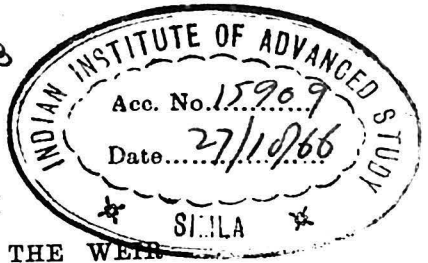


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XIII

THE LADY OF THE WEIR

By R. GRANT BROWN

THE Kyauksè district is at once the smallest and the richest in Upper Burma. Two rivers, the Zawgyi and the Panlaung, enter it from the mountains in the Shan States to the east, and from them spring a number of canal systems. These existed long before the British annexed the country, and tradition ascribes them to the great king Nawyāta¹ (Anuruddha), who reigned from 1044 to 1077 A.D.

Kyauksè means "stone weir", and the headwaters of three of the canals are at the little town of that name. Here also is the curious figure, of wood overlaid with gold-leaf, representing the Lady of the Weir (Plate I). The figure is certainly of considerable age, but archæology in Burma is not yet sufficiently advanced for even an approximate date to be fixed. I am informed by Wun Chit, who was governor of Kyauksè at the time of the annexation, that the headdress is composed of lacquered cane or some other substance in which the hair is encased.

The local legend is that this lady was one of the wives of Nawyāta and sister of the Shan king of Myogyi, which lies among the hills above where the Zawgyi enters the district, a few miles within the Shan States. At that time no town was founded, and no great building erected, without sacrificing one or more human beings, whose death was believed to be necessary to the success of the work, and whose spirits afterwards guarded it. The custom had

¹ This is the modern Burmese form of the name, spelt according to the phonetic system prescribed by the G substitution of *ā* for *a* to represent th (among). The other is the Pali form, tra the Geneva Convention.

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such vitality that in spite of the spread of Buddhism, which Nawyāta himself did much to make universal in Burma, human beings are said to have been buried alive under the gates of Mandalay when it was built in 1857, though no evidence of this is procurable. According to one version of the legend, one person was to be killed at each weir, when the young queen asked whether her death would not be sufficient for all. This was agreed to, and at the time of the British annexation it is probable that every weir in the district had near it a shrine in which was a wooden figure of the queen overlaid with gold-leaf. Since then some have disappeared, having been burnt or eaten by white ants. Both the weirs at Kyauksè, however, have figures in good condition. That mentioned above is at the Zidaw weir. Another (Plate II) is at the Minyè weir, the headquarters of the Minyè and Tāmôk canals. This is of less artistic value than the first, and is probably of later date. Near it is a much-weathered stone figure, about three feet high, with a primitive club (Plate IV). This is popularly supposed to represent an attendant on the queen, but closely resembles the *dvarapala*, or door-keeper, found at the gates of temples or pagodas elsewhere.

At the Nwadet weir, near where the Zawgyi enters the district, is another figure of the queen, also overlaid with gold, but of ruder workmanship (Plate III). It will be noticed that in all these figures the left arm is bent so unnaturally as to appear as if it was deformed. The position can be imitated, however, by making the left hand revolve on the wrist-joint as far as it will go to the left and forcing the bent elbow to the right. The Burmese are naturally supple, and extreme flexibility of the joints is regarded as elegant.

The next two photographs, Plates V and VI, are of figures resting in the same shrine as the last. Myinbyuyin ("Master of the White Horse") appears to be specially



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honoured as a local deity, though he is well-known elsewhere and his story is the subject of a favourite play. It is told at some length in the "Legendary History of Pagan", published anonymously by the present Assistant Government Archæologist in the *Rangoon Gazette* of the 24th September, 1907, and its substance is as follows.

Nāyabādi Zethu, brother and successor of King Minyin Narathunka of Pagan (1164 A.D.), had a beautiful wife whom the monarch coveted. He was sent to suppress an imaginary rebellion, but suspecting his brother's designs he left behind him his faithful servant Ngā Pyi and his best charger, and told Ngā Pyi to ride straight to him if anything should happen. No sooner was he gone than the king sent for the girl, and Ngā Pyi rode off to inform his master. At nightfall he came to a stream where he rested, not knowing that the prince's camp was on the other side of it. The horse's neigh was recognized by his owner, and when Ngā Pyi presented himself next morning he was killed, and became a *nat*, or spirit to which special powers are attributed.

The local legend as told to me makes Ngā Pyi halt on the brink of what he took for a wide river, but what was really a sandy desert. It is quite possible that the worship of this *nat* is far older than Nāyabādi Sithu, but that it has been associated with a historical event. The sandy plain mistaken for a river even suggests an ancient tradition of the wanderings of the race. It will be noticed that the name Myinbyuyin is inapplicable to Ngā Pyi, who was not the owner of the white horse; yet no one suggests that the *nat* was the real owner, Nāyabādi.

Udeinna, the Elephant-tamer (Plate VI), is also specially connected with the district, as he is said to have been born at Indaing, two miles north of Kyauksè, after his mother the Kethāni queen was carried away by a monstrous bird from the palace at Kawthambi (Kosambi) and dropped

into a banyan-tree. The original tree is said to have disappeared within the last five years.

Plates VII and VIII represent figures of considerable interest, but difficult to identify. They are wooden statues overlaid with gold-leaf, and stand in a small brick shrine on the pagoda platform at the top of Kyauksè Hill. They are popularly called the Brother and Sister, with reference, perhaps, to the King of Myogyi and Nawyäta's queen, but Plate VII certainly does not represent a woman as supposed. Mr. Taw Sein Ko, the Government Archæologist, informs me that the three-tiered crown indicates a supreme king, and a crown with the upper part bent back, as in Plate VIII, a subordinate ruler. He thinks the former figure may possibly be that of Nawyäta himself, while the latter may well represent the unfortunate King of Myogyi, with whom it is popularly identified.

This king is given the title of Kotheinyin, which appears to mean "lord of nine hundred thousand villages". The legend is that Nawyäta sent for the king, expecting him to render homage, and that Kotheinyin, who regarded himself as of equal rank but was too tender-hearted to drag his people into war, sank his pride and started for Pagan. But on reaching the whirlpool in the Zawgyi, where it emerges from the precipitous rocks marking the border between Burma and the Shan States, he was so overcome with shame that he threw himself into the river and was drowned. He would seem to be more in place as a local deity in the Shan States than in Burma, but Nawyäta's dynasty weakened after his death, and the Shans overran Burma. The figure may date from their domination.

It is characteristic of the freedom-loving Burmese, however, that their national heroes are not their powerful kings, who subdued neighbouring races and founded great empires, but victims of their cruelty, more or less obscure

and sometimes of alien race. The greatest of Burmese kings, and the man to whom, more than any other, the universal acceptance of the southern and purer form of Buddhism is due, is Nawyāta, yet no one worships at his shrine. One of the most important festivals in the country is that at Taungbyôn near Mandalay, where thousands of people from all the country gather to do homage to two obscure brothers, said to be partly of Indian origin, but more likely Arabs, who were put to death by him because they failed to provide their quota of bricks for a pagoda which he was building. Here also are worshipped their mother, a wild woman of Mount Pôppa; their guardian, a royal minister, and his sisters; Tibyuzaung the Dethroned, a snake-worshipping predecessor of Nawyāta; the equerry whose story is told above; and the Blacksmith of Tāgaung, whose strength was so great that the king was jealous of him, but could only destroy him by making his sister his queen, using her as a decoy, and burning him alive in a sacred tree. To these must be added the Blacksmith's relations, including the aforesaid sister, who threw herself into the flames; his wife the Snake-woman; and another sister who married a minister of Pegu, but set out to find her brother and died of exhaustion on the way.¹

At the foot of the picturesque hill, nearly a thousand feet high, which dominates Kyauksè, are two huge boulders, also called the Brother and Sister. Here again there may be a reference to the King of Myogyi and his sister, but the people have no very definite ideas on the subject, and the divinities may well be of more ancient date. There is, at any rate, no hesitation in appealing to them in time of sickness. Then offerings

¹ This festival is described in Professor Ridgeway's new book, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, and a more detailed description by the present writer is appearing in the July-December number of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

of fowls (once, no doubt, sacrificed on the spot, but now bought dead in the market) are made to them, and left to the birds of the air. If this fails, recourse may be had to the municipal hospital and more modern methods of treatment.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- I. The Lady of the Weir (Zidaw).
- II. The Lady of the Weir (Minyè).
- III. The Lady of the Weir (Nwadet).
- IV. Stone figure at the Zidaw Weir.
- V. Minbyuyin, the Equerry.
- VI. U²ceinna, the Elephant-tamer.
- VII. Figure on Kyauksè Hill.
- VIII. Figure on Kyauksè Hill.

XIV

THE FRAVASHI OF GAUTAMA

By ELIZABETH COLTON SPOONER

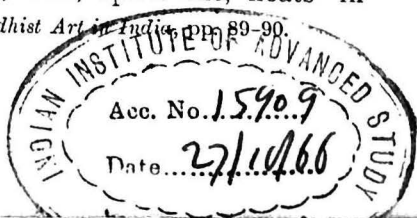
ON the reliefs of the Gandhāra School, in all scenes where Gautama is shown, and thus in constant association with him, there appears a figure which has been the subject of much discussion. He is called Vajrapāṇi by reason of the thunderbolt which he either grasps by its middle, or supports on the palm of his hand. This thunderbolt is the exact copy of the weapon which Indra, or Sakka, holds; but in these sculptures it is not so much a weapon, to my mind, as it is a symbol of divine authority, which is a matter of importance for the interpretation of the figure.

This weird Vajrapāṇi has been identified in several ways. He has been called Māra¹ because of his supposed look and gesture of a wild, hateful demon, lurking and leering, and finally standing, so it was wrongly held, triumphant among the Malla nobles at the Buddha's death. But I find no evidence to support this theory in the matter of aggressiveness. There is no menace to the life of the Master by this attendant, no hint of evil purpose in pose or manner, so far as I can see. Rather he is a guardian, and as such more consistent. For what donor would order a sculpture of the Death scene wherein the Arch-Tempter would be represented?

General Cunningham identified Vajrapāṇi with the wicked cousin of Gautama, Devadatta.² If this were so, we should have Vajrapāṇi represented as a mere man among men, a plotting, malicious human being, not the Vajrapāṇi of the sculptures, who, spirit-like, floats in

¹ Grünwedel & Burgess, *Buddhist Art in India*, pp. 89-90.

² Op. cit., p. 88.



the air at times, with the gods.¹ And further, would Devadatta find a place among the mourning followers around their dying Master?

In this Mr. Vincent Smith bears me out when he says: "The older writers on Buddhism wrongly identified the Thunderbolt Bearer as Devadatta, the heresiarch enemy of Gautama Buddha; or as Māra, the Buddhist Satan; or as the god Sakra, the Indra of Brahmanical mythology. Dr. Vogel," he goes on to say, "has recently started a fourth theory, ingenious but not proved, that he should be regarded as a personification of Dharma, the Law. The best supported hypothesis is that which treats him as a Yaksha, or attendant sprite, inseparable from the person of the Buddha. Probably the sculptors intended that he should be considered invisible to spectators, in accordance with a well-understood convention."²

The Yaksha theory is supported by M. Foucher when he calls Vajrapāṇi "une divinité d'ordre inférieur", and adds that "Le *Lalita-vistara* l'appelle un chef des génies".³ But how or why the chief of the Yakshas should come to hold such prominence in the Gandhāra sculptures, or should be depicted as inseparable from Gautama, is not apparent.

He cannot be Indra, for he is represented in the same group with that god; and I will endeavour to show later why I hold that he cannot represent the Dharma.

Who, then, is this figure, which so eloquently pleads for recognition, this unadorned, unclothed being, this invisible guardian spirit, tireless and constant, the only one who never leaves the Master's side?

A second figure, that of a monk, appears in almost equally constant association, it is true, and it is this fact which led Dr. Vogel to his theory, as he thought that

¹ Foucher, *L'Art Gréco-Bouddhique*, p. 358.

² Vincent Smith, *History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, p. 108.

³ Foucher, loc. cit.

this triad must depict the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. But I find that the monk is absent in twenty-three plates in M. Foucher's great work where Vajrapāṇi appears, so that the two figures are certainly not on a parity. Vajrapāṇi's first appearance in the biographical series of the Buddha story is in the scene representing the young prince leaving home. The question arises, would the Dharma, as yet unrevealed, appear right here, and, too, as a ruddy youth? With the thunderbolt in his hand, Vajrapāṇi alone accompanies Prince Siddhārtha, Chandaka, and Kaṇṭhaka as they fare forth into the silent night. From that hour he never leaves the Master's side, until the coffin lid has been closed in the grove of *sāl* trees at Kusinagara, after which he disappears altogether from view. Would the Dharma thus disappear at Buddha's death?

He is, from the beginning to the end, inseparable, as inseparable from Gautama as his very breath. Does not the clue to his identity lie within this fact? Is he not a *double*, or counterpart of Gautama?

If we examine for a moment a few of the sculptures reproduced by M. Foucher, we find striking proof of this suggestion. Let us take the scene of the Departure from the Palace (p. 357, fig. 182). Here is Prince Siddhārtha leaving the royal palace in the splendid vigour of early manhood. In every detail of feature and bearing, he is the ideal of a royal youth. Here, for the first time, we see Vajrapāṇi, floating high in the background, thunderbolt in hand, but invisible, as Mr. Vincent Smith maintains. Mark the same radiant beauty, the same splendid virility, reflected in the Thunderbolt Bearer, who is here the exact counterpart of Prince Siddhārtha. Compare this scene with the austerities of Gautama (Foucher, p. 381). The fair young prince is no longer recognizable, the ravages of fasting and exposure to the elements have done their worst. The sunken eye-sockets, hollow cheeks,

and drooping corners of the mouth tell the story of these six long years of vigil and fasting. Directly behind Gautama is Vajrapāṇi, still grasping the thunderbolt. But notice the marvellous correspondence between the expressions of the mental and physical depletion of the two. On Vajrapāṇi's face Buddha's sufferings are copied; here are the same sunken eye-sockets, the hollow cheeks, the faint and drooping mouth. Would Māra show such sympathetic suffering with one of his intended victims? Or could the Law, still unrevealed, become emaciated?

Again, in events of storm and stress, or of special danger, as, for instance, in sculptures where the Nāgas, the opponents of the Buddha, appear, and unusual effort is needed to bring about their conversion, the skill of the artist is taxed to mirror the feelings of Buddha in the Thunderbolt Bearer. In fig. 251, on p. 505, in the scene of the visit of the Nāga Ēlāpatra, the hostile and strained attitude of Vajrapāṇi reflects the excitement and alertness in the mind of the Master, who as Lord of Truth is confronted by Evil. Again, in fig. 272, p. 549, we see Vajrapāṇi in active hostility, where somewhat drastic powers appear to be needed to convert the Nāga Apalāla.

What seems to me a further notable instance of the close bond uniting Buddha and Vajrapāṇi is afforded by the ordination of Nanda (p. 471, fig. 238*a*). The torso of Vajrapāṇi is slightly inclined forward, and the interest expressed by the other invisible beings is feeble in comparison with his own, as he listens with rapt attention to the words which fall from the Master's lips.

In contrast with the militant character of Vajrapāṇi in the Nāga scenes, if we turn to the peaceful events recorded in the biographical series, as, for example, the Buddha's meeting with the grass-cutter (p. 391, fig. 197), the mild and benevolent expression on Gautama's face is matched by the peaceful expression of Vajrapāṇi and his easy, disengaged attitude. Another notable instance

is found in fig. 243, on p. 485, the preaching to the gods of the Trayastrimśa Heaven. Here not only the expression but even the features of the Buddha are reproduced in the Thunderbolt Bearer.

I am aware of the danger of reading too much expression into these faces of stone, owing to the play of light and shade in the photographs, as M. Foucher observes; but it seems to me, on the other hand, that it would be at least unfair to the sculptors to ignore their efforts to portray identity of emotional experience. After all, they have succeeded fairly well. I would point out, moreover, that my contention is not based on facial expression alone. Compare fig. 279, on p. 561. The scene is that of the Mahāparinirvāṇa, and below the couch of the dying Buddha, in the foreground of the composition, we see Vajrapāṇi struggling in sympathetic agony. In the following figure, No. 280, he is prostrate on the ground, as though himself expiring.

Does not this diversity of attitude and expression, harmonious always with the Buddha's, imply a more than human sympathy, and actual participation in his experiences?

I have noticed above that Mr. Vincent Smith suspects that in some of the compositions Vajrapāṇi, though portrayed, is yet invisible. This suspicion I find to be abundantly confirmed. On several occasions, for instance in fig. 222, on p. 441, we see Vajrapāṇi directly interposed between Buddha and a suppliant or worshipper. Here the kneeling figure with clasped hands appears to be addressing Vajrapāṇi instead of the Master, who has turned to greet him. Does not this show that Vajrapāṇi is a purely spiritual being?

Another point signaling Vajrapāṇi as no mere mortal is his frequent nudity. Would any being but an unclad spirit interpose between the royal actors in a scene like that of the arrival among the Śākya (p. 462, fig. 232b)?

To sum up, I find Vajrapāṇi characterized by four particular features: (1) divinity, symbolized by the thunderbolt he bears, and embracing, apparently, a protective element; (2) invisibility, evidenced as we have seen above; (3) inseparableness from Gautama; and (4) identity of emotional experience with him.

From the foregoing evidence, in my judgment, Vajrapāṇi represents a double, a spiritual and therefore invisible, counterpart of Buddha. The question now arises, what sort of a "double" is implied by a figure so conditioned? Is Vajrapāṇi to be explained by Hindu thought? He appears to exercise a double function, namely, that of a guardian angel, and yet more, that of a soul mirror, as is shown by the sculptures of the austerities, etc. So far as I know, the conception of the guardian angel is un-Indian. Nor do I find in the Upanishads such a possibility, where everything tends toward unity with the One, the Self. Here the whole endeavour is to do away with, not to multiply, the self. In fact, so far as I can ascertain, there is no precise parallel to Vajrapāṇi in Hindu or purely Indian thought. In what mystic company does such a spirit find a place? Where was such a theory as this figure implies, maintained?

To my mind, this problem finds its only solution in the amplified doctrine of the *Fravashi* in Zoroaster's teaching. The Fravashi's dual character of guardian angel and mystic counterpart provides us with the parallel we seek.

Perhaps the most familiar doctrine in Zoroastrianism is that regarding the Fravashis. The word *fravashi* itself means, so the *Encyclopædia Britannica* tells us (11th ed., vol. xxviii, p. 1043), "confession of faith," and when personified comes to be regarded as a protecting spirit. This spirit is believed to be a very part of a man's personality, existing before he is born (*Ency. Relig. and Ethics*, vol. vi, p. 116), a spiritual being of perfect

identification with the man, so much so that he is sometimes called the "spiritual counterpart" and the "external soul" (Moulton's *Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 254, 267). Mr. Herbert Baynes defines the Fravashi as follows (JRAS., April, 1899, p. 430): "It is the spiritual archetype of every man, without beginning and without end, attaching itself to the body at birth, and leaving it at death," which accounts for the disappearance of Vajrapāṇi from our sculptures after the coffin lid is closed.

If this external soul is identical with a man, then all the man's mental and physical experiences are identically shared by this spirit. There is a complete unity of being. This is the explanation of the identity of condition between Gautama and Vajrapāṇi in the scene of the austerities.

Nor does the fact of Buddha's deification in these sculptures offer any obstacle to the interpretation of Vajrapāṇi which I propose, for Moulton says that all sentient beings, of the good creation at any rate, have their Fravashi, including even Ahura himself (p. 262).

We have seen above that the figure of Vajrapāṇi is marked by four characteristics. Does not the conception of the Fravashi reveal the same? Are not divinity (in the case of a Fravashi linked to a deity), invisibility, inseparableness, and identity of experience equally characteristic of both?

This predication of a Persian character for Vajrapāṇi is supported and confirmed by the actual *vajra* which he holds, and which, called by this same name of *vazra*, is a recorded attribute of Mithra in the Persian system. Shams-ul-Ulema Dr. Modi refers to "Mithra as the angel of light and an associate of the sun, who holds a *vazra*, i.e. a mace or club, in his hand, as a symbol of authority".¹ Moreover, it is by no means incompatible with existing

¹ Cf. *A Glimpse into the Work of the B.B.R.A. Society during the last 100 Years*, p. 115.

theories of the Gandhāra school. It is, in fact, directly supported by what Rhys Davids and Grünwedel say about the Persian background of the Dhyāni Buddha doctrine. They too have pointed out the Persian character of Amitābha's name, which they say refers back to the old Persian light-worship. "The whole doctrine of the Dhyāni-Buddhas and Dhyāni Bodhisattvas appears to rest on the Zoroastrian theory of the Fravashis," and "We have thus Iranian influence distinctly before us, which accords with the local surroundings of the Gandhāra school".¹

The above seems to have been written under the impression that this evident Persian influence was a new appearance in Buddhism in Gandhāra, due mainly to geographical causes. Dr. Spooner's recent papers in the *Journal* have shown, however, that Magian thought and dogma lay rather at the very root of Buddha's system. On this hypothesis the figure of Vajrapāṇi the Fravashi is rather a survival in Gandhāra than a fresh appearance.

As we study the life of the Buddha from these Gandhāra sculptures in the light of the Zoroastrian faith, we have an explanation of this intimate, inseparable figure, the Thunderbolt Bearer. Here Vajrapāṇi finds his true place as the soul-mirror, the external soul, the mystic counterpart of Gautama the Buddha, which we of the Western world call the better self, the guardian angel, and which the ancient Persians called the Fravashi.

¹ Grünwedel & Burgess, *Buddhist Art in India*, p. 195.

