Pala art. The terracotta plaques, depicting the Mahabodhi temple with the Bodhi tree, suggest that the architectural structure was built around the tree and developed into the towering structure with a spire, wherein a Buddha image was enshrined. However, no further information can be gleaned from them. Let us now turn to the models of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya.

simplified chaitya window, multiple umbrellas of the superstructure, and flying celestial beings admiring it. The structure is also surrounded by a balustrade. Inside the structure is a seated Buddha, with standing Buddha images with halos on either side. In addition, a stone pillar crowned with an animal (elephant?) is situated between the seated Buddha and gate. Some mountains and buildings in the background may represent the seven weeks after Śakyamuni's enlightenment. However, the fact that the Buddha's image in the main structure does not demonstrate the *bhumisparsa mudra* and no Bodhi tree is visible around the superstructure yields the possibility that this is not the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya.

Thousands of terracotta votive plaques, such as those shown in figs.

6 and 7, have been



Fig. 7 Terracotta votive plaque, Bagan period, Photograph ©The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

⁵² The eight significant events in the life of Śakyamuni Buddha depicted on the plaques are: the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, first sermon, descent from Trāyastriṃśa heaven, miracles at Śrāvastī, taming of the elephant, monkey's offering of honey, and nirvana.

3. The Models of the Mahabodhi temple



Fig. 8-1 Model of the Mahabodhi temple [front, right], Bodhgaya, mid-11th century
©Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (Acc.no. EA1996.4)



Fig. 8-2 Model of the Mahabodhi temple [back, right], Bodhgaya, mid-11th century
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (Acc.no. EA1996.4)

J. Guy conducted a comprehensive study by of the models of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya,⁵³ but only the most significant examples are examined here. First, the basic structure of the models should be reviewed. The openings have a two-tiered structure with five towers, including the central tall tower on the second tier, and a Bodhi tree at the back, with a small shrine underneath. Most have a niche that may or may not be occupied by a seated Buddha image in the *bhūmisparśa mudrā*.

An example from the Ashmolean Museum collection (fig. 8-1/8-2, mid-eleventh century, no. EA1996.4) shows similar features, such as towers and a Bodhi tree, revealing a semicircular structure around the base. This is interesting because a similar structure can be observed in the ink drawing of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya from the first half of the nineteenth century (British Library, WD2060.f.71; WD2060 f.72). This similarity suggests two possibilities: one, the Burmese restoration in the early 1800s may have been based on such a model of the Mahabodhi temple, and two, the Bodhi tree was also surrounded by such a structure in the Bagan period. An example of such a semicircular structure surrounding a Bodhi tree can be found in a model of the Mahabodhi temple in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Acc.no. 2006.218). The image of Nirvana Buddha is represented in front of the central tower, while the front and sides of the ground floor section apparently depict scenes from the life of the historical Buddha.

⁵³ Guy, "The Mahābodhi Temple: Pilgrim Souvenirs of Buddhist India."



Fig. 9-1 Model of Mahabodhi temple [front, right], Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Fig. 9-2 Model of Mahabodhi temple front [rear], Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Fig. 10-1 Model of Mahabodhi temple [front, left], Bodhgaya, 12th century
© The Trustees of the British Museum (1892,1103.1)



Fig. 10-2 Model of Mahabodhi temple [rear], Bodhgaya, 12th century
© The Trustees of the British Museum (1892,1103.1)

The model in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (fig. 9-1/9-2) portrays the structure with a Bodhi tree, but does not depict a tall tower or shorter ones around it. The Bodhi tree can also be observed in the Ashmolean example above.

Regarding architectural design and unique motifs, many temples built in Bagan have so-called flaming arches or flaming decorations on the facade. A similar decoration is noted in the example of the British Museum collection (fig.10-1), although it provides a rather crude impression. Further, the front entrance shows the Buddha's footprints, recalling Dharmasvāmin's earlier account of the presence of a pair of footprints of Buddha, at Mahabodhi temple; this implies the possibility of influence from Bagan, where Buddhapāda are painted on the ceiling at the entrance to Buddhist temples. Fig. 10-2 depicts a different angle of the British Museum model (fig. 10-1); although the back is badly damaged,

a Bodhi tree is clearly visible, as well as a pair of footprints at the back entrance. Interestingly, both feet (not just one) are framed by lotus petals. Such a Buddhapāda, with a pair of footprints, can also be seen in Bodh Gaya.

The model of the Mahabodhi temple in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection (fig. 11) also depicts some features of the flaming arch of the Bagan temple architecture and the Buddhapāda. The British Museum model mentioned above and the Victoria and Albert Museum collection are the only two examples wherein Buddhapāda can be seen, but it should be noted that both are associated with the architectural features of Bagan.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ As evidenced in the plan of Bodh Gaya provided by Mitra and Cunningham, this Buddhapāda was initially identified and venerated as Viṣṇupada (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi or the Great Buddhist Temple under the Bodhi Tree at Buddha-Gaya*, Pl.XI). Gaya is a site of great significance for ancestral worship (śrāddha) and the Viṣṇupada Temple, where a Viṣṇupada is enshrined in the garbhagrha and many Hindus visit from all over the country. For further details of

Another model of the Mahabodhi temple in the British Museum collection (fig.12) lacks the other surrounding towers except for the central high tower, but demonstrates features of Bagan architecture, with a vajra engraved on the base.

The majority of the Mahabodhi temple models, although not exclusively excavated in Bihar, exhibit architectural characteristics associated with Bagan. It has been documented that the Narthang monastery in Tibet once housed both stone and wooden models of the Mahabodhi temple complex, which were discovered in 1936 and whose current whereabouts are unknown, with only a few photographs taken at the site in 1937.⁵⁵ The most significant aspect of these models is the extensive temple complex at Bodh Gaya, which encompasses not



Fig. 12 Model of Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya, 12th century
©The Trustees of the British Museum (1922,1215.7)

only the Mahabodhi temple as the primary shrine but also the surrounding smaller temples, which are further enclosed by walls. The wooden model⁵⁶ is inscribed with a date corresponding to the fifteenth century, during the reign of the Yongle Emperor (r. 1403-1425). Considering the photographic evidence of 1937, it can be discerned that the temple with the tallest tower exhibits flaming arches characteristic of the Bagan style. Notably, this example, which appears to have been produced in Tibet, also exhibits this Bagan feature. Moreover, the model of the entire complex, including the Mahabodhi temple, as well as temples dedicated to Tara and other esoteric Buddhist deities, is a testament to the importance of Bodh Gaya for Tibetan Buddhist monks.



Fig. 11 Model of Mahabodhi temple, Bihar, 12th century ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.21-1986)

4. The iconographic features of Buddhapāda from Bodh Gaya and their significance

The preceding chapter presented a few models of the Mahabodhi Temple that included Buddhapāda. In this chapter, I examine stone slabs representing Buddhapāda from Bodh

Viṣṇupada at Gaya, see Debjani, “Antiquity of the Viṣṇupada at Gaya Tradition and Archaeology.”

⁵⁵ See Guy, “The Mahābodhi Temple: Pilgrim Souvenirs of Buddhist India,” figs.19, 22.

⁵⁶ The Victoria and Albert Museum also has a wooden model of the Mahabodhi temple without towers dating to the fifteenth century (IS.50-1995). The model of the Mahabodhi temple, which is near the center of the complex model kept by the Narthang temple, is notable, although the photograph is blur, in that it has a platform at the bottom with an ornamented border resembling inverted lotus petals, and the lower structure of the Mahabodhi temple above has a protruding section, as does the Victoria and Albert Museum’s model. In the absence of photographs from any other angles, we should refrain from further surmise, but it is likely that both are very similar examples.

Gaya during the Pala-Sena dynasty. In early Indian Buddhist art, Buddhapāda were depicted in Buddhist narrative scenes as a symbolic representation of the Buddha.⁵⁷ Additionally, Buddhapāda can be viewed as a decorative motif on the gateway of the stupa. Even in Gandharan art, apart from their representation in narrative scenes, stone slabs depicting Buddhapāda with venerating worshippers are also known. In the Andhra region, not only do narrative scenes use Buddhapāda as symbolic motifs, but stone slabs depicting them with multiple motifs are engraved. India, with the exception of the Andhra region, demonstrated no evidence of stone slabs representing the footprints of the Buddha until the Pala-Sena period. However, some Buddhist images do bear motifs, such as the *dharmacakra* and *triratna* engraved on the soles of Buddha statues.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all the stone objects representing Buddhapāda dated to the Pala-Sena period were unearthed exclusively from Bodh Gaya. Although a total of eleven examples of Buddhapāda at Bodh Gaya are known, the following section will examine the characteristics of the motifs in ten examples.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Due to space restrictions, I will only provide an overview of the iconography of Buddhapāda in the early Indian art. As for Bhārhut, Buddhapāda are represented in the reliefs on the railing pillars depicting “Ajātashatru worshipping Buddha,” “Descent from *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven” (see Ito, *Ancient Buddhist sites of Sānci & Bhārhut*, Pls.208, 209) and “Nāga king Mucalinda protecting the Buddha,” and at Sānci they are found on the “Great Departure” engraved on the architrave of the gateway at Sānci, and also on the decorative relief on the gateway pillar, whose pattern seen on all the Buddhapāda is a wheel, *dharmacakra* only. In South India, Buddhapāda are depicted in narrative scenes, such as “The Seven Steps,” “Worshipping the Yaksha Shrine,” “Enlightenment,” “The Buddha’s Miracle of Crossing the Niranjana River” and “Descent from *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven”, as well as in the stone slab, which mainly depicts Buddhapāda. An example from Amaravati (1880.0709.42, circa second century, British Museum; as a similar example, 1880.0709.57, also in the British Museum collection) depicts a wheel in the center of the footprint surrounded by a *triratna*, a *swastika*, an hourglass-like object (perhaps a throne?), and a six-petalled floral design. The toes are inscribed with a *triratna* and a *swastika* (in the example from 1880.0709.42, a lotus bud is depicted on each toe). Two examples of Buddhapāda have also been excavated from Kanaganahalli. Conversely, examples from Phanigiri (circa fourth century, Hyderabad Archaeological Museum) and Nagarjunakonda (Sarkar, “Some Aspects of the Buddhist Monuments at Nagarjunakonda,” Pl. 37-B, p.69 *excavated at Site 38), with two other examples in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, illustrate the footprint entirely decorated with a *dharmacakra*, a *triratna*, *swastikas*, twin fish, conch-shell, and *pūrnaghata*, and the toes decorated with *triratnas*. In Gandhara, apart from the narrative scene of “Descent from *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven,” the depictions of the Buddhapāda, with both feet (a stone slab depicting a single Buddhapāda in the collections of the Lahore and Chandigarh Museums is thought to have originally been a single slab [the iconography and carving characteristics are remarkably the same]) are also observed. Even in Gandhara, the composition and designs of the Buddhapāda(s) are extremely varied: a stone slab of Buddhapāda returned to Pakistan from the USA in 2016 and a slab of a single Buddhapāda from the MIHO MUSEUM, etc.

⁵⁸ The motifs of *dharmacakra* and *triratna* are depicted on the soles of a seated Buddha from Mathura, dating to the Kushan period. Furthermore, some of the seated Buddha images in the Ajanta murals also display the *dharmacakra* motif on the soles.

⁵⁹ The Indian Museum at Kolkata holds four Buddhapāda. However, the present essay discusses only three as the author has not seen the fourth.

(1) **Buddhapāda ①, beside the railings behind the Mahabodhi temple**

69.5 x 69.5 x 14.5 cm, in situ (figs.13-1/ 13-2)

This sculpture is one of the two examples placed beside the railings surrounding the Bodhi tree and *Vajrāsana* behind the temple. The Buddhapāda, with a single left footprint, is engraved on the reverse side of the dome-shaped stone, which is part of the superstructure of the votive stupa. The motifs depicted on the Buddhapāda by a relatively shallow line engraving are as follows: a *dharmacakra* in the center, above which are three fish with one head. A flower bud can also be seen in the lower right towards the *dharmacakra*, a form with upper and lower bulging at the left, and a double circular design in the lower part.⁶⁰ The joints in the toes are clearly visible, with a spiral pattern with projections on the top and bottom, extending from the thumb to the little finger. This is analogous to the fingertips depicted on the Buddha's Footprint in Mahant's residence, which will be discussed later. It is worth mentioning that the design resembles the conch shell design frequently observed on the toes of the Buddhapāda at Bagan.⁶¹ In early Indian Buddhist art, the toes of the Buddhapāda are typically adorned with a *triratna* or *swastika*. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Buddhapāda at Bodh Gaya exhibits a markedly distinct iconographic tradition. Additionally, the motif of three fish with one head observed in this sculpture is not known to predate this example in India,⁶² although one with two fish is often seen on the Buddhapāda from the Andhra region.



Fig. 13-1 Buddhapada①, Mahabodhi temple
Photograph by the author



Fig. 13-2 Detail of fig. 13-1,
Photograph by the author

⁶⁰ Regarding the double-circle design, Mr. Yoshihide Koizumi proffered the valuable opinion that the design was merely an unfinished one and that a swirling pattern with a double-circle engraved on the Buddhapāda in the collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata (Acc. no. A-24214-BG2), described below, may have constituted the completed or final design. It is also noteworthy that the diameter of the two circles is almost identical.

⁶¹ A comparable conch shell motif can be observed on the toes of the Buddhapāda at Loka-Hteik-Pan (เสมอชัย พูลสุวรรณ 2016 จิตรกรรมพุทธศาสนาสมัยพุทธาม 2 ภาพประกอบและคำอธิบาย, pl.15). Additionally, several Buddhapāda, as observed at Let-put-kan, feature a conch shell at the center of the fingerprint (เสมอชัย พูลสุวรรณ 2016 จิตรกรรมพุทธศาสนาสมัยพุทธาม 2 ภาพประกอบและคำอธิบาย, pl.16) .

⁶² For further details regarding the motif of three fish and one head, see Gallop, “Three fish and one head (2).”

(2) Buddhapāda ②, beside the railings behind the Mahabodhi temple

81.0 x 79.8 x 28.0 cm (figs.14-1/ 14-2)



Fig. 14-1 Buddhapāda②, Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya, Fig. 14-2 Detail of fig. 14-1, Photograph by the author
Photograph by the author

As shown in fig.16-1, the reverse of the dome-shaped stone of the votive stupa is employed to represent a pair of Buddha's footprints. The architectural design on all four sides of the outer stone is not contemporaneous with the creation of the Buddhapāda but belongs to the original votive stupa. Only a floral motif, approximately 5 cm in diameter, is visible at the center of the footprints, which is simpler than the other examples described below. Many images of the seated Buddha in the Pala-Sena period have a double-circle pattern with a petal-like form on the foot; however, our Buddhapāda do not feature that. In addition, no motifs are engraved on the toes.

(3) Buddhapāda ③, at a small shrine in front of the Mahabodhi temple

109.5 x 109.0 x 43.0 cm (figs.15-1/ 15-2/ 15-3)

As observed from figs. 19-1 and 19-2, the reverse of the dome-shaped stone of the votive stupa is employed to represent a pair of footprints. When discovered in 1871, it was enshrined in a modest structure comprising four pillars and venerated as Viṣṇupāda.⁶³ This example differs from the preceding two in that the upper part of the stone is bordered by a row of lotus petals. A circle with a diameter of 7 cm is depicted at the center of the footprint; however, it is too distinct to determine whether it represents a *dharmacakra*. The footprints have an *aṅkuśa* (elephant goad) on the arch of the foot, and there are engraved conch shells, water bottles, and fish below the central circle. The stone bears a dedicatory inscription in two lines of Sanskrit and Prakrit on the side, noting the year Śaka 1230



Fig. 15-1 Buddhapāda③, Mahabodhi temple, Bodh Gaya,
Photograph by the author

⁶³ For the multivalency of Viṣṇupāda and Buddhapāda, see Kinnard, "The Polyvalent Pādas of Vishnu and the Buddha."

[A.D. 1308].⁶⁴ It is important to note that Buddhapāda was still donated in the early fourteenth century, a period during which Indian Buddhism experienced a rapid decline.



Fig. 15-3 Detail of fig. 15-1,
Photograph by the author



Fig. 15-2 Detail of fig. 15-1,
Photograph by the author

(4) Buddhapāda at the Mahant's compound ①

91.5 x 91.0 x 30.0 cm (figs.16-1, 16-2, 16-3)



Fig. 16-1 Buddhapāda①, Mahant's compound,
Bodhgaya, Photograph by the author

dharmacakra engraving, approximately 12.5 cm in diameter, is present at the center of both feet. The motifs on the left foot of the Buddhapāda include an *aṅkuśa* and a stick-like object (possibly an umbrella) on either side of the *dharmacakra*. The floral motif appearing below the *dharmacakra* is succeeded by a ribbon-like object with fine undulating wave-like carvings.⁶⁵ On the right foot, an eight-petalled floral design is observed immediately below the *dharmacakra*. Adjacent to this is a stick-

The Mahant residence houses a substantial collection of Buddhist and Hindu sculptures from Bodhgaya, including two examples of Buddhapāda. This example is of a similar size to the aforementioned examples (2) and (3) and employs the reverse of a dome-shaped stone of the votive stupa. A



Fig. 16-2 Detail of fig. 16-1 (left foot),
Photograph by the author



Fig. 16-3 Detail of fig. 16-1 (right foot)
Photograph by the author

⁶⁴ Mitra, *Buddha Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple*, no.12, p.201; Plate XLIII. fig.2/ Tsukamoto, *A Comprehensive Study of the Indian Buddhist Inscriptions*. Vol.1, 147 [Bodh-Gayā 30]. It is also noteworthy that the inscription refers to the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh-Gayā as the Aśoka deula.

⁶⁵ This unique motif could be a representation of the sea, a river or lake.

shaped object with a semi-circular shape on the right. Similar to the left foot, a horizontal ribbon-like object with fine engravings can be seen on the lower part. Additionally, a spiral pattern with triangular protrusions above and below (conch shell) is observed on all five toes. This pattern resembles a single footprint placed beside the Bodhi tree at the Mahabodhi temple (fig. 13).

(5) Buddhapāda at the Mahant's compound ②

43.5 x 42.5 x ? cm (fig.17)

This sculpture is considerably smaller than previous examples and has been partially buried in the floor; therefore, the shape of the substructure is unknown. However, the pattern of the lotus petals adorning the side edge is still visible. As shown in fig. 17, the form of the footprint is markedly distinct from that observed in the previous examples. It bears a striking resemblance to the natural shape of a human foot, measuring approximately 24 cm in length. A small double circular pattern, approximately 2.5 cm in diameter, is represented on each foot, although it is unclear whether this is also a *dharmacakra*. Given the realistic shape of the footprints, it seems plausible that they were intended to be Vishnupāda, rather than Buddhapāda.



Fig. 17 Buddhapāda(?), Mahant's compound, Bodhgaya, Bihar, Photograph by the author

(6) Buddhapāda ①, Bodhgaya, Indian Museum

Acc. no. A 24214-BG.1. 71.0 x 21.1 cm (fig.18)



Fig. 18 Line-drawing of the Buddhapāda ①, Indian Museum (Acc.no. A24214-BG.1.) Drawing by the Author

This example also employs the reverse of a dome-shaped stone of a votive stupa, and all four sides are adorned with architectural embellishments. The example is identical to (1) in that only the left foot is represented. A *dharmacakra* is visible at the center, as in many Buddhapāda, below which is a right-spinning swirl design with a double circle in which a snake is inscribed, and above which is a jeweled crown, which is more akin to the one from Bagan (fig.19) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, rather than in the Pala-

Sena period. Two figures are depicted on either side of the crown, each holding a fly whisk. The figures are distinguished by their hairstyles and chest features, suggesting that they may be male and female, respectively. A water jar on a pedestal is depicted to the left of the *dharmacakra*, while a conch shell is placed on a differently-formed pedestal to the right. A spiral pattern with protrusions above and below the toes can be observed. This design is identical to that shown in examples (1) and (4).

(7) Buddhapāda ②, Indian Museum

Acc. no. A 24214-BG.2. (fig.20)

Similar to the Buddhapadas (1) and (6), this one employs the reverse of the stone as a component of a votive stupa, with decoration on all four sides. The example depicted represents the right foot, whereas example (6) represents the left foot. A *dharmacakra* situated centrally on the foot is surmounted by a standing figure playing a conch shell. To the upper right of *dharmacakra* is an architectural structure with a flaming arch, a motif frequently observed in numerous temples in Bagan. A plate bearing offerings is depicted in the lower space; to the left of the *dharmacakra* is a banner erected on a jar, while below it is depicted a mountain with curling bracken patterns and a peacock perched at the summit. Such distinctive mountain representations can be observed in Bagan.⁶⁶ On either side of the peacock is a bird facing inward. The toes display spiral patterns with protrusions above and below, possibly representing conch shells, as shown in the Buddhapāda (6).

(8) Buddhapāda ③, Indian Museum, Kolkata

no. 4213 (fig. 21)

Most Buddhapāda from Bodh Gaya, with the exception of the present example and a smaller one held in Mahant's compound, utilize the reverse of the stone used for the votive stupa. However, this example from Bihar employs a differently shaped stone slab. The motifs on the footprint display a distinctive and unconventional design: a *dharmacakra* with unique spokes is situated slightly above the center of the foot. The architectural structures shown on the upper left and right sides are more modest than that seen in the Buddhapāda (7). The engraving also includes a standing image of Brahma, depicted with three faces and four arms, holding a long handle

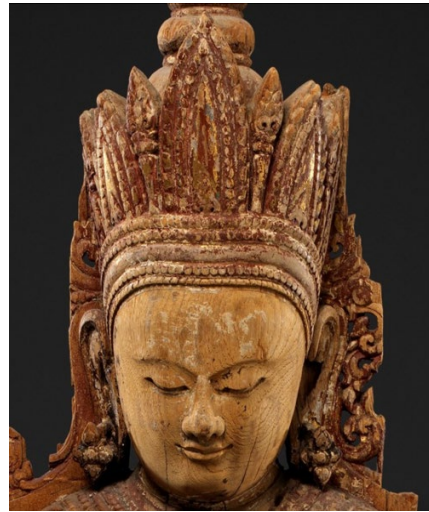


Fig. 19 Head of the Buddha, Bagan period
Metropolitan Museum of Art (1992:382)



Fig. 20 Line-drawing of the Buddhapāda
②, Indian Museum (Acc.no. A 24214-
BG.2.)

Drawing by the Author

⁶⁶ Bautze-Picron, *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan*, 175, pl.223.

of an umbrella, as well as a Buddhist scripture and a rosary. Immediately below the *dharmacakra* is apparently a boat, with a peacock and peahen on either side of its prow. On the heel, a ribbon-like object with fine wavy line engravings and an eight-petalled floral motif can be observed. It is noteworthy that this ribbon-like motif is also found in the Buddhapāda (4) housed in the Mahant residence. On the toes, a conch shell motif similar to that in the Buddhapāda (6) can be seen.



Fig. 21 Line-drawing of the
Buddhapāda ③, Indian Museum
(Acc.no.4213)
Drawing by the Author

(9) Buddhapāda, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin ①
no. MIK-I-1154 (figs. 22-1, 22-2)



Fig. 22-1 Buddhapāda, Bodhgaya, Pala period,
©Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für
Asiatische Kunst (Ident. no. I-1154).

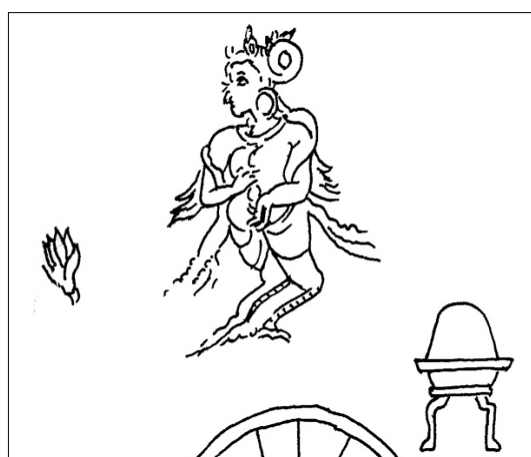


Fig. 22-2 Line-drawing of fig. 22-1
Drawing by the Author

This Buddhapāda also employs the reverse of the stone component of a votive stupa and represents the right foot in a manner analogous to that observed in the Buddhapāda (7). The *dharmacakra* is depicted in the center of the sole, above which is positioned a *kinnara* holding a musical instrument, probably *manjīrā* (a pair of small cymbals used for rituals). A bud-shaped flower and offering stand are discernible, respectively, in the upper-left and right quadrants, adjacent to the *dharmacakra*. The heel is carved with a motif resembling a basket attached to a stick. A conch shell-like motif, comparable to that observed in (6), is visible on the toes.

(10) Buddhapāda held in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin ②

no. MIK-I-17 (figs. 23-1, 23-2, 23-3)

This example also employs the reverse of the stone component of a votive stupa, representing the right foot in a manner consistent with the aforementioned examples. The *dharmacakra* is depicted at the center of the sole, with a *kinnarī* holding a *vīṇā* above it.⁶⁷ On the right side of the *kinnarī* is an eight-petalled floral motif, and below the *dharmacakra* is what appears to be a palanquin, the direction of which is unique as it is placed towards the heel rather than the toes. Given the variety of orientations in which the motifs of Buddhapāda are arranged in Southeast Asia, it seems plausible that this example might adopt a similar arrangement. The toes exhibit a conch shell-like motif, which is comparable to that observed in (6).

Thus, we may state that there are various types of Buddhapāda: a single footprint (right or left) and a pair of footprints. Regarding the motifs observed on the soles of our 10 Buddhapāda, there were no examples with the same motifs or settings. Some are decorated with a single or a few motifs, while others are elaborated with multiple motifs. Some motifs seen on the sole include traditional auspicious motifs, such as flower patterns, fish, *triratna*, and swastika, all of which can be found in the examples in the Andhra region in the early periods. Conversely, it is interesting to note that we can see several motifs, such as water jars (not *pūrṇaghata*[vase of abundance]), a crown, *kinnara*, *kinnarī*, banners, and mountains, found in Bagan in the later period. Those motifs cannot be identified in ancient Buddhapāda. Indeed, among the sutras compiled around the tenth-thirteenth centuries, the *Anāgatavaṃsa*⁶⁸, *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, *Jinālaṅkāraṭīkā*, *Paṭhamasambodhi*,⁶⁹ and



Fig. 23-1 Buddhapāda, Bodhgaya, Pala period
©Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (Ident. no.MIK-I-17)

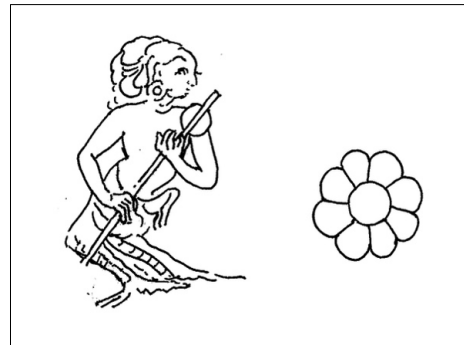


Fig. 23-2 Line-drawing of detail of fig. 23-1
Drawing by the Author

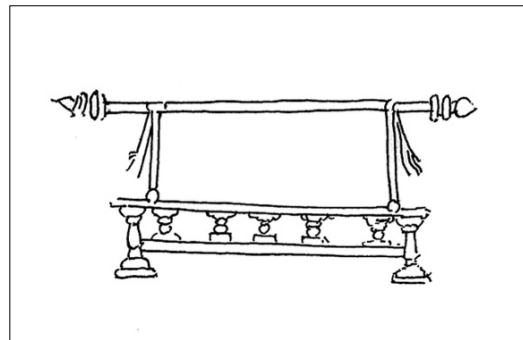


Fig. 23-3 Line-drawing of detail of fig. 23-1
Drawing by the Author

⁶⁷ It is unclear whether they are depicted as winged or not.

⁶⁸ The *Anāgatavaṃsa* describes the iconography associated with Maitreya's footprints.

⁶⁹ Coedes, *Pathamasambodhi*.

Buddhapādamāṅgala have references to these motifs, with a few exceptions.⁷⁰ It is particularly noteworthy that the crown seen in the example (6) is similar to that of the Buddha image in Bagan from the twelfth-thirteenth century. Additionally, architecture with a flaming arch, a mountain with a unique shape, a pair of kinnara and kinnari, a basket, and other iconographies, like boats and palanquins, can also be observed in Bagan. Quagliotti does not explicitly state that the intercultural relation between Bagan and Bodh



Fig. 24 Buddhapāda, Amaravati, 2nd century CE
©The Trustees of the British Museum
(1880,0709.57)

pattern to create auspicious motifs; however, the motifs observed in Bodh Gaya are scattered, although a *dharmacakra* is set in the center. Thus, the following question arises: Why does the setting of motifs in Bodh Gaya differ significantly from that of Bagan? Examples of setting various motifs around the central *dharmacakra* can be seen in the Buddhapāda (fig. 24) from Amaravati in ancient India and those (fig.25) from Sri Lanka in the Anuradhapura period. Almost all Buddhapāda from Sri Lanka are carved on square stone slabs and bear a pair of footprints, sometimes with an umbrella.⁷² Further, even the *dharmacakra* are sometimes not represented on the

Gaya would give rise to these similarities, while Di Crocco suggests an iconographic transmission from Bodh Gaya to Bagan. However, our evidence indicates that it is necessary to consider the possibility that the kinds and designs of motifs were brought from Bagan to Bodh Gaya.

Yet, some crucial differences exist between the Buddhapāda in Bodh Gaya and Bagan. Judging from the Buddhapāda painted on the ceilings of Bagan temples⁷¹, the soles of the footprints are distinctly registered in a grid



Fig. 25 Buddhapāda, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka,
Vavuniya Archaeological Museum
photograph by the author

⁷⁰ See Di Crocco, *Footprints of the Buddhas of This Era in Thailand and the Indian Subcontinent*; Cucizzo, *A Mirror Reflecting the Entire World*. The number of symbols represented on the soles of the footprints varies depending on the textual sources, with some sources indicating a total of 108 symbols and others indicating a total of 102, 100 or fewer symbols.

⁷¹ See n.59.

⁷² In some instances, a water lily is depicted between Buddhapāda and an umbrella (for example, a stone slab housed in the Abhayagiri Archaeological Museum).

soles, but there are very few examples with multiple patterns around them.⁷³ In general, most Sri Lankan Buddhapāda date back to the early Anuradhapura period, around the third century CE. Therefore, some may argue that it is not necessarily appropriate to compare the Buddhapāda of the Pala Sena dynasty with those of ancient Sri Lanka. However, as discussed in the travelogues and dedicative inscriptions in Chapter 1, it is known that various donations by Sri Lankans have been made at Bodh Gaya since BCE. We also know that a large Sri Lankan monastery already existed during the Gupta period and many Sri Lankan monks played a role in maintaining the sacred site even in the later times. Further, one more intriguing piece of evidence is the existence of the Sri Lankan Buddhapāda discovered in Bagan.⁷⁴ Based on the preceding evidence, a potential hypothesis can be posited—Sri Lankan monks in Bodh Gaya, who have a certain degree of authority in Bodh Gaya, might have been involved in creating Buddhapāda, during which they adopted some new motifs from Bagan, where Buddhism was flourishing, in contrast to Bihar.⁷⁵ The hypothesis may also explain the discrepancy in the placing of Buddhapāda: in Bagan, Buddhapāda is depicted on the ceiling of the temple, whereas, in Bodh Gaya, it is placed in front of the temple, as illustrated in the model of the Mahabodhi temple.



Fig. 26-1 Seated Buddha, Bodhgaya, 10th century CE,
©Indian Museum (no.2673-2674/A24148)

⁷³ For example, there is one each from Koddakeni (National Museum, Colombo; see Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka*, 72/6D-E), Anuradhapura (Anuradhapura Archaeological Museum), and Vavuniya (Vavuniya Archaeological Museum), and so forth (ibid., 73/6E). The stone slab of Buddhapāda from Vavuniya displays a prominent *dharmacakra* in the center of the sole, accompanied by the *triratna* below. To the left and right, above the *dharmacakra*, respectively, are an umbrella and *chauri*, the handles of which emerge from a round jar. The remaining elements are positioned in a vertical sequence below the aforementioned elements. On the left and right are an offering stand, resembling the hourglass motif observed in the slab from Amaravati, and a *śrivasta*, respectively. Below these are twin fish and a conch shell.

⁷⁴ See Poolsuwan, *Buddhist Murals of Pagan No.2*, fig.19(b).

⁷⁵ Dharmasvāmin recounts that he was advised by a Theravada Buddhist monk to discard the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* he had in his possession, claiming that the Mahayana teachings were not beneficial (Tasaki, “The Buddha Gaya in the Early 13th Century,” 80).

One more pair of soles must be referenced, i.e., the foot soles of seated Buddha images in the Pala dynasty, currently held in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. In general, a simplified *dharmacakra*—a tiny six- or eight-petalled floral design, or a small double-circular motif—is frequently carved on the soles of Buddha and Bodhisattva images in the Pala-Sena period. However, the soles of the Buddha image in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* recovered from Bodh Gaya,⁷⁶ bear four motifs—two fish, a swastika, *triratna*, and a *dharmacakra* (figs.26-1, 26-2). The *triratna* is set at the center of the sole, with the swastika and two fish, respectively, on the left and right sides above the *triratna*, and the *dharmacakra*, on the heel.⁷⁷ The elements constituting the *triratna* are also distinctive: the ω-motif is not in the form of a common ω, but a conch shell is protruding from between the ω-motif and the *dharmacakra*, and a lotus flower is depicted below the *dharmacakra*. The swastika is a common motif in the Buddhapāda excavated from the Andhra region, but the one on the soles of our Buddha image is the only example from the Pala-Sena period. It is also noteworthy that each of the four tips of the swastika is decorated with bead-like ornaments. As a supplementary point, the setting of the *dharmacakra* on the heel and the *triratna* in the center of the sole can also be seen in Buddha and Bodhisattva statues from Mathura in the Kushan period and on one of the Buddhapāda in the Abhayagiri Archaeological Museum, suggesting intercultural communication between India and Sri Lanka. While there is no definitive evidence to ascertain whether the donor of the Buddha statue was a Sinhalese individual, given the robust historical and cultural connections between Bodh Gaya and the Sinhalese Buddhist community, it is plausible that Sri Lankan Buddhists may have played a role in the statue's background.



Fig. 26-2 Line-drawing of the right foot of fig. 26-1

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we focused especially on the travelogues by monks, who visited Bodh Gaya, donative inscriptions, sculptural representations of the models of the Mahabodhi temple, and Buddhapāda discovered at Bodh Gaya, to analyze some aspects of the development

⁷⁶ The inscription on the Buddha image comprises two lines and states that Bodhisena from Dantagalla donated the image (Tsukamoto, *A Comprehensive Study of the Indian Buddhist Inscriptions*. Vol.1, 142-3; Indrajī, “Buddha Gayā, the Hermitage of Śākya Muni, by Rajendralala Mitra (Book Review),” 143).

⁷⁷ Some of the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues from Mathura, dating to the Kushan period, bear a *triratna* in the upper part of the sole and a *dharmacakra* on the heel. Regarding the Buddha images from Gandhara, the only example of a *dharmacakra* on the heel is found on the sole of a Buddha image in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection (Acc. No. 743), which is notably scarce. The heel has a *dharmacakra* with a serration pattern on its outer edge and a large *triratna*, extending from the center to the top of the sole (Quagliotti, *Buddhapadas*, 62-3, Figs. 39-40).

and management of Bodh Gaya. The analysis undertaken here leads to the following three observations.

First, the Bagan dynasty restored the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya. Even in the thirteenth century, when the major Buddhist centers in Eastern India were declining, Buddhist monks from neighboring countries still made pilgrimages to the site, as a sacred place, and donated intermittently. Second, despite variations in the details of the votive tablets, which have been found in abundance not only in Eastern India but also in Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand, a seated Buddha image in *bhūmiśparśa mudrā* in the Mahabodhi temple and a Bodhi tree behind the structure are always represented. In other words, these icons indicate that Theravadin Buddhists from the neighboring countries recognized Bodh Gaya not only as sacred but also necessary to prove the orthodoxy of their Buddhism. For this reason, a pseudo-holy site modeled on Bodh Gaya was built in a neighboring country, and their devotion led to the production of pilgrimage souvenirs in the form of models of the Mahabodhi temple. Third, it is crucial to note that they added their regionalized taste of Buddhist art rooted in their region to the model of the Mahabodhi temple. Even though Buddhapāda had not been produced in India for a considerable time, it is remarkable that despite the decline of Buddhism, Buddhapāda, containing many motifs of Bagan and Sri Lanka, was produced in Bodh Gaya.

To conclude this paper, we will revisit the initial question posed: how was the authenticity and orthodoxy of the sacred site, Bodh Gaya, sustained when Buddhism was declining? This is related to how the Buddhists of neighboring countries sought to prove the authenticity and orthodoxy of their forms of Buddhism. The antiquities discussed in this paper validate that Buddhists in neighboring countries not only recognized Bodh Gaya as the sacred place where the Buddha attained enlightenment but also as an essential site for the verification of the authenticity and orthodoxy of their own beliefs, even as the Buddhism in India faced rapid decline. For them, inserting their unique elements into Bodh Gaya as the original sacred site, ensured that their regional Buddhist art was no longer peripheral and that they were able to acquire authenticity and orthodoxy. Additionally, the many regional characteristics observed in the sculptural representations examined in this paper were made possible by the support of neighboring Buddhist patrons, who facilitated the continued survival of Bodh Gaya.

This paper has only provided a cursory overview of the sculpted Buddhapādas in Sri Lanka when discussing the Buddhapādas from Bodh Gaya. In the upcoming research, I aim to delve more deeply into the dissemination and evolution of the Buddha's Footprint faith in Sri Lanka and its neighboring countries.

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Abbreviation

Cv. *Cūḷavaṃsa*

Mhbv. *Mahābodhivaṃsa*

Mhv. *Mahāvaṃsa*

T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經)

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fig.18 Line drawing of Buddhapāda ①, Bodhgaya, Indian Museum, Kolkata (no. A
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fig.19 Detail of Standing Crowned Buddha, Bagan period, Burma, ©The Metropolitan
Museum of Art. (1992.382)

fig.20 Line drawing of Buddhapāda ②, Bodhgaya, Indian Museum, Kolkata (no. A
24214-BG.2), drawing by the author

fig.21 Line drawing of Buddhapāda ③, Bodhgaya, Indian Museum, Kolkata (no.4213),
drawing by the author

fig.22-1 Buddhapāda①, Bodhgaya, Pala dynasty, Musuem für Asiatische Kunst (Ident.
no. I 1154) in: <https://id.smb.museum/object/1650035>. Photo: Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst /CC BY-SA 4.0[accessed: 12 January
2025]

fig.22-2 Line drawing: detail of fig.22-1, drawing by the author

fig.23-1 Buddhapāda②, Bodhgaya, Pala dynasty, Musuem für Asiatische Kunst (Ident.
no. MIK-I-17) in: <https://id.smb.museum/object/1636232>. Photo: Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst /CC BY-SA 4.0[accessed: 12
January 2025]

fig.23-2 Line drawing: detail of fig.23-1, drawing by the author

fig.23-3 Line drawing: detail of fig.23-1, drawing by the author

fig.24 Buddhapāda, Amaravati, British Museum (1880,0709.57) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

fig.25 Buddhapāda, Anuradhapura period, Vayuniya, Vayuniya Archaeological Museum, Sri Lanka, photographed by the author

fig.26-1 Seated Buddha, c.10th century CE., Bodhgaya, Indian Museum, Kolkata. (no.2673-2674/A24148), © Indian Museum, Kolkata

fig.26-2 Detail of the right foot of fig.26-1, © Indian Museum, Kolkata