## CHAPTER 5: MAITREYA

### 5.1 – The traditional type of iconography

Among the figures that make up the modestly sized iconographic repertoire of these sculptures, although the prime position is occupied by Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi, the representations of Maitreya deserve particular attention. This is due not so much to the quantity of images but rather to their variety and specificity, from which we can grasp certain peculiar aspects of the cult devoted to this bodhisattva.

One of the simplest iconographic versions of Maitreya is represented on stela S141 (II: Fig. 107; GS 18). Thanks to the fortuitous conservation of details and the more traditional iconography, this is also one of the most easily recognisable subjects, which in turn provides useful elements for comparative analysis of other, less preserved specimens. The bodhisattva is depicted standing on the corolla of a lotus with upturned petals. He has bare feet and is wearing a *paridhāna* with a belt knotted at the waist, a shawl, a Brahmanical cord, bracelets, a short beaded necklace, and large hanging earrings. The headdress seems to consist of a crown of matted hair (*jaṭāmukuṭa*), or maybe a three-pointed *mukuṭa* tied at the sides, leaving the *jaṭā* fully visible, with an image of a *stūpa* in the central crest. The right hand, in *abhayamudrā*, is holding an *akṣamālā*, while the lowered left hand holds a pyriform *kamaṇḍalu.* Two small figures of offerers kneel below at his sides: to the right is a woman with a lotus flower and on the left is a man (?) with a votive lamp (an open portable fire-stand?).

The good preservation of details makes S141 the unambiguous paradigm of a specific iconographic type, characterised by the simultaneous presence of *akṣamālā* and *kamaṇḍalu*. This association is an important clue to a safe identification, especially when, as in the case of rock sculptures, the surfaces are worn down by centuries of exposure to the elements. Thus, we can positively identify Maitreya among standing figures (S147; II: Fig. 141; GS 19) and seated figures as well (S38, S68, C73; II: Figs. 40, 70 and 76b left respectively; GS 22, 21 and 23 respectively; see also below).

Several stylistic and iconographic elements of S141 seem to place it among the earliest rock art works: the symmetrical rows of curls, the receding features of the face, the heaviness of the figure, and the straight instead of knotted belt ends all call to mind certain late-Gandharan examples.[151] Nevertheless, the presence must be noted of other details that are absolutely typical of the rock sculpture of Swat, such as the drapery of the *paridhāna*, with hem raised above the left knee, the simple beaded necklace, and the rather rigid pose of the body despite the bending position. These are all features that place the work within the new current. Also, despite several marginal iconographic variations, this sculpture finds a close comparison in a bronze that Barrett assigns to the Swat (1962: 40, pl. XXIX, fig. 20). Previously described by Grünwedel, Gibson and Burgess (1901: 186-188) as being among the antiquities of the Berlin Museum, the piece disappeared after World War II. In addition to unusual icono-

[151] Although a rigorous stylistic classification of the sculptures of Gandhāra is still impossible, certain marked stylistic and iconographic characteristics that recur frequently and with cross associations can be the basis for a rather loose chronological scheme. Consideration is to be given, for example, to particular draperies with flat pleats that are ribbon-like or in pairs of engraved lines. These are mostly associated with strong facial characteristics that in their relative variety (e.g. the shape of the face, narrow and long or wide and squashed) also contain common stylistic motifs, such as protruding slanted eyes, receding facial features quite close to each other, and the schematic and artificial decorativeness of the headdresses. Frequently there are, in association with such stylistic characteristics, also particular iconographic motifs such as the chair with round, elongated legs, sometimes with a back that is flared at the top; see e.g. Ingholt 1957 fig. 285; Taddei 1985 fig. 6; Id. 1987 figs. 9-11; Sotheby Parke Bernet & Co. 1982 n. 361; Kurita 1988-1990: I, fig. 413; cf. also, in Callieri *et al.* 1992: pl. XVIII, figs. 1-2 and p. 35, the two small stela statues depicting two seated bodhisattvas, found at Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai. According to the revised chronology and periodisation of the site (Olivieri forthcoming), the two stelae belong to the context of Period VII, dated to the first half of the third centuries CE. For their stylistic and iconographic characteristics, the two sculptures can be assigned to the latest phase of this chronological horizon.

**Fig. 34** – Chilas I: Standing Maitreya
(courtesy Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften, Felsbilder und Inschriften am Karakorum Highway)

graphic features (rare among the bronzes and unknown among the rock sculptures), such as the presence of the *vanamālā* and the garments decorated with small circular motifs, this bronze is also characterised by infrequent technical devices such as the particularly intricate inlay decoration in silver and copper.

It cannot be ruled out that these uncommon features may constitute, within the class of the bronze sculpture, an analogous indication of relative archaism. With a cautious hypothesis, it is possible to compare it with the group of post-Gandharan sculptures roughly dated to the sixth century CE, which show, in addition to an exchange of influences with Kashmiri art, a taste for an overly ornate – though schematic – decoration (Paul 1986: 119 ff.). On the other hand, the bronze of the Berlin Museum can be compared, in an even more immediate manner, with certain petroglyphs from Chilas I, in particular the standing Maitreya (Fig. 34) depicted between a *stūpa* (on the right) and a minor figure of Avalokiteśvara (on the left). While Avalokiteśvara is identified as such by the iconographic details as well as by the inscription (#[*na*]*mo aryavalokiXXX*), the inscription

that accompanies Maitreya is a generic votive formula that mentions the donors (Siṃhoṭa and Gamanaśūra) but not the divinity that is the object of the dedication (Fussman 1993: 23; pl. 16). Nonetheless the attributes of the figure (*akṣamālā* and *kamaṇḍalu*) leave no doubt concerning its identification.

This series of petroglyphs, executed at the same time as the inscriptions and therefore also chronologically classifiable on a palaeographic basis, is assigned by Fussman (*ibidem*) to a date certainly before 630, even if the author fixes a generic term *ante quem* just for reasons of prudence, cautiously suggesting indeed the possibility of a much earlier dating.[152] Besides the generic affinity of the crown and other ornaments, the style and decoration of the garments, as well as the feet set widely apart, appear too similar to be casual. The evidence is perhaps tenuous but nevertheless significant, since it testifies to a transitional phase in which Swat sculpture was moving between a Gandharan legacy and new artistic inputs. It thus constitutes a precious record of the artistic process which led to the full formal independence of the slightly later production, where the elements inherited by previous experiences are almost unrecognisable, merged as they are into a new, different vocabulary.

With the exception of this example, the depiction of Maitreya in the rock art of Swat, although inspired by the preceding tradition, contains strongly innovative elements that seem to represent not so much a mere iconographic evolution of older models as a true evolution of the contents that we can attempt to link to historical documentation.

## 5.2 – The iconographic innovations

A form of representation still echoing the Gandharan tradition – in the conceptual scheme rather than in iconography and style – is that of Maitreya as a member of the divine triad, where he shares with Avalokiteśvara the function of attendant to the Buddha. However, a fully recognisable Maitreya appears in this role only once (and with innovative characteristics compared to the preceding tradition), in a relief in the Jambil Valley, C9 (II: Figs. 8a,b; GS 24).[153] The relief shows, on the right, a large image of a pensive Padmapāṇi and on the left a triad composed of a seated Buddha flanked by two standing bodhisattvas. The Buddha, with nimbus and aureole, is in *dhyānāsana* on a throne supported by lions standing frontally with snouts facing each other, and surmounted by an ornate cushion with the characteristic fringed tassel. The two bodhisattvas at the sides, haloed and smaller in size, are standing on two identical lotus corollas with two opposite rows of petals, in an accentuated, identical bending pose.

The precarious state of conservation of the relief, aggravated by the (intentional?) disfigurement of the faces, prevents a detailed description of the headdress, which nonetheless, judging by the respective profile and particularly the height, must have consisted of a crown, which most likely differed in form from each other. The bodhisattva on the left is certainly Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi: in *varadamudrā,* the bodhisattva holds in his left hand, lifted up at shoulder level, his distinctive attribute, the lotus flower. But he holds it in a very unusual manner: by the end of the stem, so that the corolla points downwards. As usual, his garments are composed of the *paridhāna* with a knotted belt, probably the *uttarīya*, and the typical short beaded necklace. To the right is Maitreya, with his ascetic characteristics strongly accented: in addition to the *kamaṇḍalu* held along his side in his left hand, the bodhisattva holds in his right hand the sound-making staff of the ascetic (*khakkara*). This has the form of a long pole topped by a circular element with hanging rings, whose profile can be conjectured on the right. The garments are the typically monastic ones, i.e. a rather short *saṃghāṭī* from which a length of the *antaravāsaka* sticks out.

[152] "[…] je ne connais pas d'argument qui empêche de les dater des environs de 500 par exemple" (Fussman 1993: 23).

[153] Although in the rock art of Swat depictions of triads composed of a Buddha between two bodhisattvas are rather rare, it cannot be ruled out that Maitreya was present in other examples of this type as well. Nevertheless, the poor conservation of the reliefs does not permit the certain identification of the attributes, among which however there appears the ascetic's staff, an object frequently associated with the images of the standing Maitreya (see further on).

Maitreya reappears with these same characteristics in other compositional groups where the major differences from the Gandharan tradition and, at the same time, the innovative features of the rock sculpture stand out with greater immediacy. Again in the Jambil Valley, relief C30 (II: Figs. 31a-e) clearly shows the most original traits of the rock art of Swat in terms of iconography and spatial organisation of the figures. The centre (not physical but rather conceptual) of the scene is a triad composed of a Buddha, in *dhyānāsana* on a *siṃhāsana* of the "columned" type, accompanied by two bodhisattvas standing on two identical lotus flowers. From their attributes (respectively a lotus flower and a manuscript) the bodhisattvas can be identified as Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi on the right and Mañjuśrī or Maitreya on the left (see below, Chap. 5.4; II: Figs. 31a,b; GS 37). To the right of the triad, on a simple lotus corolla in the centre of the longitudinal axis of the relief, is an image of a standing Maitreya (II: Fig. 31d; GS 25), small in proportions compared to the components of the triad but with the same attributes and garments as the preceding relief. To the left of the main group is depicted a second triad (II: Fig. 31e) notably smaller than the first. It is composed of a pensive Padmapāṇi accompanied by two standing bodhisattvas. The one to left is difficult to identify; the one to the right, although not well preserved, can be positively identified as a replica of the preceding Maitreya, the only difference perhaps being the garment that here seems to consist of a simple *paridhāna.*

The rule determining the composition, according to the overall concept of rock art, is the renouncement of artificially imposed symmetry in favour of an adaptation to the space provided by the natural shape of the stone. On the other hand, it is much more difficult to establish the rule, if any, that determines the choice of the subjects and, even more, of their juxtaposition. Worth noting, however, is the triad composed of bodhisattvas only, a subject certainly atypical in comparison to the traditional Gandharan repertoire (which, however, still inspires the iconographic scheme) but not infrequent in the rock art of Swat and bordering areas. In this specific case, the triad has Maitreya depicted as an attendant. The relief preserves the details of the *kamaṇḍalu* of Maitreya, i.e. an inverted cone-shaped vase with horizontal pod-like elements and a handle on top. The form of this attribute remains constant in all the representations of Maitreya as an ascetic, in an iconographic version inspired by the figure of the errant monk.

A more detailed version of the *kamaṇḍalu* is supplied by the stela found at Shnaisha inside a kind of chapel that, in a late phase of the life of the site, was set against the wall of the main *stūpa* (Qamar and Ashraf Khan 1991: 185, 188; pl. 13; Abdur Rahman 1993: 20, 22 and plates XXa, XXVIIb; here, S179; II: Figs. 73a,b; GS 26).[154] Unfortunately the stela is mutilated: the figure is apodal, the face and the hairdress are greatly chipped, and the end of the pole is missing (although, by analogy, the object can safely be identified as an ascetic's staff). Also missing is (most probably) the nimbus. As in relief C30, the bodhisattva is wearing a *paridhāna* instead of a monastic garment, confirming the existence of a (significant?) variation in the clothing. Due to several stylistic and iconographical details (the shape of the face, the anatomical structure, the position of the body, the drapery of the garments, and the wavy design of the ends of the belt), the stela fits perfectly into the sphere of rock sculpture, even though its position in the specific context of Shnaisha remains uncertain. In this example the vase of Maitreya, although conserving its typical form, is decorated with incised geometrical motifs.[155]

[154] Regarding the stela found at Shnaisha, the two excavation reports published up to now offer discordant interpretations. Qamar and Ashraf Khan (1991: 185) hypothesise that it portrays the bodhisattva Maitreya, although erroneously interpreting the attribute as a lance. Of a different opinion is Abdur Rahman (1993: 20, 22), who interprets the figure as an image of Śiva Mahādeva, recalling, although without citing it, an hypothesis previously formulated by Tucci (see below). On the basis of this premise, which I consider to be erroneous, and in consideration of the position of the chapel that contains the image, the author draws wrong conclusions regarding the religious syncretism of the period. According to Abdur Rahman's reconstruction, the period in question is that of the Kushan hegemony, as testified, according to the author, by the stela itself. Nonetheless, the author does not cite any archaeological datum that could corroborate such a dating, which is absolutely impossible both for the stela under discussion as well as for the other rock sculptures that he himself cites in comparison. See the critical reappraisal by Taddei (1998), followed by a polemic reply by Abdur Rahman (2001) that, however, does not clear up the doubts raised by Taddei's review. On this subject see also Chap. 1.3 and Part II, Introduction.

[155] From this, as with many other examples of the same type, it emerges that the tendency toward a certain simplification of details, which characterises the rock sculptures and which can at first sight influence a judgement regarding style and chronology, actually

The iconographic version of the ascetic/errant monk Maitreya is certainly repeated in other reliefs, all asymmetric groups of bodhisattvas.[156] In one of them, located in the Kokarai area (C71; II: Fig. 74), the group is composed of a triad (on the right) and a bodhisattva in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* (on the left). The main character of the triad is a pensive Padmapāṇi, while the ascetic Maitreya is one of the two standing attendants, the other being a second Padmapāṇi in *varadamudrā*. Most likely the bodhisattva that completes the relief on the left – shown in a different iconographic attitude (see below) – is again Maitreya.

In relief C100 (II: Fig. 100), in the Ugad Valley, the standing figure of the ascetic Maitreya is placed between two pensive Padmapāṇi who were differentiated, to judge from what has been conserved of the relief, by only a few elements such as the throne (a rectangular podium surmounted by a cushion for the Padmapāṇi on the right, the typical lotus-shaped throne for the one on the left) and the central hem of the garment, visible only in the Padmapāṇi on the left. The difference in size, less marked between the two Padmapāṇi, is more conspicuous in the figure of Maitreya, who appears noticeably smaller, especially in view of the fact that he is standing. As in many other instances in the rock art of Swat, the different sizes of the figures in this case seem to be primarily dictated by criteria of spatial organisation that, as we have seen, do not always render with proportional variations the concept of a hierarchic relationship. Nonetheless, the visual result of the scene, despite the centrality of the Maitreya figure, actually translates into an effect of predominance of the two Padmapāṇi.

Even more clearly, the (apparently?) subordinated position with respect to Padmapāṇi is reasserted by relief C118 (II: Fig. 122), where the standing ascetic Maitreya is represented, smaller in size and standing frontally, to the proper left of a seated Padmapāṇi.[157] In relief C22 (II: Figs. 22a,b,c), also in the Kokarai area, the principal subject is again a triad with a pensive Padmapāṇi flanked by two standing bodhisattvas of uncertain identification. Above this group are two smaller figures: to the right a figure in *dhyānāsana* (also a bodhisattva?) and to the left a standing Maitreya with an ascetic's staff and a *kamaṇḍalu*. The group is completed on the right by the image of a bodhisattva over a smaller one of a pensive Padmapāṇi, and by the depiction of a *stūpa* with a tall square body that hosts the image of a Buddha (?) in *dhyānāsana.* In all the examples cited, and especially in the last one, the figure of Maitreya occupies a marginal position which, however, seems limited to this specific aspect of bodhisattva iconography.

Of a different tenor are the several representations of the enthroned Maitreya. They depict a distinct iconographic type, for which we posses a direct comparison with the bronzes. The diversification in the iconographic rendering of Maitreya, depicted sometimes as an errant monk and sometimes enthroned, is so manifest and constant that it appears to follow a precise iconological criterion. It is probably aimed at establishing a code of recognition that refers not so much, or not only, to two different temporal conditions of Maitreya – reigning in the Tuṣita heaven or descended as a Brahman in the land of Ketumatī – but rather to two aspects of the bodhisattva and his relationship with the earthly world. Worth noticing is however the fact that in both cases the top of the headdress mostly shows a slightly curvilinear profile, probably formed by a projecting *jāṭa* as if to highlight the inherent ascetic nature of the bodhisattva.

As we have seen, in the rock sculpture of Swat certain iconographic variations can be categorised as semantic signs that serve to create immediately perceptible distinctions. Such is the *ardhaparyaṅkāsana/*reverse *ard-*

responds to a sort of ergonomic principle. It cannot be by chance that some stelae show greater iconographic richness, perhaps because they were destined for a more sheltered place and intended for close viewing, compared to the sculptures executed on rocky boulders or walls that are subject to more rapid deterioration and are not related to a fixed and close point for observation.

[156] To these reliefs of certain interpretation we should perhaps add C79 (II: Fig. 81a), where the standing bodhisattva to the left of the pensive Padmapāṇi (II: Fig. 81b) could be holding a long pole, which in this case can only be the ascetic's staff of Maitreya. However, this reading is only a possibility.

[157] In this relief, unfortunately badly damaged, Maitreya holds a *kamaṇḍalu* in his lowered left hand. It is difficult to say which attribute he holds in the right hand, whose position, raised to shoulder level, would comply both with holding a book or an ascetic's staff. An almost identical scheme (a pensive Padmapāṇi to the left and a "minor" standing figure of Maitreya to the right) is repeated in a relief in Buner (Olivieri 1994: fig. 9); in this case, the attribute in Maitreya's right hand is a book.

*haparyaṅkāsana* opposition that represents two different and complementary functions. As discussed in the previous chapters, the second – a mirror version of the first – is reserved for the *prajñā* family, to which not only Maitreya, but also Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi-Vajrasattva can be ascribed.[158] While the standing versions of the bodhisattva usually posses a greater index of recognition, it is particularly in the seated versions that identification is more often uncertain. This depends on the scarce differentiation of the specific attributes, almost always reduced to a vague profile in which the attributes of each of the three bodhisattvas find an equally compatible form.

## 5.3 – Maitreya and Vajrapāṇi[159]

Cross-comparison shows how the silhouette of many rock sculptures corresponds almost perfectly with that of the bronzes. This indicates, as we have often been able to ascertain, the existence of common iconographic models that, although with variations and adaptations, are repeated in both productions. By virtue of this patent analogy, details often lost in the rock sculptures can be retrieved from the bronzes. Nonetheless, the degree of precision is determined by the index of recognition of the different iconographic models. In some instances individualities are only scarcely differentiated and, for lack of specific details, their identification remains uncertain. This is exactly the case with Maitreya and Vajrapāṇi. Several bronzes show them both seated in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* and with a profile that is so similar in the form of the attribute and the pose of the hand holding it that their silhouettes are practically superimposable. Thus, in the rock reliefs even a superficial abrasion makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other, also in view of the fact that other significant details – such as the features of the headdress, which generally offers a further element for recognition in the case of the bronzes – in the rock sculpture are often barely preserved, if not completely obliterated.[160]

Actually, the presence of Vajrapāṇi among the seated figures of bodhisattva in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* in the rock sculpture is merely a likely hypothesis based on the existence of a version (this also known from very few samples) that unmistakably portrays the bodhisattva as standing. For this iconographic type there are no known comparisons outside the specific sphere of the rock sculptures of Swat, not among coeval productions in different media (such as bronzes, terracottas and paintings), but also not among the rock sculptures in the adjacent areas (Dir, Puran, Buner).

Among the rock sculptures, the standing Vajrapāṇi appears in two different versions, either with right hand with *vajra* held horizontally to the shoulder and left hand on hip (S18; II: Fig. 18; GS 32), or in *varadamudrā*, holding in his left hand a *vajra* (S43 and S144; II: Figs. 44 and 146 respectively; GS 30 and 31 respectively). The lower extremity rests on a lotus with a long stem that emerges from the ground and usually rises as far as the top of the bodhisattva's thigh, and a minute corolla, seen in profile, which shows two opposite rows of petals. Due to the scant details that have been preserved, the lotus is not immediately recognisable. The thick, rigid form of the stem and the unusual size of the corolla, too small in proportion, make the lotus appear, at first sight, more like a *daṇḍa*. Unnatural forms of the lotus, in a way similar to this one, can occasionally be found. Among the rock sculptures, a comparison can be seen in stela S133 (II: Fig. 134), which depicts a standing Padmapāṇi whose lotus has a rather stubby stem, making the corolla – already more minute than usual – appear even smaller in size. Also the *vajra* shows an unusual and variable shape, which probably changes according to some specific meaning or function. It can be classified in two different types: a symmetrical wavy form (type *a*), and a compound form, with triangular upper part and bulbous lower part (type *b*), possibly to be interpreted as a combination of the *vajra* either with a bell (*ghaṇṭā*) or a dagger (skt. *kīla*; tib. *phurba*).

[158] On the characteristics and implications of this symmetrical opposition see esp. Chap. 3.3-4.
[159] On the conventional use of the name "Vajrapāṇi" in this volume see Chap. 1, fn. 9.
[160] For example, in the bronzes of Karachi, the gem in the headdress of Vajrapāṇi (Figs. 31a,b) or the *stūpa* in the headdress of Maitreya (Figs. 29a,b).

As for the lotus' shape, more numerous and easier comparisons – although indirect – are often found in other contexts.[161] Nonetheless, in our case, the most likely hypothesis is that, in the specific repertoire of rock sculptures, this is the iconographic form conventionally attributed to the blue lotus (or nocturnal *utpala* or *nīlapadma*), which is depicted as a closed flower seen in profile, often with an external row of reverse petals (Bunce 1994: *s.v.*), associated with the night and the moon (Id. 2001: *s.v.*).

The lotus that rises from the earth, supporting the *vajra* held by Vajrapāṇi (or the one from whom Vajrapāṇi receives the *vajra*?), finds only a vague analogy in the rather common iconographic convention that places the attribute of the divinity on the corolla of a lotus, a lotus that the divinity itself, however, holds in its hand. This particular device, which applies to both seated and standing figures, becomes a quite common feature in Buddhist iconography especially from the sixth/seventh century onward (Pal 1986-1988: II, fig. 90a).

The peculiar image of the standing Vajrapāṇi depicted in the rock sculpture of Swat conforms, in its general characteristics, to the iconographic type portrayed in a *sādhana* of an eleventh-century manuscript cited by Foucher. Here the bodhisattva, in *varadamudrā*, is holding both the *vajra* and the *utpala* lotus, and is defined in the *sādhana* as "Vajrapāṇi of Maṅgakoṣṭha in Oḍḍiyāna" (Foucher 1905: I, pl. VI, n. 5; p. 193, n. 22). The precise geographical reference given in the text explicitly indicates a significant connection between the bodhisattva and Swat,[162] which may be the possible source of this iconographic theme and its later variants, among which the manuscript's illustration itself can be counted.

Various traces of this special link can be found in Buddhist literature. Texts containing direct references to Vajrapāṇi and the North-West (in particular Uḍḍiyāna), albeit cryptically, offer clear evidence of a part of the doctrine not revealed by the Buddha to the great assembly of the *śrāvaka*s and the bodhisattvas, but – in a conversation without words and without time or place – to an intimate entourage (*abhyantaraparivāra*), in which Vajrapāṇi plays the principal role. In fact, he seems to represent, in the sphere of the esoteric disciplines, the intuitive, mystic capacity to duplicate the substantial identity of the three mysteries – the body, voice and thought of the Tathāgata – of which Vajrapāṇi is considered the Lord (*Guhyakādhipati*). He is, in a word, the expression of the substantial, but unknown, unity of the Tathāgata with all human beings, a unity that can only be accomplished through a process of magical auto-identification.[163]

Compared with Padmapāṇi or Maitreya, Vajrapāṇi does not seem to have ever enjoyed a true popular cult, a sphere in which he is essentially acknowledged (or presented) as a kind of guardian, with a ferocious face, of Dharma. This literal expression of his functions gives the bodhisattva an abstract scholastic character, difficult to approach for the immediate needs of the faith, not even through transitive properties. The true home of Vajrapāṇi remains that of the esoteric circles, within which he represents the quintessence of magical science.[164]

The iconographic version of Swat, which in its austere simplicity is distant from the martial or purely ancillary image often attributed to Vajrapāṇi,[165] is perhaps one that most faithfully transmits a recollection of

[161] As for Gandhāra, a case in point is represented by the bodhisattva to the left in the triad within micro-architecture of the Peshawar Museum (in Ingholt 1957: fig. 257; Miyaji 1985b: pl. IV, 1 no. 10; Kurita 1988-1990: I, fig. 396; Filigenzi 2012a: fig. 45). An analogous solution is documented in Kashmir by the Pandrethan Padmapāṇi (Siudmak 1990: fig. 9).

[162] On the identification of Mangakoṣṭha as Dhānyapura/Dangram, see Tucci 1958: fn. 24 (mentioning earlier theories), 228, 316.

[163] Such doctrinal formulations appear in a more or less explicit form in the seventh century in texts such as *Mahāvairocanasūtra* from China (Lamotte 1966: 152-154); nevertheless, already the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin, in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, tells of a long journey taken by the Buddha Śākyamuni in central and southern India. During the second leg of the journey, in the North-West, the Buddha separated from Ānanda and was accompanied only by Vajrapāṇi (Przyluski 1914). Although the *Vinaya* is silent on why, it is difficult to consider it merely by chance that, within the tantric tradition, Vajrapāṇi is said to have received the teaching and confidence of the Vajrayāna from the Buddha in Uḍḍiyāna (cf. Tucci 1949: 212-215).

[164] A close relationship between the *vidyārāja*s – who can be briefly defined as magical, personified formulas – and Vajrapāṇi, to whose authority the former are subject, is established, for example, in the *Ārya-Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Przyluski 1923: 311-312).

[165] According to relatively late traditions, summarised in a passage of the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* by Haribhadra, Vajrapāṇi is the one who protects the doctrinal Body [revealed] from the material body of all the Tathāgatas. He is the perpetual acolyte (*nityam*

the tantric nature of the bodhisattva.[166] It is probably not by chance that the very few examples that portray Vajrapāṇi standing with a lotus emerging from the earth are found exclusively on stelae, for which we can postulate a more protected and reserved placement. Also worth mentioning is the iconographic coincidence with the image cited in the manuscript, where the *utpala* lotus is not held by the bodhisattva's hand but insinuates itself through his bent arm, as if the flower's stem were not cut off but still attached to the roots and emerging from the ground. In another manuscript of the same collection (Ms. A. 15, No. 10; Foucher 1905: I, pl. II, n. 3), the bodhisattva is shown standing beside Akṣobhya, his spiritual progenitor, and again the lotus he is holding in his left hand is still attached to the roots and rises up from the earth (or from water?) until the corolla reaches his face's level. It would therefore seem that a crucial aspect in the iconography of Vajrapāṇi, at least in certain contexts, is this specific form of the lotus, which may point to particular meanings of an esoteric nature. This is indirectly indicated through the recurrent presence of this motif in the grottoes of western Deccan (Kanheri, Ellora, Aurangabad), which many scholars now believe to be connected to the diffusion of tantric Buddhism.[167]

As will be more evident further on, traces of a substantive affinity between Maitreya, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi can perhaps be detected in their active connection with the Law, and namely its revelation, transmission and protection. This affinity is expressed, in the enthroned version of these bodhisattvas, in the sharing of the reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana*. A cursory examination of the iconography of the three bodhisattvas, as testified by the bronzes, reveals the difficulty in distinguishing one from another in the evanescent profiles of the rock sculptures.

The bronzes portraying an enthroned Maitreya provide important information regarding the form of his distinctive attribute, which is not the handled vase characteristic of the standing ascetic Maitreya reproduced in the rock sculptures, but a small, elongated flask the bodhisattva is holding in the palm of his hand resting on his thigh, or suspended from his wrist or on the stem of the *campā* (flower of *nāgakeśara*; cf. Pal 1975: 202, no. 77; von Schroeder 1981: 94-95, 11H). In one of the Karachi bronzes the bodhisattva is portrayed seated cross-legged (in *sattvāsana*?) on a lotus with two opposite rows of petals, with a strip of stylised rock at the base and the right hand in *mahāśrīmudrā* (Figs. 35a,b).[168] In another he is in *padmāsana* on a leonine throne resting on a lotus corolla, the right hand in *varadamudrā* (von Schroeder 1981: *ibid*.). In the remaining two instances, he is in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana*, the right hand in *varadamudrā.* The throne, missing in one of the examples (Pal 1975: 202, no. 77), is in the other example a truncated pyramid of the rock type (Figs. 29a,b).[169] The bronzes also include portrayals of Vajrapāṇi and Vajrasattva seated in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana,* on rock thrones of different forms.

In one case (Figs. 31a,b) Vajrapāṇi is depicted in *varadamudrā*, holding in his left hand a *vajra* by the upper point, which remains thus concealed, while the lower point rests on his thigh. Exactly the same posture applies to several images of Maitreya, who is shown seated in *padmāsana* and *abhayamudrā* on a lotus with two opposite rows of petals (von Schroeder 1981: 92-93, 10G), or in *padmāsana* and *varadamudrā* on a leonine

*anubuddha)* of the *nirmāṇakāya* of the Buddhas and one of the compilers and guardians of their *kharmakāya* (Lamotte 1966: 147-148), in an interesting parallel with Ānanda (*ibid*.: especially 145-149).

[166] Despite some slight modifications, the iconographic model elaborated in Swat surface in various places and at other times, as for instance on a fragment of a silk banner from Dunhuang that has been dated to the ninth century (Singer and Denwood 1997: fig. 81).

[167] For a brief comparison I refer the reader to R.S. Gupte (1964); J.C. Huntington 1981; S.L. Huntington 1999 (first ed. 1985): 239-274. In particular, in Gupte 1964 the Vajrapāṇi in Sk 28 (pls. 9b, 9d) shows a close affinity with the above-mentioned Vajrapāṇi of Ms. A. 15 no. 10 (Foucher 1905: I, pl. II, n. 3). It should be noted that in the caves of Deccan, the lotus of Vajrapāṇi is also generally the *utpala*, which appears to be specially connected with the achievement of knowledge in an esoteric sense (Huntington 1981: 51).

[168] The *mahāśrīmudrā* is considered a variant of the *vitarkamudrā*, or rather the gesture linked to the magical-sacral value of the word, the dogma, the argument and therefore the exposition and explanation of the Law. The *mahāśrīmudrā*, where the thumb forms a circle with the ring finger instead of the index finger, is also an auspicious gesture towards the faithful (Dale Saunders 1960: 71).

[169] The case records include other examples (von Schroeder 1981: 5G; 6C; 6H; 10E; 12H), however, in which the form and position of the attribute are very close to the Gandharan tradition.

**Figs. 35a,b –** Maitreya in *sattvāsana* (?) on lotus throne
(Karachi National Museum; courtesy MNAOR, NM 1959 448, neg. nos. 1854, 1872)

throne resting on a lotus-shaped base (*ibid.*: 91-92, 10A, 94-95, 11D, with a variation in the pose) and, with his fingers closed in a downward position, holding by the neck the little flask lying on his thigh. In another example (Pal 1975: 164, no. 60) Vajrapāṇi, here portrayed with a ferocious look, grasps in his right hand, held at chest level, a kind of short staff with a knotted upper end, while his distinctive attribute, the *vajra*, rests in the palm of his left hand lying on his thigh. Vajrasattva is portrayed in a similar pose as well, with *vajra* in the right hand on his chest and *ghaṇṭā* in the left hand lying on his thigh (Pal 1975: 162, no. 59a,b). However, this is also the way Maitreya sometimes holds his flask. Such cases, although few in number, nonetheless prove the existence of two different iconographic types whose silhouettes are almost perfectly coincident. This introduces an element of doubt in the identification of all those barely legible images whose profiles show a generic compatibility with both of them. In several instances, however, a precise identification is still possible, especially in the stelae, which often show a better state of preservation. This latter fact indirectly confirms the hypothesis that the stelae, or at least most of them, might have been originally meant for a somewhat sheltered location.

For example, Maitreya can be recognised with certainty in stela S68 (II: Fig. 70; GS 21), where the bodhisattva is portrayed seated on a high podium with a lotus-shaped base, with an *akṣamālā* in the right hand pointing

**Figs. 36a,b,c –** Kafir-dherai, Puran: Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi and minor bodhisattva figures (courtesy IsIAO, neg. Dep. CS L17915/31; L17918/14; L17918/16)

downward (in *varadamudrā*?), and a small globular flask in the palm of the left hand resting on his thigh. The only element that departs from the norm is the position of the legs, in *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* instead of reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana*.[170] Rather similar is the bodhisattva depicted in relief C63 (II: Fig. 62): it is executed on a roundish mass that stands out from others more irregular in shape. Here the figure is sitting in the usual pose of reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* on a podium decorated with a row of lotus petals at the top instead of the bottom (in a variant of the lotus throne described in Chap. 3.5) and is certainly in *varadamudrā.* Although largely erased, the attribute conserves a compact form that is much more compatible with a vase than with a *vajra*. Moreover, the presence of the *akṣamālā*, which the bodhisattva holds in a rather unnatural manner in the open palm of the right hand, lends further support to this hypothesis. Indeed, the *akṣamālā* appears to be exclusively associated with Maitreya and hence – when preserved or clearly absent – it may serve to disambiguate uncertain identifications. The leonine throne and the conserved form of the attribute, roundish with an elongated protuberance at the top, make it possible to also recognise Maitreya in the main figure in relief C31 (II: Figs. 32a,b; GS 20), where again the natural form of the rocky block, with a kind of central cusp separated by a fissure from a lobe of approximately triangular shape to the left, is masterly supported by the figuration. In the centre, on a raised plan, Maitreya, in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana* with *akṣamālā* in the right hand in *varadamudrā* and a small flask in the palm of the

[170] While this is not a unique exception, it is still rather rare. See, for example, the bronze image of Maitreya published by von Schroeder that, to judge from the stylistic characteristics, certainly comes from Swat (von Schroeder 1981: 96-97, 12H).

left hand resting on the thigh, is portrayed seated on a throne supported by two frontal lions and decorated at the base by a row of lotus petals. Columns and/or fringed tassels are vaguely recognisable in the vertical elements that are conserved at the sides of the throne. To the left, on two superimposed levels, are depicted a Buddha in *dhyānāsana* (above) and a standing bodhisattva (below) of much smaller dimensions. At the sides and below are two figures of pensive Padmapāṇi that are identical except for size, the Padmapāṇi to the left being slightly larger and occupying the triangular lobe of the block. This gives it a natural predominance, both proportional and visual, over its twin on the right.

In addition to the specimens that can certainly be identified as Maitreya, there are others for which identification is probable,[171] or where the form of the distinctive attribute held in the palm of the hand might be either a flask or a *vajra*.[172] Therefore, it is only from the short list of examples of uncertain identification that we can draw the hypothesis – probable but not verifiable – that among the enthroned bodhisattva the anonymous sculptors of Swat may have also inserted Vajrapāṇi and Mañjuśrī. If that was the case, their parsimonious presence scale would betray the fact that these two bodhisattvas belong, exclusively or electively, to the more restricted levels of philosophical speculation.

## 5.4 – Maitreya and Mañjuśrī

While at least the standing version of Vajrapāṇi is safely identifiable in the iconographic repertory of the rock sculpture, the hypotheses regarding Mañjuśrī are much vaguer since the bodhisattva cannot be identified with certainty in any of our examples. The problem arises mostly due to the lack of a truly exclusive attribute, for example the sword, which is absent not only among the rock sculptures but also among the bronze sculptures that, because of stylistic and iconographic affinity, can be attributed to the same geographic and chronological environment. In fact, less distinctive is the sole attribute of the book, which in the rock sculpture is also borne, as we will see, by Maitreya, and in the bronze sculpture by other divinities. As for these latter, some characters are easily recognisable (as is the case, for example, with female divinities such as Prajñāpāramitā), while in other instances the identification depends on a strictly contextual reading, as in the case of the bronze of Nandivikramādityanandin, where Mañjuśrī, holding a manuscript, is depicted as a bejewelled Buddha (see Chap. 3.2). Once again, the deterioration due to exposure to the open air further decreases the possibility of specific identification in the case of the rock sculptures.

The presence of Mañjuśrī in the repertory of rock sculptures, although not proved by unquestionable evidence, is nonetheless highly probable, not only in consideration of the important position the bodhisattva generally occupies in the Buddhist pantheon, but also in the specific definition given to it in Swat. In fact, from this region come two particularly significant bronze sculptures that up to now have been interpreted as depictions of the Tathāgata Vairocana. The first one, which comes from Charbagh and belongs to the collection of Wali Saheb – already published by D. Barrett (1962: 38-39, Pl. XXVI, fig. 12), Ph. Granoff (1968-1969: 85-86, fig. 13), and U. von Schroeder (1981: 94, 11A) – shows a figure seated on a *siṃhāsana* of a rather peculiar type consisting of a series of nine frontal lions on a double lotus corolla. This image owes the current identification

[171] This is the case especially with several ancillary figures either standing – such as the figure to the right in two rather similar reliefs, C87 (II: Fig. 88) and one found at Bhai II, in Buner (Olivieri 1994, figs. 5, 9; for this particular relief see further on) – or seated, particularly the figure at the bottom left of the front face of the throne of Padmapāṇi, in a relief from Kafir-dherai, in Puran (Olivieri 1994: fig. 19; here, Figs. 36a,b,c), where the attribute in the left hand seems to be the pyriform vase of Gandharan reminiscence.

[172] In particular see: C22, figure on top right (II: Fig. 22b); S128 (II: Fig. 130; GS 33); S38 (II: Fig. 40; GS 22), where the hold and profile of the attribute in the bodhisattva's left hand recall those of the terrifying Vajrapāṇi in Pal (1975: 164, no. 60), although the (likely) presence of an *akṣamālā* in the right hand in *varadamudrā* makes the identification with Maitreya more likely. See also the figure on the left in reliefs C72 (II: Fig. 75) and C73 (II: Figs. 76a,c; GS 35); the figure on the left in a relief from Tangai in Buner (Olivieri 1994: fig. 6); the small figure on the left in the already mentioned relief from Kafir-dherai, which, although it is very disfigured, we imagine to be similar to another relief at the same site (Olivieri 1994: respectively figs. 19 and 13); and finally S143 (II: Fig. 145; GS 34). For this iconographic type see below.

as Vairocana to the *dharmacakramudrā*, but actually the sculpture (like the second one) shows iconographic characteristics (*paridhāna*, hair partly hanging over the shoulders) more compatible with the figure of a bodhisattva rather than with that of the bejewelled Buddha. As a matter of fact, in the specific context of the Pakistani bronzes the latter is distinguished by gathered-up hair (a detail especially noticeable from the back), the *saṃghāṭī*, and usually by the three-pointed cape.

The second bronze (von Schroeder 1981: 11G, 11I) again shows, also with a variant, the bodhisattva in *dharmacakramudrā* on a throne very similar to the first one but with six lions instead of nine. The most indicative characteristic is the crown, which has five identical figures of Buddha in *dhyanimudrā* disposed in the three usual crests and in the spaces between them at the top.[173] This might be read as a reference to the esoteric form of Arapacana-Mañjuśrī, in which *a ra pa ca na* are the five syllables of the *mantra* of the five Buddhas (Huntington 1981: 51). Two *sādhana*s consecrated to Mañjuśrī (*Sādhanamālā*: I, 89-91) offer a textual parallel in which the bodhisattva is defined as "[…] full of splendour, who settles all doubts by his solemn words […] who shines like the Rising Sun […]". In the iconographic version of this form of the bodhisattva there is an obvious reference to the symbolism of the seven rays of the sun, which is expressed here not by means of the seven horses, as in the more customary iconography of the chariot of Sūrya, but through an analogical transfer of the function of the horses to the *vāhana* of Mañjuśrī, the lion, which also bears a strong solar connotation. The version with six lions may well be, indeed, an iconographic variation in which Mañjuśrī himself (like the Buddha) is seen as the seventh and most important ray of the sun (cf. Snodgrass 1985: 24 ff.)

One cannot be surprised that this particular iconographic version of the bodhisattva, strongly steeped in esotericism, was welcomed in Swat, a region that, as we have noted from various sources, must have been at the time one of the most prestigious centres of tantric teaching. The rock sculpture clearly witnesses a boundary which separates the circumscribed world of the gnosis form the larger, everyday world of religious practices and beliefs. At the same time, it also demonstrates that between the two worlds there exists a connection, as a tenuous stream of the first can be detected in the iconographic lexicon of our reliefs. We must therefore consider the presence of Mañjuśrī among them as very likely. Nevertheless, since the probabilities are restricted to a few cases of uncertain interpretation, the fact remains that from a merely quantitative analysis the presence of this bodhisattva in the rock sculpture repertory is marginal and that we must consider it, as in the case of Vajrapāṇi, an evident overflowing of the highest intellectual Buddhist circles.

In a few cases, however, the probability of recognising Mañjuśrī among the unidentifiable specimens of the rock sculpture becomes less vague. We can assume that, among the immediately recognisable indices of the different iconographic types, there was a criterion of selective exclusion/inclusion in which each attribute or iconographic sign assumes a dominant character in relation to specific figures, as, for the case in point, the *kamaṇḍalu* for Maitreya and the manuscript for Mañjuśrī. That is to say, the *kamaṇḍalu* alone identifies Maitreya and remains, in the occasional associations with the manuscript, the dominant sign of identification. The manuscript, in the absence of other distinctive iconographic signs, could instead be considered peculiar to Mañjuśrī, when other dominant signs do not apply. In the same way, to cite an example that can be verified more easily, the completely open lotus and/or the image of Amitābha in the headdress are dominant characteristics of Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi, which annul any possible error of identification in the case of occasional associations with the *kamaṇḍalu*.

A probable example of this is offered by a rock sculpture in Buner, in the Bhai II area (Olivieri 1994: 473 fig. 9), where, to the right of a pensive Padmapāṇi, is portrayed a second bodhisattva, standing, with *kamaṇḍalu* in the left hand and a second attribute, probably a manuscript, in the right hand lifted up to shoulder level. The presence of the *kamaṇḍalu* is significant in identifying the bodhisattva as Maitreya. Analogous reasoning can be applied to C73 (II: Figs. 76a,b,c; GS 23, 35, 36), perhaps one of the most fascinating examples in the entire production. In the rocky block to the right, a pensive Padmapāṇi is portrayed on the right side, and on the left a

[173] The presence of the five effigies of Buddha in the headdress is expressly cited in the *Sādhanamālā*: I, 140.

bodhisattva seated in *sattvāsana*. The right hand of the latter is lifted up to the shoulder with *akṣamālā*, and his left hand is on his thigh, with an attribute of conical shape, most probably a *kalaśa* (GS 23).[174] On the boulder to the left, the first figure on the right is a bodhisattva in reverse *ardhaparyaṅkāsana,* with the right hand in *varadamudrā*, and the left hand lifted up to shoulder level, with an attribute barely distinguishable (GS 36). Nonetheless, the conserved profile suggests a manuscript in the form of a closed case with a lace with a terminal circular element. An idea of the actual model that inspired the attribute can be conveyed by Manuscript No. 2 found in the excavation of Mound C at Gilgit (Shastri 1939: pl. 1424 A), an object roughly contemporary to our sculpture.

The bodhisattva possesses *only one* object as an attribute, evidently the one that belongs to him in the most specific and significant manner. Similarly, it can be noted how the three-pointed crown is clearly drawn, as if the hair of the bodhisattva is not arranged in the high *jaṭā* that usually overhangs the profile of the crown in the images of Maitreya. A cautious hypothesis could be suggested regarding the unusual pointed shape of this crown, that it could have been originally identical or similar to that of the Arapacana-Mañjuśrī of the bronze mentioned above. The figure that closes the relief to the left is a bodhisattva in *padmāsana*, with the right hand presumably pointing downward (in *varadamudrā*?) and the left hand on the thigh with attribute (a *kamaṇḍalu*? a *vajra*?).

The differences between the four bodhisattva figures, which would be perceived as obvious in other contexts, appear to be particularly significant in the rock sculptures of Swat where the composite reliefs often contain repetitions of the same character. It could be said that the differences are meant to specifically represent four distinct personalities, perhaps, respectively: Padmapāṇi, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi. Obviously, this is a hypothetical interpretation since, except for Padmapāṇi, the figures are part of the case records of iconographic types that are not very different from each other. However, this is a most likely hypothesis, since Maitreya is never portrayed without *kamaṇḍalu* (which makes plausible the identification with Mañjuśrī of the bodhisattva with only the book), even though the distinction between Vajrapāṇi and Maitreya remains uncertain in the case of the figure on the extreme left of the relief (II: Fig. 76c).

The figurative language of the rock sculptures lacks external comparisons for aspects that, precisely because of their originality, remained so far confined within a limited context. Nevertheless, being in itself coherent and organic, this context itself offers sufficient data for supporting likely hypotheses.

## 5.5 – Maitreya as custodian and successor

The most innovative feature the rock art of Swat introduces into the iconography of Maitreya is the ascetic/errant monk characteristic, expressed by the attributes of the ascetic's staff and the monastic garments. To these two objects the Buddhist community must have attached a particular symbolic value that linked the figure of Maitreya to the Buddha Śākyamuni. According to the accounts of Faxian, Song Yun and Xuanzang, the ascetic's staff and monastic robes of the Buddha Śākyamuni were preserved among various other relics in nearby Nagarahāra, close to Haḍḍā. In the eyes of the faithful, these particular relics must have been precious not only because they were the personal belongings of the Buddha, but also because they were signs of a specific condition. From the cult of these objects, iconography probably obtained a sort of historical and theological justification at one time for attributing them to Maitreya as symbols of legitimate succession on earth. [175]

[174] For a close comparison, and indeed a confirmation of this identification, see the bronze sculpture in von Schroeder 1981: 12H.

[175] For this suggestion I am indebted to M. Deeg, who indicated the possible connection with the stories of the Chinese pilgrims (see Beal 1958 [1884]: xxxv; cvii; 96-97); in particular, Song Yun mentions the Ki-ka-lam Temple (*khakkhara*, or the Temple of the Ascetic's staff) where the two relics were kept together (instead of in two separate places, as described in the story by Faxian). Despite the differences in detail, the various stories agree on the placement of the relics in Nagarahāra, on the importance of the cult devolved to them, and on their miraculous powers. An interesting appendix is contained in the account by Xuanzang, who reports the story of a king who, having learned about the existence of objects belonging to the Buddha, took them away from the temple and brought them to his palace. However, after a short time, they were miraculously returned to the original place of cult, thus making a fool of this "illegitimate" claim by the king. Regarding the particular esteem in which these "historical" emblems were held, there are traces of a portable votive tabernacle in wood found by Stein in Ming-öi near Shorchuk (*Sérinde*: 229-230, n. 173). Of the

Nevertheless it remains significant that these particular iconographic versions of Maitreya were produced in Swat, and that they put a particular emphasis on the modest aspect of the ascetic/errant monk, as evidenced, for instance, in the above-mentioned transformation of the traditional small flask of the bodhisattva in a prosaic container for water, perhaps derived from forms in current use. The iconographic fusion between the condition of the coming Buddha and that of the ascetic/errant monk was evidently born of a mixture of contingent factors with characteristics deriving from the historical evolution of the bodhisattva.

Beyond the specific artistic sphere of Swat, the only possible comparison from a strictly iconographic point of view is with the figure of Devadatta in Pāla art (Mitra 1979: figs. 3, 7; S.L. Huntington 1984: figs. 35, 38; Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988: pl. 5) and with the figure of the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha in Far Eastern art (*Sérinde*: 333 ff.; figs. 252a,b). Both personages are portrayed in monastic garb and are holding the attribute of the *khakkhara,* or ascetic's staff, with its characteristic circular termination with suspended hanging rings. The sound of these rings announces the presence of the errant monk and, in a certain sense, is a substitute for his voice, to which the ascetic practice imposes silence.

Although the origin of Kṣitigarbha remains unclear, there are traits of its personality and function that can, in some ways, be superimposed on those of Devadatta, namely the monastic characterisation and the connection with the infernal regions. From the version the orthodox texts of Buddhism give of the history of Devadatta it emerges that, because of his wickedness, he was plunged into hell by the Buddha (Oldenberg 1921: 158-159). What the texts propose as an unpardonable sin of blasphemy and presumption, culminating in a schism, is the aversion of Devadatta to the relaxing of the customs of the monastic community, which according to him had dangerously deviated from their original purity and austerity. Therefore, Devadatta is, for his followers, the champion of ascetic rigor.

The testimony of the Chinese pilgrims indicates that the sect of Devadatta counted, during the period of their passage, a considerable number of followers.[176] Even during such a late period, the sect must have enjoyed strong popularity. Devadatta is mentioned, for example, in one of the dedicatory inscriptions found at Chilas. The text, which is entirely or partly repeated three times on the same rocky boulder, is recorded by Dani as "*vicarati devadata sabodhapati*", meaning, according to the author's reading, "Devadatta, Lord of knowledge, spreads (or preaches)" (Dani 1983: 152).[177] It is also unusual that, despite the fact that the art of Gandhāra – which certainly represented an authoritative tradition – preferred to avoid the representation of Devadatta, the Pāla art manifestly displays his ascetic character in a clearly orthodox context, an evident sign of a sort of cultural acclimatisation to this concept. In short, it seems that the claims of Devadatta enjoyed a vitality that, albeit limited, was constant and capable of imposing on the "official" art a kind of recognition.

The orthodox doctrine does not seem to have been insensitive to the criticism that appears patently epitomised by Devadatta and radicalised by the schism, but that might have been in latent ferment within the

original object, which was probably a triptych, only one panel has survived, which illustrates, on three superimposed levels, a kind of apology for the Manuṣi Buddha. At the top is depicted a haloed standing figure in *abhayamudrā* and *varadamudrā*, wearing a loincloth and accompanied by an attendant. The central scene illustrates again the same figure in a loincloth and a second character bowing down before him. The lower part is divided by a listel into two separate fields containing a standing Buddha (Śākyamuni?) on the right and two worshippers on the left. The character in the loincloth is to be interpreted as the newly-born bodhisattva, although, according to a convention also known in the Himalayan regions, as for instance in Tholing (http://whav.aussereurop.univie.ac.at/whav/media/10136/) and Tabo (http://whav.aussereurop.univie.ac.at/whav/media/9032/), he is not depicted as a baby but is only recognisable as such by the particular dress. The accomplished Buddha of the lower register wears the traditional *saṃghāṭī* and holds in his left hand the *khakkhara.* Whatever the exact symbolic content of this relief, which would deserve a more detailed analysis, the loincloth, i.e. the iconographic sign that unmistakably indicates the earthly birth, brings to the fore the close connection that existed between the Buddha incarnated in mortal form and the personal objects that will later distinguish him.

[176] Faxian mentions the existence of followers of Devadatta in Central India (perhaps referring to the Kosala), who venerate the three Buddhas of the past but not Śākyamuni (Beal 1958 [1884]: xlviii). Also Xuanzang, regarding the kingdom of Karnasuvarna (Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na), speaks of the existence of many heretics and of three *saṃghārāma*s where, according to the rules imposed by Devadatta, use is not made of curdled milk (*ibid*.: 201).

[177] The meaning proposed by Dani for *vicarati* is questioned by von Hinüber, who explains it as "wanders about" (von Hinüber 1989: 45).

orthodox community as well. Since it was impossible to openly recuperate the value of asceticism through the compromised figure of Devadatta, the orthodoxy worked on other personages. One example is Piṇḍola, who was transformed from a gluttonous monk into the symbol of continence and noble poverty and an incitement to the virtue of making donations.

Piṇḍola, by now celebrated as an *arhat*, could suddenly appear to anyone, in the lowest and most humble guise, with the intention of testing the willingness to make an unselfish gift. In Piṇḍola, the monastic community extols its own virtue and that of the lay community, which it praises and incites for support. In this story of painful redemption can also be detected a kind of warning concerning leniency and faithfulness in the capacity of the monastic community for self-discipline, and also a response to criticism that admirably circumvents self-criticism.

The north-western origin of the legend connected with the figure of Piṇḍola (Lévi and Chavanne 1916: 254) and, more generally, of the *arhat*s as "protectors of the Law" (*ibid*.: 204; Demiéville 1954: 373 ff., in support of the hypothesis of a Kashmiri origin), seems to be a sign of a particular religious culture strongly linked to the value of asceticism and individual responsibility in the person of the monk. This culture could easily have produced the iconographic innovation in which the bodhisattva/ascetic par excellence (Maitreya) takes on the features of the errant monk.[178] This appears to be even more motivated in the period corresponding to the flowering of the rock sculptures, in which the regional contraction of economy in general, and of the Buddhist monastic community in particular, might have favoured the recuperation of original codes of behaviour that contributes to the preservation of the monastic community while adding dignity and prestige to it.

Piṇḍola and Maitreya seem to share several characteristics that connect the two, although on two different levels, to a fundamental theme of the doctrine: the conservation and protection of the Law. Above all, there exists between the two an "historical" connection, since Piṇḍola, like the other *arhat*s "protectors of the Law", cannot enter *nirvāṇa* until the arrival of Maitreya will release him from his commitment. Nevertheless, there are other specific characteristics of Piṇḍola that place him in the wake of a sort of "Maitreyology", of which he helps us to grasp some crucial contents

The personality of Piṇḍola and the reasons for the cult devolved to him[179] emerge from the complex and sometimes contradictory group of legends regarding his historical connection with Śākyamuni, of whom he is a sort of testimony and representative. The essential traits of Piṇḍola, as we can gather from the texts, are the following: his being a *bhikṣu,* of which he incarnates the ideal; his activity as a "catalyst" of meritorious actions; and his excellence in the "lion's roar". This last characteristic is interpreted by some as the emission of a sound of ecstasy and exultation[180] and by others as the capacity to triumph dialectically over heretics.[181] Both interpretations can be considered true and, in a way, complementary, since the "lion's roar" emitted by Piṇḍola on the attainment of Illumination is accompanied by the declaration of his capacity to resolve the doubts of others since he has now reached the peak (Strong 1979: 69).

Piṇḍola proposes himself, at many stages of his legend, as the one who can resolve "the dharmalogical doubts" of monks on the path, a role which "[...] complements his function of reassuring the doubting mer-

[178] To judge from the earlier artistic production, from Swat we obtain a rather different image than that of the rest of the "Gandharan" *koiné*. Throughout its exceptionally long life span, the site of Butkara I did not yield images that can be considered explicitly inspired by Mahayanic ideas, such as the epiphanic scenes variously distributed elsewhere, if we exclude the later works that present only generic references to transcendent realities. This does not automatically mean that Swat is a stronghold of Hīnayāna, since the relationships between the two vehicles is rather more complex and blurred. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to suppose that the attitude of the religious community was oriented towards greater individualism in the learning process and spiritual improvement, a climate that lends itself easily to nourishing the genesis of the Vajrayāna.

[179] The cult of Piṇḍola is well attested in China and in Japan by various documents, both literary and artistic (cf. Strong 1979: espec. 78-82), while we can only presume, although with good reason, its existence in Indian territories. The popularity of this personage is also documented in Central Asia (*ibid*.: 53-54) and in Tibet (*ibid*.: 52, 70).

[180] Cf. T.W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede in *Pali-English Dictionary*, *s.v*. "*sīhanāda*" (see also Strong 1979: 68, fn. 70).

[181] Cf. Lévi and Chavannes 1916: 250; see also Strong 1979: 68, fn. 69.

it-makers in their karmic acts of offering" (*ibid.*: 70). This activity as "resolver of doubts" is deliberately underlined in Tibetan iconography, which confers on Piṇḍola, besides the traditional attribute of the bowl, also the book (*ibidem*). Piṇḍola appears in this guise to reassure Daoan, who is dubious regarding the comment of the *sūtra* (*ibidem*), but Asaṅga as well, who did not succeed in penetrating the doctrine of the void. Though he understood the theoretical explanation Piṇḍola had given to him according to the orientation of the Hīnayāna, Asaṅga was still not satisfied and went as far as the Tuṣita heaven, where Maitreya himself instructed him in the doctrine of the void according to the Mahāyāna concept (*ibid.*: 72; cf. also Rahula 1966: 2). It was therefore Maitreya who removed Asaṅga's doubts, but nevertheless it is Piṇḍola who, aware of Asaṅga's torment from afar, magically appeared before the great master and saved him from suicide, an extreme measure to which Asaṅga was pushed by his irresolvable doubts.

In certain aspects the legend of Piṇḍola appears like a sort of repetition in a minor tone of that of Maitreya, which is also marked by contradictions or obscure paradoxes. Nevertheless, behind the apparent inadequacy one can find concealed the reasons that make both figures, although on different and almost superimposed levels, the depositories and defenders of the *dharma.* The explicit prediction of the Buddha Śākyamuni regarding the destiny of Maitreya as the future Buddha, repeatedly indicated in the texts, assumes strongly symbolic tones in the *Lalitavistara*. Here, he who resides in the Tuṣita heaven waiting to be incarnated for the last time in Siddhārtha responds to the despair of the assembly of *deva*s for his approaching abandonment by designating Maitreya as his successor. The latter will reign in the Tuṣita heaven in his place, waiting to become incarnate as a Manuṣi Buddha in the next temporal cycle. The investiture is sanctioned by a transfer of emblems, the royal crown the future Siddhārtha removes from his own head and places on the head of Maitreya (Foucaux 1884: 40). In this symbolic gesture, Mus (1928: 274-275) correctly sees a symbol of the permanence of the celestial, eternal Buddha, in other words an act of revelation whose hidden meaning, however, remains inaccessible to the assembly of the gods.[182]

Despite his prestige, Maitreya nonetheless appears unexpectedly out of place, or excessive, on certain occasions. The *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra* shows him to be surprised by the prodigies that precede the transcendent teaching revealed by Śākyamuni to the assembly of the bodhisattvas. The significance of the prodigies is revealed to him by Mañjuśrī, who moreover knows the destiny of Maitreya, of which Maitreya himself seems to be unaware (Burnouf 1925: 18; Kern 1884: 28; Mus 1928: 184-185). In this episode, Mañjuśrī reveals that during the time he was the Varaprabha bodhisattva, he had among his disciples a lazy individual who was hungry for fame, inconstant, and incapable of fixing the teachings in his mind. His name at that time was Yaśaskāma, the present Maitreya who would become the last Buddha of the present era, thanks to the merits he had accumulated (*ibidem*).

As with Piṇḍola, for Maitreya negative traits are revealed from his past character and a certain inferiority or weakness. This earned Piṇḍola the censure of the Buddha and Maitreya the need to be instructed by a bodhisattva, who nonetheless recognised the greatness of his future role. In the same way, the punishment for having

[182] The significance of a stela conserved in Lahore should be seen in a similar light: it shows, within an aedicula (?) with a segmental trapezoidal architrave, a bejewelled bodhisattva seated in *bhadrāsana*, with his ankles crossed and making a preaching gesture, and with a crown of leaves suspended over his head. To the sides are two standing Buddhas, smaller in size, the one on the left seeming to be looking at a small figure crouched down at his feet, and the one to the right holding a vase or urn in his left hand (Rhi 2006: fig. 7.10; Filigenzi 2012a: fig. 49). The bejewelled bodhisattva undoubtedly calls to mind the episode described in the *Lalitavistara,* especially since he is portrayed in a pose often associated with Maitreya. The symbolic value of the scene appears to be reinforced by the two complementary figures of the Buddha, which suggest, in the same veiled tone as the literary version, the fundamental identity with the central figure. The iconography also seems to emphasise this reality not for what it *is* but for what it *appears to be* through its perceptible manifestations. Regarding the symbolic transmission of royal insignias see also the studies on the episode of the gold tunic offered by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī to the Śākyamuni Buddha, refused by him in favour of Maitreya, or spontaneously accepted by Maitreya after the refusal of the other members of the community (Przyluski 1919: 39 ff.; Mus 1928: 269; Lévi 1932: 361 ff.). A complementary analogy is thus established between the attribution to Maitreya of the crown in the Tuṣita heaven, which refers to the "celestial" sphere, and, in the worldly sphere, that of the monastic robes and ascetic's staff, which significantly are removed from an illegitimate possession (see above).

abused the magical powers translates for Piṇḍola into the task, apparently incongruous, of keeping watch over the maintenance of the *dharma* until the arrival of Maitreya. The hypothesis of Mus (1928: 184-185), who sees in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra* the legitimisation of the Mahāyāna and of its superiority over the Hīnayāna represented by Maitreya, although reasonable, does not cancel the impression that in this episode there is a hidden meaning. Even admitting that the intent is to prove that the old belief is subordinate to the new one, it appears excessive and inappropriate to label as ridiculous one who is still unanimously considered the next Buddha. What Maitreya seems to impersonate in this context is the role of the initiate, which appears to be reasserted in a significant way in the *Mahāsukhāvatīvyūha*. In fact, it is Maitreya who receives revelation from the Buddha, who shows him and describes in detail the Pure Land (Mus 1928: 185, fn. 1). Even more eloquent in its apparent contradiction is the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, which portraits a hesitant Maitreya who, like the other bodhisattvas, is convinced of the superiority of Vimalakīrti. Nevertheless, in the same text not only does Vimalakīrti acknowledge Maitreya as the future Buddha (Lamotte 1976: 85-88), but, moreover, Śākyamuni himself entrusts Maitreya with the custody of the *sūtra* (*ibid.*: 265-270).[183]

Also in the episode of the gift of the golden tunic, which is to say, in the Hinayanic context, Ajita/Maitreya is described as the last-comer among the disciples of the Buddha. He is, in short, the "boy", the promise not yet realised but projected towards the goal. Regarding this, an interesting comparison, already brought to our attention by M. Taddei (1969), can be established between Maitreya and the *brahman/ātman*. They both represent, in two different contexts, the potential for complete development of the consciousness. Just as the *brahman/ātman* of the *Upaniṣad* is symbolically described as the being no larger than a grain of rice who lives in the internal space of the heart, the Yogācāra school considers the *tathāgatagarbha*, i.e. the "embryo" of Buddhahood, to be contained in every being as "the hidden gem of which speaks the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the *bodhicitta,* our interior reality, a λόγος σπερματικός to be eventually re-attained" (Taddei 1969: 370). The presence at Butkara I of reliefs that portray small figures inside the corolla of an open lotuses (*ibid.*: 364-366; figs. 1-4) is probably linked to this current of ideas, whose existence in that land of Uḍḍiyāna is not surprising.

The reliefs cited by Taddei, as the author emphasises, strongly recall certain representations of Horus, or Harpocrates, whose iconography, as shown by the examples of Begrām and Sirkap, was well-known in the Hellenised cultural milieu. In particular, the close affinity with the reliefs of Butkara I is detected in the iconographic and conceptual connection (of which the author cites various examples; *ibid.*: 366-367; but see also Lecuyot 1998) between the young boy Harpocrates and the lotus flower.

The common characteristics the Gandharan iconography attributes to Harpocrates and the *brahman/ātman* (or rather, in this specific case, with the seed of Buddhahood) are partly transferred to the figure of Maitreya, whose iconographic affinities with Brahmā (personification of the *brahman*) have been clearly shown. Nevertheless Taddei, emphasising the "plumpy and boyish" aspect of certain images of Maitreya (cf. the numerous examples in Ingholt 1957: figs. 101, 191, 227, 228, 259, 310, 345 etc.; see also Ackermann 1975: 158; pl. LXXVIIIb), points out the affinity with the young boy, Harpocrates, both for conceptual coincidences – such as the lunar character and the role of "successor" of the Sun God – and for iconographic analogies. These include the particular posture of the seated images; the attribute of the vase; the gesture of the right hand, which Harpocrates raises to his chin as well as to his shoulder, in a way that recalls the *abhayamudrā;* and even the gesture, often associated with Maitreya, of the hand on the shoulder with palm turned inward. The same headdress – the *pskhent* between two lotus buds for Harpocrates, the bipartite chignon with a pear-shaped ornament for Maitreya – offers a comparison between the two (*ibid.*: 379-380). This characteristic of a divine young boy, which the texts as well as the iconography attribute to Maitreya, is one of his most distinctive traits, where potentiality and the act of becoming take form contemporaneously.

The relationship between Maitreya and the Mahayanic doctrine, too often dismissed by scholars on the assumption of a clashing "inadequacy" (cf. Luczanits 2005: 185), seems actually to be much more complex than

[183] Also in the *Lalitavistara* Maitreya is indicated by the Buddha as the custodian of the *sūtra* (Vaidya 1958: 27, 318).

appears at first sight and would merit a thorough analysis that is outside the scope of this work. What is considered the "re-education" of Maitreya could instead constitute the elaboration in the most markedly Mahayanic sense of characteristics innate in the personage, who seems to represent the projection of the gradualness of the spiritual progress in a dimension suspended between the celestial and the earthly. In addition to the idea of salvation obtained by virtue of faith, grace, and as a gift, in Maitreya we find epitomised the tenacity of the disciple, the commitment of the intellect, threatened but not defeated by fallibility and misconception. The idea of progression, of a quality leap, seems to be the constant of his controversial figure, one that is reasserted by his earthly biography. The *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the text that deals with it the most, although not explicitly mentioning the original affiliation of Maitreya in his earthly incarnation, implies that he will convert to Mahāyāna during his life and that he in turn will convert many members of his family and his clan (cf. Jaini 1988: 77-78).

In this mixture of incompleteness and unavoidability, Buddhist speculation realises a symbol of infallible progress, crowned by the initiation, but also marked during its development by apparent contradictions which sagaciously epitomise the stages of attainment. Maitreya is therefore a prototype that concretely reassumes the path that leads to Buddhahood and the qualities that one has to develop along the way. As is shown by the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, he can therefore resolve the doubts of Subhūti regarding why and how a bodhisattva perceives exultation from meritorious acts performed by others and transforms this exultation into an instrument of salvation for the same (Vaidya 1960: 71). And again it is Maitreya, in the *Śālistambhasūtra*, who clarifies to Śāriputra the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* (conditioned co-production) (Vaidya 1961: 100-106). In clearing up such doubts, he thus represents the exemplary process of perfecting wisdom (cf. Jaini 1988: 66-67).

This is the way an essential characteristic of Maitreya is delineated in the texts: in the presence of the Buddha, and sometimes other bodhisattvas, he is the one who *receives* the teaching. Before men and *deva*s, however, he is the one who *transmits* and *explains* the doctrine. In the same way that he is the object of an initiation, by transitive property he seems to be considered – at least in certain circles – as the active subject of the initiation. This particular vocation of Maitreya reverberates directly on history and individual destinies. In fulfilling his function, he appears as the inspirer or revealer of doctrinal texts of which he, on the other hand, is often and explicitly identified as the custodian. Great teachers and commentators refer to his authority, having directly learned from him the basis of the works later produced by them. As we have seen, among the excellent disciples of Maitreya who can rightly be called his "initiates", there appears the name of Asaṅga, the founder of the Yogācāra school. After having been instructed by Maitreya on the doctrine of the void, Asaṅga at various times goes to him, in the Tuṣita heaven, to receive instruction on the Mahayanic *sūtra*s, which he in turn will preach to others.[184] Confronted with the scepticism of men, Asaṅga begs Maitreya to descend into the Jambudvīpa and explain the doctrine to the sceptics himself. Every night for four months, Maitreya appears in front of a vast assembly and explains the doctrine, while during the day Asaṅga comments on his teachings (Rahula 1966: 2).

The case of Asaṅga is the one for which we have the best documentation; nevertheless he belongs to a large group of "saints" who manage, by methods the literature does not always explain clearly,[185] to enter into direct

[184] We can see the affinity between the personal vicissitude of Asaṅga and that of Maitreya, as is referred to by the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. From this parallelism we can deduce a kind of paradigm of the initiated/initiator relationship and of the meaning of the "transmission" of knowledge.

[185] According to Paramārtha, the revelation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* to Asaṅga occurred at night in order that Asaṅga could receive it in a dream or in a deep state of concentration during the nocturnal calm, thanks to the *abhijñā* of the Small Vehicle (Takakusu 1904: 273-274). Only after having initiated Asaṅga to the Mahāyāna will Maitreya teach to him the *samādhi* of the "solar light", thus making him capable of ascending to the Tuṣita heaven (*ibid.*: 275). It is therefore thanks to the *samādhi* that it is possible to make this journey, described in some texts as an actual physical displacement – by virtue of the magic powers (the first of the six *abhijñā* possessed by the *arhat*) obtained through the cultivation of the *samādhi* – and in other texts as a spiritual journey (Demiéville 1954: 380 and fn. 4). Rather, it is in a dream that a monk receives the visit by Maitreya, who reveals to him how, disguised as a Brahman, he himself executed the statue of the Buddha for the temple of Mahābodhi. It is perhaps significant that also this work, which no

communication with Maitreya for the purpose of being instructed or entirely removing doubts of a doctrinal character (Demiéville 1954: 376 ff.), or to execute a copy of his image, as in the case of the colossal statue in wood at Darel, first mentioned by Faxian. According to the legend linked to this statue, the artist was conducted to the Tuṣita heaven three times by an *arhat* (Legge n.d.: 24-25). Another version of the same legend, gathered by the pilgrim Fajieng, who passed through Darel shortly after Faxian, only the *arhat* went to Maitreya and made a portrait of him, on which the statue was based (Demiéville 1954: 379 and fn. 4). An interesting feature of the story by Faxian is the opinion – reported to him by the local population – that the propagation of the Doctrine in the East occurred following the erection of the statue of Maitreya. Faxian finds this hypothesis completely plausible, since Maitreya is the "great spiritual master" (Legge n.d.: 27-28).

The encounter between human saints and Maitreya, passed down by a considerable body of literature on the argument,[186] represents a sort of historical appendix of the cult of the bodhisattva and of the speculation related to his paradise, for which testimonies of various kinds survive, mostly from non-Indian regions. As for the artistic evidence, there appears to be significance in the massive presence of Maitreya in Xinjiang (Baruch 1946: 67-71), an area which has also provided important literary testimonies – including the annals of Khotan in which the history of the country is intertwined with the name of Maitreya – as well as numerous votive inscriptions, confessions of sins, and the *Maitreya-samiti*, a hymn to Maitreya in Tibetan found near Khotan (*ibid.*: 71 ff.).

The development of a true mythology of Maitreya, which is somehow related to millenaristic doctrines originating from the prophecy about the decline of the Dharma (see Nattier 1991), seems to belong to a relatively late era. However, it is possible to identify traces of it in that part of the canonical literature that, though belonging to the Hinayanic tradition, represents a kind of hinge towards Mahāyāna. This is the case with the *Mahāvastu*, elaborated probably within the Mahāsaṃghika and Lokottaravādin communities. It contains the first mention of Maitreya in a state preceding the condition of bodhisattva when, in a remote past in which he lived as a earthly *cakravartin*, he expressed in the presence of the Tathāgata Suprabhasa the vow to become, in the distant future, a Buddha himself (Jones 1949-1956: I, 67-68). This episode, although with different details, is repeated and amplified in the *Maitreya-vyākaraṇa* of the *Divyāvadāna*, where the future bodhisattva, in the guise of the king Vāsava, pronounces the vow in the presence of the Buddha Ratnaśikhi, who prophesies that one day Vāsava will become a Tathāgata with the name Maitreya (Cowell and Neil 1886: 3, 40). This represented the implicit establishment of the necessity of a vow (*praṇidhāna*), formulated in the presence of a Buddha, to become in the distant future a Buddha one's self. This vow must be "accepted" in a certain sense by the Buddha, who sanctions it by means of a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*).

The direct relationship between human beings and Maitreya is realised not only through mystic contact but also through an encounter that is realised, by means of a vow, on earth or in heaven (or both) either near or far in time. That is to say, the devout person can express a vow to be reborn with Maitreya in the Tuṣita heaven or, in a more distant future, in the land of Ketumatī where, at the completion of his cycle, Maitreya will become incarnate and a Buddha. Great personalities of Buddhism have left personal testimonies of this vow: Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Xuanzang (Demiéville 1954: 388-389), and Bu ston (Obermiller 1939: I, 89-90). Often the vow to be reborn in the Tuṣita heaven, which could be realised in the immediate future, soon after death, is accompanied by a vow to follow Maitreya in his incarnation in the land of Ketumatī (cf. Nattier 1988: *passim*). This, for example, is the hope of Xuanzang (Demiéville 1954: 388).

artist could have executed, was accomplished by Maitreya in four months, like the teaching of the Mahayanic *sūtra*s in Asaṅga's story (Julien 1857-1858: II, 466-470). Often the intermediary is an *arhat* (see *infra*). One of the versions of the legend of Vasumitra says that he put doctrinal questions to an *arhat* who, unable to find a solution, through the force of concentration ascended to the Tuṣita heaven to ask Maitreya (Demiéville 1954: 370). In this case Vasumitra is an "indirect" disciple of Maitreya.

[186] In addition to the above-mentioned instances, see the exemplary cases of the king of Ceylon, who obtained on his deathbed the vision of the Tuṣita heaven (Demiéville 1954: 383), and of a king of Khotan who went there to contemplate Maitreya, transported by the magical powers of an *arhat* (both episodes are recorded by Nattier 1988: 40, fn. 27). In these cases, as Nattier emphasises, they are persons who apparently enjoyed this experience without having exercised any effort to merit it.

The "complementary" vow to be reborn during the advent of Maitreya on earth is motivated not only by the happiness promised by the event itself (the era of Maitreya is the height of the ascending curve of a cycle; cf. Nattier 1988: 26-28), but also by the possibility of receiving from Maitreya the *vyākaraṇa* that will make it possible to become, in turn, a Buddha. This is in fact the expectation of Xuanzang (Demiéville 1954: 388), the same that we find formulated in a dedicatory inscription from the region of Turfan related to the erection of a pole, most likely in 728.[187] In it the founders express the vow to meet the Buddha Maitreya in the future and to receive from him the blessing to acquire the condition of Buddha (Baruch 1946: 73-74). The coincidence of the testimonies leads us to suppose that the *praṇidhāna-vyākaraṇa* mechanism, already implicitly asserted by the *Divyāvadāna*, is an important and constant feature of the cult of Maitreya. The Nepalese tradition, which attributes to Maitreya a specific "*viśvavyākaraṇamudrā*" (see Chap. 1.2), might well represent the iconographic and devotional reflection of this binomial concept. A similar inspirational source can also be conjectured for our standing Buddhas S13, S40, S75 (?), and S60 (?) (II: Figs. 11 [GS 1], 42a,b, 78, and 60a,b respectively), and regarded as a complementary and integrative delineation of that salvific mission so clearly stressed by the rock sculpture of Swat.

It is therefore legitimate to wonder whether or not, regarding the cult of Maitreya and his heaven as outlined in more detail in non-Indian documents,[188] there might also be traces in Indian regions, particularly in visual art. Actually, Gandhāra has produced many isolated statues of Maitreya or, in the reliefs, depictions of him as a member of divine triads or as a protagonist in scenes portraying the Tuṣita heaven,[189] surrounded by an assembly of persons (cf. J.C. Huntington 1984; Luczanits 2005). It is rather hard to believe that the isolated figures of bodhisattvas in Gandhāra, which already appear greatly characterised by their individual (or typological) iconographic traits, as well as by their mutual relationships and complementary oppositions, are not the expression of a well-established cult, already based on a solid textual and ritual tradition. This is especially true for Maitreya, who is not only the depository of a function that brings him close to history but is also located in a place accessible to the faithful.

Although Gandharan iconography often preserves a margin of ambiguity that makes the interpretation uncertain, it is still possible to detect, especially when comparing similar subjects, details that indicate significant differences. The reliefs portraying Maitreya in the Tuṣita heaven could be generically interpreted as a mere iconographic transposition of what is affirmed in the texts: that Maitreya is waiting for the completion of the cycle in the Tuṣita heaven surrounded by the *deva*s who live there. However, I would like to point out a relief from Charsada (Ingholt 1957: fig. 285; J.C. Huntington 1984: fig. 6; Klimburg-Salter 1995: n. 152; Filigenzi 2012a: fig. 61), in which the generic assembly of personages dressed in princely costumes, as the divinities are usually depicted, is substituted by a group of different people (men and women in various costumes, and a monk),[190]

[187] The erection of a pole was, according to the ritual custom of the region, a symbolic act that preceded the foundation of a temple or monastery (Baruch 1946: 72-73).

[188] It is above all Chinese literature that conserves the most detailed documents concerning the cult of Maitreya, first of all the *sūtra*s expressly dedicated to him, such as the *Great sūtra of the bodhi of Maitreya*, translated by Kumārajīva in 402, and the *Great sūtra of the contemplation of Maitreya ascended to be born in the Tuṣita Heaven*, which was translated towards the middle of the fifth century, and also the Maitreyan *sūtra* inserted in the Chinese version of the *Ekottarāgama* (translated towards the end of the fourth century), which contains the first allusion to a group of four *arhat*s whom the Buddha had destined to wait for the coming of Maitreya. In addition to these, Chinese tradition also possesses a considerable body of commentaries which reflect the animated debates regarding several doctrinaire and cultural orientations (see Demiéville 1954: *passim*; cf. also J.C. Huntington 1984: 137).

[189] See the stela of the Chandigarh Museum where Maitreya is portrayed in the upper crescent-shaped part of the relief (Rosenfield 1967: fig. 91; J.C. Huntington 1984: fig. 7; Kurita 1988-1990: I, fig. 399); the Lahore relief from Charsada (Ingholt 1957: fig. 285; J.C. Huntington 1984: fig. 6; Filigenzi 2012a: fig. 44), that portrays Maitreya with the right hand at his shoulder, the palm facing inward, seated on a low bench, his feet on the ground crossed at the ankles; a relief in the Musée Guimet (Luczanits 2005: fig. 1; Filigenzi 2012a: fig. 62), where the bodhisattva is, instead, in *padmāsana* and *abhayamudrā*, within a segmental trapezoidal architrave outside of which are eight figures, four of them masculine at the bottom and four of them feminine at the top between two small covered side balconies, which in this free architectural synthesis appear to be suspended in the air. To these examples we can add the relief discussed in fn. 182, which portrays Maitreya in *dharmacakramudrā.*

[190] In the non-narrative reliefs, the art of Gandhāra often places the female figures in a peripheral position, positioning them mostly inside small balconies, as is the case in the relief cited above in fn. 189.

gathered in a non-hierarchal order around an enthroned Maitreya. The liveliness of the scene is mainly the result of a felicitous visual arrangement that uses a pyramidal scheme to create the illusion of a crowd "encircling" the bodhisattva. This conveys the impression that the characters depicted are not typified portraits of followers or donors but rather people in actual contact with the divinity,[191] which we imagine could be realised in the celestial dimension of the Tuṣita heaven[192] or in the future land of Ketumatī.

Certain marked stylistic and iconographic characteristics (the receding features of the faces, the schematic decorativeness of the hairstyles, the drapery with thin pairs of engraved lines, the particular seat of Maitreya with its thin legs and decorated back flared at the top) ascribe the relief to a late phase of Gandharan art that can be dated to approximately the late third/fourth century.[193] Its chronological placing is therefore perfectly compatible with what can be considered a period of great expansion for the cult of Maitreya. This is documented not only in the works of his illustrious followers but also by the fact that to this chronological horizon is also attributed the arrival and translation in China of doctrinaire texts concerning Maitreya and that group of *arhat*s, the "protectors of the Law", who were waiting for his coming (Demiéville 1954: *passim*).

Although the fourth and fifth centuries appear to be a rather fertile period for the Maitreya cult, the beginning of the cult obviously predates this. In addition to the testimony of iconography, another indication of this is the devotion to Maitreya and his heaven by Saṃgharakṣa, the author (or, as he defines himself, the compiler) of a *Yogācārabhūmi* preceding that of Asaṅga (Demiéville 1954).[194] As for its longevity, the literary, epigraphical, and iconographic sources of Xiujiang bear more than eloquent witness to this, though one must take into account the fact that the particular incidence of the cult of Maitreya in a religious environment like that of Central Asia, which was strongly influenced by messianic doctrine, could have extended its duration.

The range of documents corroborating the wide diffusion and acceptance of eschatological notions centred on Maitreya also includes monumental remains from datable archaeological contexts in Afghanistan. At Tapa Sardar, a colossal image of the Buddha Maitreya, surrounded by minor figures of bodhisattvas and lay devotees, was housed in Chapel 100, a shallow open room (a sort of gigantic niche just below the Upper Terrace) in axial correspondence with the entrance to the Upper Terrace and the Main Stupa's stairway (Figs. 37, 38). This focal axis (north-west direction) is oriented towards the Dašt-e Manara plain and the ancient town of

[191] The same impression is obtained from the reliefs of Kapiśa where, despite the hieratic formalism, the bystander figures always have a marked connotation of "actuality" due to the differentiation of sex, category and age, and to the "Iranian" characterisation of their costumes. This seems to represent a conscious desire to distinguish them from what appear, in the "Gandharan" tradition, to be a kind of iconographic convention for the "Indian" personage. This positioning in the present, or rather in the sphere of a perceptible reality, is often reinforced in the Kapiśa reliefs by distinct attenuation, if not the actual absence, of the proportional hierarchy between the figures of the devotees and those of the divinities (as, for example, among the numerous related examples, in part still unpublished, Rosenfield 1967: figs. 104, 105).

[192] Chinese and Japanese literature has handed down the existence of an opposition between two currents of thought, one connected with the cult of Amitābha and the other with the cult of Maitreya, that have produced ample debate about the nature of the paradise of one and the heaven of the other. The Amidist schools claim the superiority of the Pure Land of Amitābha, a true transcendent paradise, over the Tuṣita heaven, which instead belongs to the sphere of the *kāmadhātu*. For this current, one of the strongest points in the dialectic opposition of the two theological orientations is the fact that Sukhāvatī is a paradise without women, in the sense that whoever achieves rebirth does it as a man, while in the Tuṣita heaven men and women remain differentiated, being still subjected to a reciprocal attraction that prevents spiritual perfection. For their part, the followers of Maitreya (among them Xuanzang) claim that the positioning in the sphere of *kāmadhātu* makes it easier for the laity to enter the Tuṣita heaven, which can be achieved by a rebirth immediately after the earthly life. In contrast, the immediate rebirth in the paradise of Sukhāvatī is understood by Xuanzang to be a distortion in the sense of the Amidist *sūtra*s, which should be considered intentional and not literal. The promise of this rebirth to common human beings would have the scope of encouraging the cultivation of determined *dharma* in relation to determined causes. It therefore will not be realised immediately but rather in an imprecise future (cf. Demiéville 1954: 389-395).

[193] Cf. the dating suggested by Taddei (1987: 359) for the *devī* in the Fujii-Yurinkan Museums of Chinese Art in Kyoto; see also fn. 151 above.

[194] Regarding the dating of Saṃgharakṣa, reserved acceptance should be given to the tradition that says he was, together with other great personages such as Aśvaghoṣa, the spiritual master of Kaniṣka. In any case, Saṃgharakṣa is already considered an historical personage by Daoan, i.e. at the end of the fourth century.

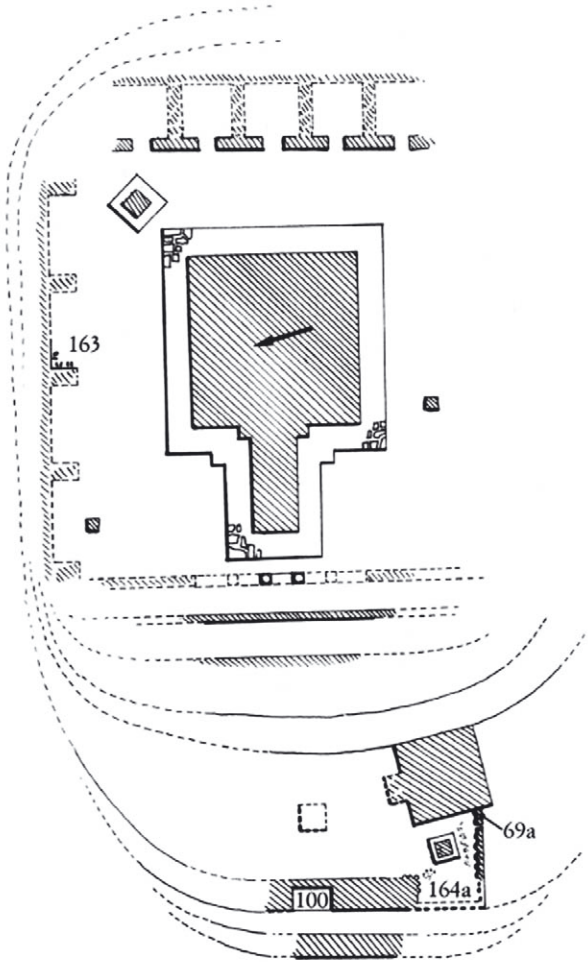


**Fig. 37 –** Tapa Sardar: Ground plan of the Upper Terrace and Chapel 100
(after Verardi and Paparatti 2005: fig. 22)

Ghazni, which means that the colossal image of Maitreya – well visible from a great distance – was a sort of welcoming protector of the site. Based on archaeological data and iconographic consideration, this impressive installation (which belongs to a second phase of the chapel) was assigned by M. Taddei to a late phase of the Early Period II of the site (fifth-sixth century CE; Taddei 1999a: 392-394), and to the sixth century CE or even later by Verardi and Paparatti (2005: 425).

Tapa Sardar also offers an unparalleled glimpse into the connection of the cult of Maitreya with royal ideologies – probably widespread among the "Buddhist kingdoms" of the early medieval period – which emphasise the role of the pious king in the devolutionary cycle preceding the advent of Maitreya. The lay devotees in "Kushan" dress who surround Maitreya in Chapel 100 are not generic characters. We can assume that the gilded reliquary (TS 2090), fragments of which were found in the debris, was held by the main lay figure as a clear hint to an actual act of donation. Also the presence of a child in the group (Verardi and Paparatti 2005: 425) suggests the typified portrait of a family of donors, either Nēzak/Alxon, or, according to Verardi and Paparatti, of the *rtbyl* aristocracy of Zābul (Verardi 2005: 591-592; see alsoVerardi and Paparatti 2004: 99). In a later phase (seventh-eighth century CE) Maitreya reappears twice (at least, as a Buddha) in the chapels surrounding the Main Stūpa on the Upper Terrace. Although the partial preservation of the chapels and their decorative apparatus does not allow a precise reconstruction of the overall iconographic programme, what remains suggests a coherent progression. The unfolding theme seems to be that of the endless *dharma* which, after the *Pārinirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni, will be renewed on earth by Maitreya and defended in the meantime by a "regent" king (Filigenzi 2008a,b).

**Fig. 38 –** Tapa Sardar, Chapel 100: Colossal Maitreya with minor bodhisattvas and lay devotees (courtesy IsIAO, neg. Dep. CS 12488/14)

No doubt, the entanglement with a formalised rhetoric of power must have constituted a driving force behind the cult of Maitreya, as attested by different sources (Filigenzi 2008b: 19-22 esp.), but no less significant is the pervasiveness of the intrinsic contents of the doctrine. Judging from the iconographic evidence, the religious culture of Swat, for its part, appears to have been extremely sensitive to theological and soteriological speculations connected with the figure of Maitreya, which in the sphere of rock sculpture assumes, in some cases, rather peculiar characteristics that are only legible in the light of those doctrinaire orientations. The most evident reflection of these orientations on the iconographic repertory of rock art are found in certain representations of Maitreya with four arms that were identified by Tucci as portrayals of the god Śiva (Tucci 1958: 307). This identification is based on the misinterpretation of two attributes: the ascetic's staff and the manuscript, which Tucci describes respectively as a *triśūla* and a *ḍamaru*. This erroneous identification can be corrected today on the basis of a nearly complete census of the sculptures which, besides offering the possibility of cross-comparisons between the various portrayals of Maitreya with two and four arms, can avail itself of comparisons with better-conserved examples that have come to light in recent years.

There are now five known specimens of this particular iconography of Maitreya: stela S61 (II: Fig. 61), published by Tucci (1958: fig. 26); the stela published by D. Klimburg-Salter (1982: 99, pl. 18; here, Fig. 39); relief C91 (II: Figs. 91a,b; GS 27) in the valley of Ugad, in the locality of Banjot; relief C65 (II: Figs. 64a,b; GS 28) in the valley of Saidu, in the locality of Supal Bandai; and finally stela S126 (II: Fig. 129), of unknown origin, now in the Swat Museum in Saidu Sharif. This case record provides a secure basis for an analytical

**Fig. 39 –** Four-armed Maitreya (after Klimburg-Salter 1982: 99, pl. 18)

approach, especially considering that these works belong to one and the same geographical, cultural, and chronological sphere. The state of conservation, although precarious in some cases, is nonetheless sufficient to clearly determine the exact superimposition of all the figures that, with marginal variations, repeat the same subject: a standing figure with four arms, the two upper ones bent upwards, with an ascetic's staff in the right hand and a manuscript in the left hand; and the two lower arms pointing downwards and extending slightly away from the sides, and (not regularly) with an *akṣamālā* in the right hand and a *kamaṇḍalu* (often) in the left.

As is shown by the best-conserved examples, the monastic robe is accompanied by a high tiara and jewellery that includes large earrings, a short beaded necklace, and bracelets. Three of the five sculptures are on stelae and two on a rock wall. In every case, with the exception of stela S126, which lacks the lower part, the figure rests on a simple lotus corolla with a single row of petals. The style of the tiara is identical in four of these five examples: a tripartite *mukuṭa* (or *jaṭāmukuṭa*?), with crests of equal height, the central one having a rounded upper profile. In one of the better-conserved examples (Fig. 39) the central crest is fan-shaped and recalls the Gandharan tradition of the skull-cap turban, but also a particular type of chignon of the bodhisattva (cf. the examples in Taddei 1969: fig. 20 and Kurita 1988-1990: I, fig. 411, on the right). Only in the case of relief C91 the shape of the tiara might be slightly different, but the precarious state of conservation does not offer any certainty regarding this. However, the ribbons descending on the sides are rather well-conserved, although their presence is uncertain in the other cases.

Relief C91 stands out for its powerful visual impact, which is produced by the particular conformation of the rock wall, a sort of elongated rectangle with an extraordinarily smooth and regular surface, separated by a net fissure from a more irregular and slightly receding base. The figure seems to be characterised by greater immobility compared to the similar specimens, which show moderate movement in the body, with the weight gracefully shifted to the right leg. Nevertheless, the slightly oblique placement of the rock and the elevation from the ground are perhaps responsible for what could be either a mere optical impression or the effective result of an execution that must have been conducted in difficult conditions, within the narrow space of a scaffolding.

We owe the correct reading of the attributes of this iconographic type to D. Klimburg-Salter, who published and described a stela from a private collection, indeed one of the better-preserved in the small series (Klimburg-Salter 1982: 99, pl. 18).[195] D. Klimburg-Salter identified the subject as an image of Brahmā but, although mentioning as a comparison the supposed image of Śiva published by Tucci (relief C65), she did not proceed to further collations. The interpretation proposed by Klimburg-Salter, though disproved by new evidence, is nonetheless close to the truth. Returning to an hypothesis already advanced by Pal (1975: 54), Klimburg-Salter asserts that, if the interpretation of the figure is exact, the presence of Brahmā in a Buddhist context should not be considered a mere intrusion but rather the expression of a syncretic tendency of Buddhism, evidence of which was already yielded by archaeological investigations at Tapa Sardar, in Afghanistan.[196]

The analytical study of the entire corpus of the rock sculptures of Swat, which demonstrates the unequivocal correspondence between the various four-armed figures – all referring to a single iconographic type – also evinces that the interpretative hypotheses of Klimburg-Salter and Tucci do not match the ideological frame of reference, which is coherently Buddhist. This four-armed figure does not appear in marginal contexts or in a subordinate position, but as the subject of isolated stelae or in direct relationship with images of Padmapāṇi, as in the case of relief C65,[197] or even, as is evident from relief C91, in a position of absolute dominance over the surrounding space. Such prominence conferred on an exogenous divinity – moreover emphasised by its being the only four-armed one in a context of divine figures connoted by "normal" anthropomorphism – would have appeared ambiguous and thereby generate confusion about an antagonist religious system.

The affinity between the iconography of Śiva and that of Maitreya in Gandhāra has often been emphasised (see Sherrier 1993: 624). Nevertheless Śiva is always recognisable on the basis of one or more distinctive signs: the three faces, the third eye, the erect penis, the *triśūla*, and the presence of his consort and/or his animal vehicle (for a brief examination of the known specimens and the relative bibliography see Sherrier 1993). This customary iconographic affinity between Śiva and Maitreya would inevitably have induced the artists of Swat to maintain one or more of these distinctive signs if they had intended to represent Śiva or, as is actually the case, to confer on Maitreya characteristics that were unequivocally recognisable. Among these, in addition to the ascetic's staff, the monastic robe must be included, which often occurs in the iconography of the four-armed divinity of Swat. This garment, which expresses the compliance with a rule and the explicit affiliation

[195] I have to point out the doubts expressed by A. Gail about the authenticity of this stela during the discussion following the first presentation of this topic at the South Asian Archaeology Conference in 1997 (Filigenzi 2000: 1068, fn. 4). The observation, which comes from a very skilled scholar, calls for attentive, close study of the piece, which I know only from the published photograph. In any case, the existence of this iconographic type is confirmed beyond any doubt, even if the hypothesis of A. Gail is proven to be correct, since we possess corroborations that are not suspect. Nevertheless, the rarity of this subject, which is limited to very few examples, makes a counterfeit improbable, especially on account of the fact that at that time only the less well-conserved had been published. The possible counterfeiter would not only have to possess the courage for such an initiative but also a great capacity for iconographic analysis.

[196] The author refers to the colossal clay sculpture of a female deity with the same iconographic features as the Hindu goddess Durgā, which was found in the Buddhist settlement of Tapa Sardar. See Chap. 7, esp. fn. 220.

[197] The relief C65, executed on a large block of gneiss, shows Maitreya with four arms between two figures of Padmapāṇi, the one on the right in a pensive pose and that on the left standing. The presence of this figure with four arms between the two Padmapāṇi eliminates any possible doubt of his belonging to an alternative cultural context that might exist regarding the isolated figures.

to the monastic order, appears not to be very consistent with the anti-institutional and "transgressive" nature of Śiva. Rather, the unequivocal authority of this figure is much more plausibly explicable when traced back to the sphere of legitimate and innate affiliation with the general context. It does not represent Śiva, nor Brahmā, but Maitreya *as* Brahmā: the preserver, the inspirer, the revealer.

Also the affinities between Maitreya and Brahmā have been amply discussed (cf. Taddei 1969: 374 ff.), although from a strictly iconographic point of view rather than with regard to the semantic aspect. The relationship that exists between the Buddha and Maitreya is analogous to that between the *brahman* and Brahmā: in both it is a relationship between a symbol of creation and one of continuity. The conceptual correspondence between Brahmā and Maitreya finds confirmation in the symbolism of the "priestly" garment, which bears witness to the function of Brahmā, the priest who, among the officiants, has the task of guarding, directing and successfully completing the rite (cf. Silburn 1955: 90; Bailey 1983: 6-7). This is equivalent, on a transcendent level, to the function of "guardian of the *dharma*" in the samsaric cycle, i.e. of creation according to the Brahmanic values for Brahmā, of the Law according to Buddhistic values for Maitreya. In Brahmanic literature the connection between Brahmā and the *dharma* is often emphasised. Created, according to Upanishadic speculation, in the beginning of the world by the Lord who transmits to him the Veda (M. Falk 1986: 225), Brahmā acts according to the *dharma* since his own essence is the *dharma*, as is illustrated by the epithets of *dharmamaya* (he who consists of the *dharma*) or *dharmapuñja* (personification of the *dharma*) (Bailey 1983: 139 ff.).

The author, revealer or inspirer of the propagation of sacred texts (*ibid.: passim*), Brahmā appears in Puranic mythology as the one responsible for communicating the *dharma* to human beings, thus impersonating on a transcendent level the role the Brahman holds in society, that is, the incarnation of the *dharma*, of his precepts and their actuation, whereas the *kṣatriya* incarnates activity in the world (cf. Lingat 1973: 216). In this role Brahmā is also mentioned in Buddhist literature, where he incites the Buddha to communicate doctrine, or other personages to embrace the monastic life. In the Buddhist transposition, the role of Brahmā stops at the threshold of doctrine, in which sphere he must give way to someone else. Gandharan iconography already explicitly demonstrates a passage of functions, from Brahmā to Maitreya, from Indra to Avalokiteśvara, with the reconstitution of complementary roles in relation to the *dharma* of a superior moral order.[198] Like Brahmā in the Brahmanic sphere, Maitreya is the incarnation of the *prajñā* and of the preservation of the *dharma* through teaching, inspiration and conduct. His role is complemented by Avalokiteśvara-Padmapāṇi who, embodying the *karuṇā*, predisposes the mind to receive the *dharma* and helps this latter to inform – and transform – individual destinies.

It is a fact that from Kashmir to Central Asia − although with various nuances − Maitreya appears to be venerated as the guardian of the doctrine, the lord of a nearby heaven, the depository of the baptismal gift of prophecy. Therefore, the iconographic features of Maitreya in the rock sculpture of Swat cannot be considered a random invention, but rather a further witness to the vitality of regional artistic centres, where ideas largely shared by the Buddhist community were translated in original visual forms.[199] The iconographic transformation

[198] This is the case with the above-mentioned icons depicting a divine pentad, composed of a seated Buddha flanked by two standing bodhisattva (Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara) and by Indra and Brahmā, portrayed in the background in respectful attitudes. The iconographic affinity between the two Brahmanic divinities and the two bodhisattvas is so explicit that it must be considered intentional and significant; otherwise, it would be absolutely misleading. Indra and Brahmā yield to the two bodhisattvas a "function" in the world, in the interior world of the microcosm and in exterior world of the macrocosm, a function that obviously has its origins in the Upanishadic speculation. Images of pentads from Gandhāra have been amply published. The most famous of the series is undoubtedly that in the de Marteau collection, known as the "Buddha of year 5" (published for the first time by Harle 1974: fig. 71). For a quick overview of analogous examples I refer the reader, besides the already-mentioned work by Harle (fig. 74), to: Ingholt 1957: figs. 253, 254; Miyaji 1985b: pls. I, 1, II, 2 no. 3, III, 1 no. 4, X, 2 no. 25; Kurita 1988-1990: I, figs. 403, 404, 405, 411, 413; Filigenzi 2012a: figs. 1-7, 21-24, 27, 30-31.

[199] Beyond Swat, but in areas that are culturally similar, other images have been found of Maitreya with four arms. The most important, for position and size (almost eight meters in height), is depicted in relief on a large solitary block of rock near Mulbeck between Srinagar and Leh. Despite a certain simplification of the details, the image is very close to the Kashmiri style of the eighth to ninth centuries (cf. the image in bronze of Mañjuśrī with four arms in Pal 1975: 156, no. 56, which the author perhaps dates too late, to

undergone by Maitreya's distinctive attribute, the flask, can also be read as the result of a strong development of the cult of the bodhisattva in a soteriological sense. The various forms of the *kamaṇḍalu* appear, when observed from this perspective, not as casual variants, but as explicit formulations of the various symbolic values connected with it. If the vase of the ascetic/errant monk bodhisattva expresses with immediacy a condition, the elongated flask of the bodhisattva portrayed in his inherent royal nature seems rather to recall a function. The form is often deliberately different from the pyriform *kamaṇḍalu* of Gandharan tradition, perhaps precisely to render more effectively the idea of such a function. In all evidence, this function was firmly associated, in the religious thought of the time, with that of the "baptism" and was symbolically expressed through the lustral rite or unction. This can be inferred above all from the form of a small pitcher as it appears in several bronzes (but also in the above-mentioned image of Maitreya at Chilas I; here, Fig. 34),[200] although it appears equally immediate in the globular vase held on the thigh or in the palm of the hand.

It could be said that the cult of Maitreya brought with it the requirement to iconographically renew the image, especially by means of a container that emphasises more explicitly the concepts. The new iconographic tradition, which we see so amply affirmed in the late antique phase, nevertheless finds at least one precedent in Gandharan art that, significantly, seems to represent a rather late issue. The sculpture (Musée Guimet, photographic archive: 1222/53; Fig. 40) shows the bodhisattva seated in *padmāsana* on a moulded podium, in *namaskāramudrā*, with a globular vase in the left hand resting on the thigh. The relatively late dating of the sculpture is suggested by several typical stylistic indicators such as the drapery with thin pairs of lines engraved in parallel; the large, wide, flattened face; the slightly receding features; and the drawing of the hair in pronounced vertical rows of waving curls. Another prominent iconographic element in this example is the figure of the devotee, certainly the donor, in Scythian costume portrayed on the right kneeling and praying in a three-quarter view. He is depicted not within the field of the front face of the podium, as usually occurs in Gandharan sculptures, but rather *in front of* the podium, as is made clear by his exceeding size. This almost suggests a desire to represent, beyond the Gandharan stereotype, the individual, concrete act of donating and personal devotion.

The relationship of the devotees with Maitreya is exemplarily illustrated in iconography as personal, intimate and direct, because it is with Maitreya that one can be reborn. It is Maitreya who can shorten the length of time between a vow and its realisation. As J.C. Huntington aptly remarks (1984: 162, fn. 16), the *kamaṇḍalu* therefore cannot be merely the symbol of the Brahmanic nature of Maitreya, but, as suggested by its visual representations, also – and moreover – the receptacle of the teaching and perhaps the esoteric vase "of generation (*utpatti*) in the visualisation of paradisal *vyūha*s or, possibly, in certain types of meditations on various deities. In any case, it probably signifies some sort of initiation (*abhiṣeka*) [...]. Within the context of Maitreya cult it may have symbolised the promise to the faithful that attained his paradise of their own *cakravartin*-ship

the ninth century). Unlike in the typical iconography of Swat, here Maitreya is holding in the two upper hands the *akṣamālā* (in the right hand) and the *nāgakeśara* (in the left hand); he holds the *kamaṇḍalu* in the lower left hand and with the lower right hand performs the *varadamudrā* (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977-1980: I, 1, fig. 4; Fontein 1979: fig. 1). A second figure of Maitreya with four arms is depicted on a stela in Dras. Here the bodhisattva, standing on a lotus corolla with two opposite rows of petals and flanked by two small figures of devotees, holds the *kamaṇḍalu* in the palm of the hand at his side, and the right lower hand is not in *varadamudrā* but in *namaskāramudrā* (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977-1980: II, fig. 3, on the left). It is not possible to add to these examples the stela found at Chang-pa (Ladakh) (*ibid*.: fig. 12), as suggested in the original article (Filigenzi 1999: fn. 37, fig. 12). I am thankful to Ch. Luczanits for pointing out the mistake to me, which was based on a photograph that was only partially legible, and for kindly sending me much better images, which he took himself, that clearly show that the divinity represented is actually Hayagriva. It is interesting to note that another monumental relief depicting Maitreya is found beyond the Rasila Pass, about 35 kilometres in a straight line from the large relief of Mulbeck, near the village of Karchekar in the valley of Suru. This one, however, is in the more usual iconographic form, with two arms, with an *akṣamālā* in the right hand in *namaskāramudrā* and a *kamaṇḍalu* in the left hand held below (Fontein 1979: 7; figs. 2-4; Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977-1980: II, fig. 7). The monumental size of this relief can perhaps be linked to the fame of the statue of Darel, which the local worshipers venerated as the original cause of the expansion to the East of Buddhism. It is therefore not out of place to suppose the existence of a tradition that, while identifying Maitreya with the *dharma*, assumed the image to be not only a *sema* but also a symbol gifted with active power.

[200] An analogous reference, although different and chronologically distant, is the vase with a mouth that appears on the Gandharan reliefs and is connected with lustral rites (cf. Zwalf 1996: nos. 145, 158, 162; 137, 173; Faccenna 2001: 264).

**Fig. 40** – Gandharan Maitreya and devotee (Musée Guimet, photographic archive, 1222/53; drawing by B. Velletri)

**Fig. 41** – Standing Maitreya (after Pal 1975: no. 38)

with its inherent promise of either Universal Monarch-hood or Buddha-hood". It is certainly these values that inspire certain documents from Xinjiang, such as the dedicatory inscription that invokes of Maitreya the excellent benediction to acquire the condition of Buddha (Baruch 1946: 74), or the hymn to Maitreya found by H. Francke near Khotan that hopes for the attainment of the bodhi "having drunk the ambrosia of his Doctrine" (*ibid.*: 92).

In harmony with these testimonies of faith are the numerous bronzes that, in the northern areas of the Indian subcontinent and in Kashmir, confirm by their chronological horizon the existence and the importance of the cult of Maitreya, portrayed sometimes in ascetic robes and sometimes in royal garments.[201] Among them is

[201] There are numerous examples published by Pal (1975) and von Schroeder (1981).

one that seems to give voice to the reasons for this faith (Pal 1975: no. 38; here, Fig. 41): Maitreya is shown standing on a completely open lotus corolla with a simple fan-shaped chignon and an antelope skin on the left shoulder. The right hand is at the shoulder with the palm facing inward.[202] In the left hand he is holding the *kamaṇḍalu*, not hanging as in the usual grasp, with the neck held between the fingers, but in a gesture which seems to give effect to a promise, with the palm slightly outstretched as if in the act of offering the contents.

[202] The gesture of placing the right hand on the shoulder with the palm facing inward seems to generally indicate an expression of homage (Bhattacharyya 1958: 437) or, according to a more precise reading of the contexts where it appears, "of subordination and deference" (Taddei 1969: 375 ff.; see also J.C. Huntington 1972: 91). In the case of Maitreya, however, it must have a significance of deference and therefore of loyalty with respect to the Buddha and particularly his teachings, which Maitreya is committed to defending and re-proposing to mankind in due course. The hypothesis of Pal, who reads in it the idea of beckoning (Pal 1975: no. 38, p. 122; Id. 1979: 255-256, where the gesture is defined as a variant of the *abhayamudrā*), is also plausible in the specific reference to Maitreya who, when calling to himself, calls to the Doctrine. Nevertheless, this hypothesis fails to take into account the clear significance of deference that this *mudrā* assumes in the art of Gandhāra, where it is often performed by young Brahmanic ascetics and *deva*s in the presence of the Buddha or at least of personages of a superior level (cf. the examples gathered by Taddei 1969). However, Pal is right in his objection to the definition of *namaskāramudrā* (which instead is an alternative definition of the *añjali* or *kṛtāñjalimudrā*) given to this gesture by Bhattacharyya (1958) and assumed by J.C. Huntington (1972). However, it must be remembered that Huntington accepted it with reservations, pointing out the omission, on the part of Bhattacharyya, of the sources and reasons on which the definition rests. For the sake of convenience but also with the same reservations, this definition has occasionally been used in this work.