

The Buddhist *Pratimālakṣaṇa*

Charles Willemen

In many *śilpaśāstras* one finds a section which deals with iconometry, *tālamāna*. A text often referred to is Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsamhitā* (sixth century C.E.), and Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary C.E. 967. Buddhist literature also has its iconometrical texts, but they come from Brahmanical tradition. Ancient Indian craftsmen were primarily members of a guild of e.g. painters. But the Buddhist tradition introduced some adaptations, bringing texts which belong to the Sthaviravāda group, actually the (*Mūla*) Sarvāstivāda *nikāya*, school. Later Mantrayāna texts were written which may belong to the same *nikāya*. B. Laufer's study of the Tibetan *Citralakṣaṇa* in 1913 opened up this field of study.

The catalogue of the Beijing edition of the Tibetan *Tripitaka* kept in the library of Ōtani University in Japan, mentions the four following texts:

1. no. 5804 *Daśatālanagrodhaparimaṇḍalabuddhapratimālakṣaṇa*, i.e. the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* defining the image. (PL)
2. no. 5805 *Samḥuddhabhāṣitapratimlakṣaṇavivarāṇa* (PLV), a commentary on PL.
3. no. 5806 *Citralakṣaṇa* (CL), defining a Painting (of a *Cakravartin*).
4. no. 5807 *Pratimāmānalakṣaṇa* (PML), defining the measurements of images.

The original Sanskrit of PL may date back to the tenth century, certainly before the time of Atīśa (C.E. 982-1054). G.Tucci mentions a Tibetan translation by Atīśa. This is the time of Mūlasarvāstivādins. This school appears at the end of the seventh century C.E., i.e. between the stay of Xuanzang and Yijing in India. Mūlasarvāstivādins have a long *vinaya* with a great number of *dr̥ṣṭāntas*, *avadānas*, stories illustrating the rules. The Sanskrit PL contains a dialogue between the Buddha and Śāriputra, the ultimate authority of all Sthaviravāda literature. Having returned to Jetavana from the Tuṣita Heaven, Buddha was asked by Śāriputra how to represent him after he had passed away. Thereupon the Buddha expounds the measurements to make his likeness. A Tibetan version was made by Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (*Kīrtidhvaja* c. 1285-1378 C.E.) and Dharmadhara, c.1306-1315

C.E. The translation was made in Guñ-thañ, in sKyid-groñ, Gyirong, in southern Tibet, on the way to Kathmandu. The Chinese translation of this Tibetan text was made by the Mongolian Gombojab (c. 1690-1750 C.E.), mGon-po-skyabs, Gongbu Chahu, in 1741, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (reigned 1736-1796) in Beijing. The Chinese version also places the dialogue in the Jetavana in Śrāvastī, but the Buddha is about to ascend to the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. At that moment Sāriputra asks how to make an image. There certainly was more than one version of the PL. The Chinese commentary, referring to the Tibetan, mentions three translations and one commentary. The one commentary probably is PLV. G.Tucci says that the Tibetan tradition, as preserved by sMan-thañ-pa (fifteenth century C.E.), knows four versions of the PL. One may have been a PML. Of the three PLs one is translated by Atīśa, called *Śāriputrapariṣcchā*, because it is expounded at Sāriputra's request. Sāriputra appears as an artist in three *avadānas* in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*.

PML or *Ātreyaṭilaka* has a Brahmanical origin, but Buddhist elements have been included in it. Ātreya, a descendant of Atri, belongs to Brahmanical circles. Also PL has been attributed to Ātreya, legendary descendant of Viśvakaman. It should be well understood that the Buddhist PL is quite different from the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, as edited by Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya, New Delhi in 1991. The CL, as studied by B.Laufer and later by G.Roth in 1990, shows no trace of a Buddhist tradition. The three parts which together form the CL, may be a product of the Gupta age, sixth century C.E., or somewhat earlier. The text is now transmitted in the Tibetan tradition only.

The most complicated part of the image is the car. The Chinese PL described it in three stanzas (11-12-13) and in a rather long explanation.

The unit is a digit, *aṅgula*, a fingerbreadth of the image itself. Twelve digits are a span, *tāla*. A *pāda* is one fourth of a digit. The text uses the terms *āyāma* for length (i.e. *māna*) and *vistāra* for width (i.e. *pramāṇa*), although according to circumstances, *āyāma* may mean *vistāra*, and vice versa.

The elevation is *utsedha* (i.e. *unmāna*). The terms *saṁdhi*, *bandha* and *nirgama* may be seen as meaning *āyāma*, *vistāra* and *utsedha*.

The Chinese text reads:

11. The ears are two digits wide, and the tip is at the same level as the middle of the eyebrow. The external auditory meatus is four quarters wide, and its hole is half a digit.

12. The tragus is four grains high, and transversely it should be a full digit. The

inside of the ear is defined in an upper and lower part, a quarter digit. The depth, including the hollow, is two and a half digits altogether.

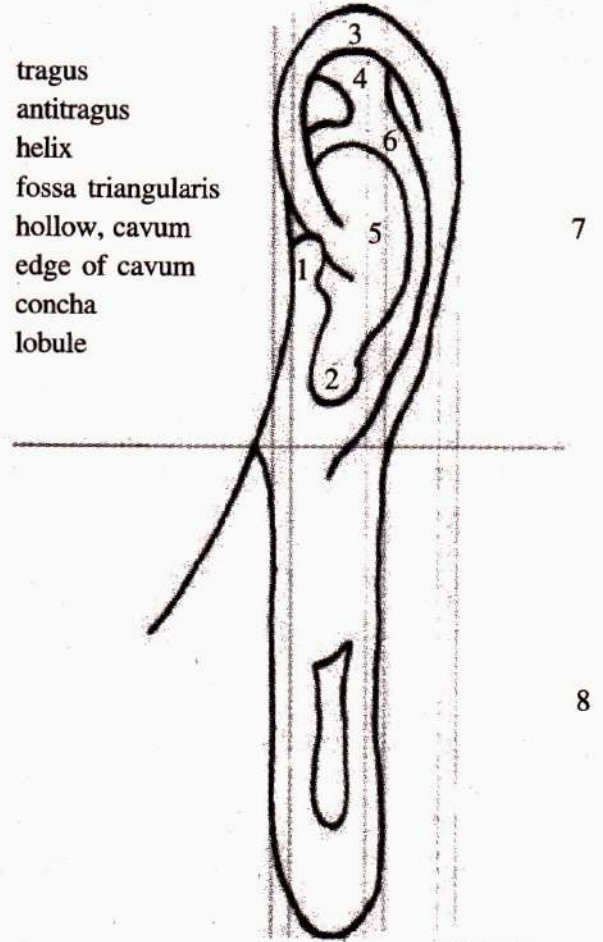
13. The auricle is four and a half digits, and the earlobe is five digits long. The outer rim and the edge of the hairline are lovely and completely beyond compare.

Commentary

The anterior aspect of the ear is horizontally two digits wide. The same applies to a painted image. The posterior aspect is one digit and a half wide. The tip is on an equal level with the middle of the eyebrow. The external auditory meatus is one digit wide, and its hole is half a digit, both round and invisible. The tragus, commonly called ear-stake, covers the external auditory meatus and stands at its side. Perpendicular it is half a digit, and horizontal one digit. At its middle is a depression, exactly opposite the lesser canthus. Its upper protrusion is round, but its lower protrusion is flat. Its shape looks like a flower bud which is about to open, but it is not open yet. The ear hollow outside the external auditory meatus is one and a quarter of a digit wide. For a tridimensional image it is two digits, in connection with its low depth.

Adding half a digit for the outer rim, it is altogether two and a half digits. The upper and the lower part of the inside of the ear are, generally speaking, one quarter of a digit. But when making distinctions, the edge of the ear is one quarter thick. It winds down along the auricle and reaches the detached base, a place one digit opposite of the tragus in an oblique way. It becomes a protrusion, one quarter in height, and the shape resembles that of a tragus. It further goes down and curves back to become the base of the ear, and it happens to be connected with the base of the tragus. The upper part of the edge of the hollow bifurcates, each part being one quarter thick. The inner branch becomes gradually more slender and its tip disappears below the edge of the rim of the ear. The outer branch diminishes and gradually disappears.

1. tragus
2. antitragus
3. helix
4. fossa triangularis
5. hollow, cavum
6. edge of cavum
7. concha
8. lobule



From the point of bifurcation upwards to the tip of the ear is one digit and a half, and the width is one digit and a quarter. The upper end of the rim of the ear, giving the outline while on its way, rises up slightly from the inside of the hollow and from the ear hole, which is partitioned off by the tragus. (The helix) gradually becomes higher and wider. As it winds upwards it passes beyond the tip of the tragus. It makes a curve and reaches a place above the upper end of the base of the ear. It is one quarter wide and its edge turns inward. Making a curve (the rim) reaches down below the halfway point of the outer edge of the auricle, and it gradually decreases and becomes finer. Without being interrupted or disappearing, it reaches below the point opposite the bottom of the base of the ear, and it slowly becomes a grasp there (splitting up the character *qu*, the earlobe). In short, the auricle is vertically four and a half digits, and it stands straight. The earlobe is five digits long, one digit and a half wide, facing forward. Now we come to the rim of the ear and the edge of the hairline. They both have highs and lows, ins and outs, curves and angles. They are beautiful and lovely, difficult to fully explain with words. One should exert one's skill to the fullest at all these places. If one properly brings out their beauty, one is in agreement with the rules.

The Sanskrit text reads:

17. The line of the brow should be four measures, and the tip of the ear should be on the same level too. Both ears protrude two digits. The tragus is half a measure (high).

18. Its elevation should be known as one measure. The attached part of the ear should be half a measure (deep). The helix should be one fourth of a digit wide.

19. The ear in its inner side should be one and a half, two measures (wide). May both sides look beautiful, and the hair too.

20. Moreover, the earlobe should be five and a half measures (high) from the member. From one ear to the end of the other the skull is known to be eighteen digits.

It is immediately clear that the Sino-Tibetan text and the Sanskrit text belong to different lineages. As is obvious, this text is very technical. A traditional Chinese intellectual does not write about such matters. That is why we have to wait till 1741 to have a Chinese text. Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan greatly contributed to the popularity of the so-called *Fan* (Indian) style in Buddhist art in Yuan China (C.E. 1279-1368). This Indian, Western, actually Newer style of image-making was known as *Fun* in eighteenth century China. The style originated in Pāla-Himalayan art, and is distinguished from the Han style, i.e. Chinese style, which actually is Tang (C.E. 618-907) style, of Gupta inspiration.

It may be noted that iconometry is an Indo-European idea. Architecture and image-making are related arts. In Greece Polyclitus (fifth century B.C.E.) is known for his views about iconometry. In Rome Vitruvius (first century B.C.E.) is best known. The Renaissance is a 'rebirth' of Greek-Roman antiquity. One may think of Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519). So, the PL, also in its Chinese version, continues a common Indo-European cultural tradition.

References and Notes

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