

MONIKA ZIN

(Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities / Universität Leipzig, Germany)

**Crossing the Ocean of *saṃsāra*: Berlin,
Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. III 9023***

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explain the meaning of two mural fragments housed in the Central Asian Collection of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The two mural fragments under discussion, nos. III 9023a and III 9023b–c (Pl. 1, Fig. 1),¹ were brought to Berlin by the 4th Turfan Expedition in the year 1914 from the Buddhist cave monasteries in Kizil in the area of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road, today's Province Xinjiang, an autonomous region of the Peoples Republic of China. The murals show peculiar waterscape with persons trying to cross it; they can be compare with similar representations from the area of Kucha.

Keywords: Buddhism, mural, Central Asian, Kizil, Kucha, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Turfan Expedition, Albert Grünwedel, Albert von Le Coq, waterscape, Buddhist cosmology, ocean of *saṃsāra*, *aupapāduka*, *gandharva*

The members of the Turfan Expeditions (1902–1914) directed by Albert Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq, who brought the paintings to Berlin, called their act of chiselling

* I would like to thank Dr. Lilla Russell-Smith, the curator of the Central Asian Collection and the Museum's technician, Mrs. Ines Buschmann, for their manifold help despite their duties in the ongoing transfer of the Museum collections to the Humboldt Forum. My gratitude goes also to the Kucha Research Academy, especially Dr. Zhao Li, for providing me with information and materials.

¹ Fig. 1: Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, nos. III 9023a and b–c; illus. Angela F. Howard and Giuseppe Vignato, *Archaeological and Visual Sources of Meditation in the Ancient Monasteries of Kuča, Studies in Asian Art and Archaeology* 28, Brill, Leiden, 2015, pl. 159; if not stated otherwise drawings in the present paper are by the author.



P. 1: Kizil, Cave 14, Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, nos. III 9023a-c, photograph © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst/Jürgen Liepe, CC BY-NC-SA

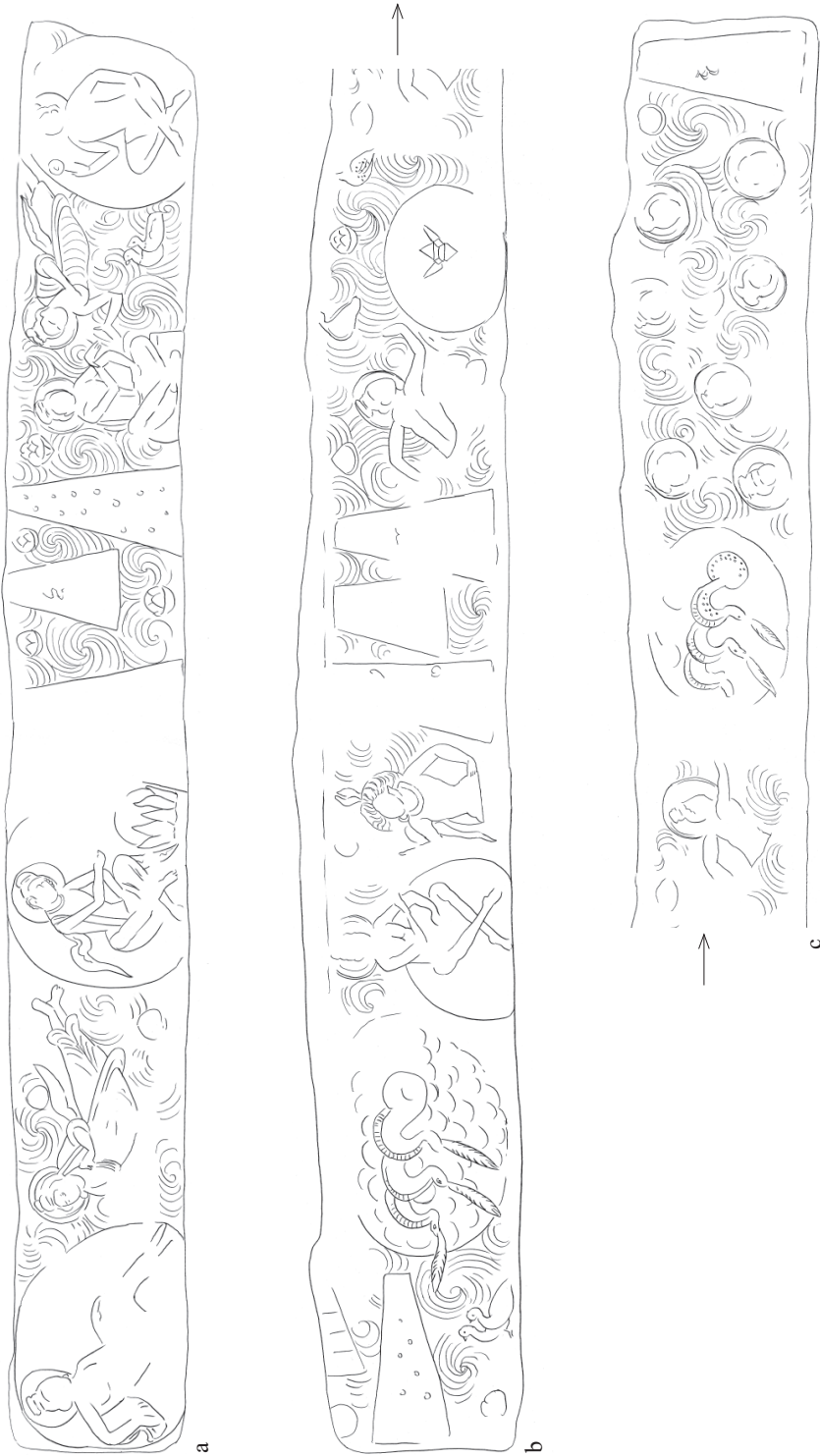


Fig. 1: Kizil, Cave 14, chamber, impost bands, Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, nos. III 9023a–c

the fragments from the temple walls as “salvaging”. Today, it is rather regarded as an act of brutal vandalism. Tragically, many murals which were taken to Berlin were destroyed in the World War II; altogether approximately eighty fragments from Kucha were lost – among them some of the most precious pieces and some too large to be removed to depots outside Berlin.

Ca. one hundred eighty other fragments were taken to St. Petersburg by the end of the war and today form the “Grünwedel Collection” at the Hermitage. Approximately sixty fragments from Kucha are today in museums and private collections around the world; many of them originally belonged to the collection in Berlin. Despite of this fact the Kucha paintings housed in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, approximately three hundred fragments (315 acquisition numbers), are the largest collection outside of Xinjiang.

The representation on the fragments III 9023a and b–c is puzzling.² The background is turquoise green and covered with carefully drawn lines indicating swirls in water; white and blue lotus flowers and ducks are shown in several spots. This is how water reservoirs like ponds, rivers, and oceans are depicted in Kucha. There can be no doubt that the representation was intended to represent movement of water. Several other elements confirm this: on III 9023b–c two persons are depicted swimming and on the right side seven heads are visible between the waves; these seven must be understood as swimming, or rather drifting, too. Clouds with fire spiting snakes are also represented; they often appear on the median strips of the barrel vaults (cf. *infra*, Fig. 14) to indicate rain. Their presence in the water is no surprise: according to wide-spread Indian beliefs snake deities, the *nāgas*, inhabit the ocean. Several cone-shaped “mountains” in different colours protrude from the water. In fragment III 9023a two persons are sitting and a third one is lying on dark “islands” or perhaps inside of “bubbles”; one holds a flower, in front of another one stands a pot on fire. Another seated person is, however, not surrounded by such a “bubble”. Two flying persons are also shown as if approaching the other ones. All depicted individuals are male; all, including the swimmers mentioned above, are nimbate. Their blue hair is piled up into chignons much in the way Brahmins are represented in Kucha. The upper bodies of the flying persons are covered with cloths, the others are shown with bare upper bodies. In fragment III 9023b–c in front of a person sitting on a “bubble”, a demon with blue complexion, hair standing on end and characteristic two “feathers” emerges from water; he seems to converse with the sitting person. In front of another “bubble”, or perhaps inside it, appears a “jewel” emanating four rays.

² Without going into details of this particular painting the depictions of that kind have been explained until now as visualisation of meditative states (Howard in: Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, pp. 159f.) and as a part of Buddhist cosmology mirrored in pictorial programmes of the caves (Ines Konczak-Nagel, *Painted Buddhist Cosmology: The Pictorial Programme of Central Pillar Caves in Kucha*, in: *Essays and Studies on Kucha*, Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig Kucha Studies I, Delhi, 2020, pp. 1–10, 183–185); cf. *infra*.

As we will see, an attempt to explain the depicted subject can only be undertaken by means of comparison with similar depictions in Kucha and by taking into account the original location of the painting in the cave, i.e. it has to discuss the painting as part of the entire pictorial programme of the interiors. The fragments have been removed from their original position and for a century the exact cave they came from was unknown.³ Today, thanks to the cooperation of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst with the Kucha Research Academy, it has been ascertained that the paintings were taken from Cave 14 in Kizil where they were originally located below the curvature of the barrel vault. Tentatively we can presume that the III 9023a was once located along the right wall (there is still a fragment of the painting preserved *in situ*, in the front part). The six fragments which were reconstructed to form III 9023b–c probably belonged to the strips along the left and front walls. Note that the left edge of III 9023b–c belongs to a “corner”: the “mountains” there are shown at a 90° angle to join another wall. This was certainly the front left corner of the cave if the strip is viewed from below.

And indeed these paintings were intended to be seen from below, since they decorated the impost bands, i.e. narrow surfaces facing the floor underneath the barrel vault. As the comparisons will show, strips with related content were placed in the same or equivalent locations, usually “underneath” other representations, in most cases the *jātakas*. Wherever such representations were not depicted the impost bands are merely decorated with ornamental patterns or depictions of wooden beams “supporting” the balconies represented above. Depictions of the “ocean” like the one in III 9023 are only met in few caves. Unique is e.g. the turquoise band with lotuses and geese on the dome in Kizil 189⁴ where it is placed around the central Buddha in the “lantern”.⁵ Lotus rosettes on turquoise background which may be a simplified version of the “ocean” appear sporadically.⁶ Though many paintings have not survived the ages and documentation of others is lacking, we can still assume that the topic was not widely

³ The record cards in the Archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst give “Höhle über der Höhle der 16 Schwerträger” and “Quizil. Grosse Anlage kleine Tempelhöhle, ganz oben über der Schwerthöhle” (i.e. from the cave above Cave 8); there is also a pencil note “Höhle 7?”. One record card defines the position in the cave “Aus der Mitte Deckstreifen” [from the middle of the ceiling strip].

⁴ Kizil, Cave 189 (Zweite Höhle von vorn), illus. in *Kizil Grottoes = Shinkyo Uighur Jichiku Bunbutsu Inkai / Haikiken Kizil Senbutsudo Bunbutsu Hokanjo, Chugoku Sekkutsu: Kizil Sekkutsu / The Grotto Art of China: The Kizil Grottoes*, 1–3. Tokyo 1983–85, vol. 2, pl. 65; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang 2009 = Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua yishu bianji weiyuanhui*, 1–6. Urumqi, vol. 3, pl. 166, pp. 188–189.

⁵ The sitting Buddha is holding a bowl with the snake inside what suggests the iconography of the conversion of the Kāśyapa ascetics as it is often depicted in Gandhara; the water around might perhaps allude to another miracle in the context when Buddha was walking on water (for the textual and pictorial tradition, cf. Dieter Schlingloff, *Ajanta – Handbuch der Malereien / Erzählende Wandmalereien*, 2000, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden; Dieter Schlingloff, *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 1. Narrative Wall-paintings*, IGNC, Delhi, 2013, no. 67; Monika Zin, *Mitleid und Wunderkraft. Schwierige Bekehrungen und ihre Ikonographie im indischen Buddhismus*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2006, ch. 8). The iconography in Kizil 189 is to my knowledge unique.

⁶ Like on the squinches of the dome in Kizil 183 or the median strip in Mazabaha 9.

spread; it remains to be explored why it was used and what particular meaning this motif transmitted.

Representations similar to III 9023 and placed in the same location inside the cave can be found in the neighbouring Cave 13 in Kizil (Figs. 27–38); here tiny fish are bustling about. Similar fish images also appear in Cave 7 in Kizil (Fig. 4),⁹ where only the right strip is preserved.¹⁰ The painting also shows a person climbing one of the mountains.

In all three caves, Kizil 7, 13, and 14, the barrel vaults above the strips are decorated with depictions of the *jātakas*.



Fig. 2: Kizil, Cave 13, main chamber, left impost band



Fig. 3: Kizil, Cave 13, main chamber, right impost band

⁷ Fig. 2: Kizil, Cave 13 (Fünfte Höhle neben der Sechzehn-Schwertträger-Höhle), main chamber, left impost band, illus. in: *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 1, pl. 209, p. 233.

⁸ Fig. 3: Kizil, Cave 13 (Fünfte Höhle neben der Sechzehn-Schwertträger-Höhle), main chamber, right impost band, illus. in: *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 39; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 1, pls. 207–208, pp. 231–232.

⁹ Fig. 4: Kizil, Cave 7 (Höhle mit dem Frescoboden), main chamber, right impost band.

¹⁰ Grünwedel records such stip also underneath the depiction of Maitreya on the front wall of the cave. See Albert Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan, Königlich Preussische Turfan Expeditionen*, Verlag von Georg Reimer, Berlin, 1912, p. 49: “Dieser Sims lief auch über der Tür hin unter dem Maitreyabilde in der Lünette.”



Fig. 4: Kizil, Cave 7, main chamber, right impost band

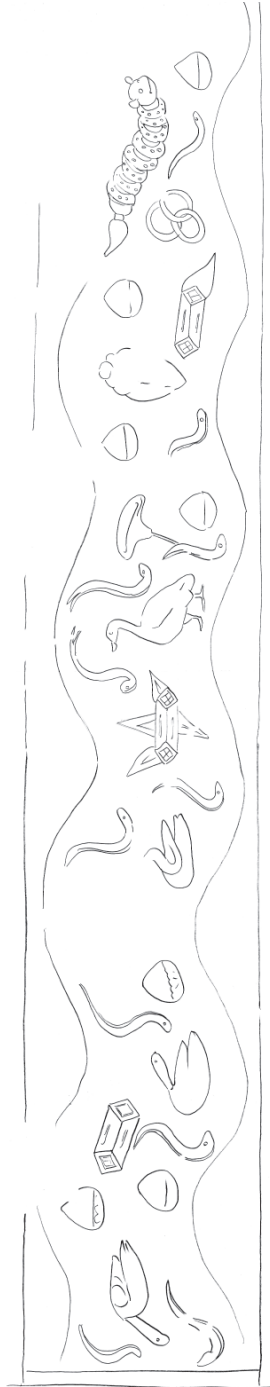


Fig. 5: Kizil, Cave 38, main chamber, left impost band



Fig. 6: Kizil, Cave 38, main chamber, right impost band

The representations in Cave 38 (Figs. 5¹¹–6¹²) differ in that they do not contain persons but only show the usual aquatic background. Fascinating are worm-like creatures with faces of cats (?), whose bodies coil in multiple ways and end in a tail fin. These creatures (or at least their rear parts) seem to echo prototypes from Mediterranean antiquity; marine creatures with coiled, snake-like rear parts (cf. *infra*, fn. 17). The representations of the “ocean” in Cave 38 were painted on top of earlier ornamental motifs; wavy lines along both edges and “arrows” (Fig. 6, in the middle) in regularly intervals project from the decoration underneath.¹³ The decorative ornament was not re-painted along the front wall but it occurs on the upper reveal of the entrance door¹⁴ (today only a narrow strip is visible behind the door case). In the barrel vaults of this cave the *jātakas* and scenes with the Buddha appear in alternating rows.

In Kizil, similar representations are to be found at least three more times, in Caves 67, 118 and on a fragment in the Hermitage the provenance of which is not clarified yet. The depiction on two strips in Cave 118 belongs to the 1st Indo-Iranian Style, i.e. it was executed probably around 500 CE. The “ocean” strips today are documented only on historical photographs and Grünwedel’s published drawings – unfortunately in this case not only the paintings brought to Berlin but also the original drawings were lost – (Figs. 7¹⁵–8¹⁶). Grünwedel labelled the cave “Hippokampenhöhle” [Seahorses Cave];

¹¹ Fig. 5: Kizil, Cave 38 (Musikerhöhle), main chamber, left impost band, visible in: *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 127.

¹² Fig. 6: Kizil, Cave 38 (Musikerhöhle), main chamber, right impost band, illus. in: Grünwedel, *Alt buddhistische Kultstätten* 1912, fig. 123 (water-coloured drawing); *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 1, pl. 72, pp. 86–87; Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, pl. 160.

¹³ Grünwedel noticed that the strip was repainted; he calls it “senseless” because of the depictions of the balcony with musicians below (Grünwedel, *Alt buddhistische Kultstätten*, p. 64: “Genauere Untersuchung zeigt, dass dieser Wasserfries Restauration ist (...). In der Tat ist der Wasserfries hier ganz sinnlos und nur ein später hereingebrachtes dekoratives Element (...).”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: “Interessant ist, daß auch die Decke der Türleibung mit Wasser neu bemalt ist; fünf Lotusscheiben bilden die Dekoration, daneben tummeln sich Gänse und Fische im Wasser.” [It is interesting that the ceiling of the door reveal is also repainted with water; five lotus disks form the decoration, next to it geese and fish bustle in water].

¹⁵ Fig. 7: Kizil, Cave 118 (Hippokampenhöhle), strip on the lower most part of the barrel vault above the front wall, Berlin, no. IB 8477, war loss, cf. Caren Dreyer, Lore Sander and Fridrike Weis, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Dokumentation der Verluste, Band III: Museum für Indische Kunst (Verzeichnis seit 1945 vermisser Bestände der ehemaligen Indischen Abteilung des Museums für Völkerkunde, des heutigen Museums für Indische Kunst) Berlin*, Museum für Indische Kunst, SMB, Berlin, 2002, p. 149 (illustrated); illus. in: Grünwedel, *Alt buddhistische Kultstätten*, fig. 238b (drawing); Ernst Waldschmidt, *Gandhāra, Kutscha, Turfan, eine Einführung in die frühmittelalterliche Kunst Zentralasiens*, Klinkhardt & Biermann, Leipzig, 1925, pl. 37; Albert von Le Coq, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien, Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen*, V, Neue Bildwerke I, D. Reimer, Berlin, 1926, pl. B.3 (Grünwedel’s drawing), pl. 9; Satomi, Hiyama, *Kizil Sekkutsu dai 118 kutsu (Kaibakutsu) no Hekiga Shudai: Mandataru ou Setsuwa wo Tegakarini [The wall paintings of Kizil cave 118: the story of King Mandhatr as a new identification]*, “Journal of the Japan Art History Society” 168, Tokyo: Bijutsushi Gakkai, pp. 358–372 and Satomi Hiyama, *The Wall Painting of Kizil Cave 118: The Story of King Māndhātṛ as a New Identification*, “Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology” 5, 2012, pp. 145–170; Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, fig. 161; water-coloured drawing by Grünwedel.

¹⁶ Fig. 8: Kizil, Cave 118 (Hippokampenhöhle), strip on the lower most part of the barrel vault above the rear wall, Berlin, no. IB 9176, war loss, cf. Dreyer, Sander and Weis, *Dokumentation der Verluste*, p. 199 (illustrated);



Fig. 7: Kizil, Cave 118, front wall, lower most part of the barrel vault, Berlin, no. IB 8477, war loss



Fig. 8: Kizil, Cave 118, rear wall, lower most part of the barrel vault, Berlin, no. IB 9176, war loss

the topic is palpable indeed. Compared to the previously described representations in Caves 7, 13, 14, and 38 – all belonging to the 2nd Indo-Iranian Style and therefore later in date – the water beings among the lotus flowers, ducks, and conches, are more differentiated in this cave. The many-headed *nāgas* are depicted with their arch-enemy, Garuḍa, and the beasts include several composite creatures like a fish and a camel with human heads. The “seahorses” are fantasy creatures; their prototypes can be traced among the mythological animals of the Mediterranean antiquity which were depicted in Gandhara, too.¹⁷ The animal in Fig. 8 resembling a bear must be a tortoise as can be deduced from its pendant in another strip. In Kucha, tortoises are shown with ears; since we are in the desert the painters probably never saw such an animal. The human-like persons actively participate in the life of the “ocean”. Two are shown escaping from the *nāgas* while wildly gesticulating; one is holding a snake, the other one a bowl, perhaps representing jewels from the sea, while a third one without nimbus shoots an arrow at one of the “seahorses”. The “bubbles” and the “mountains” are not represented.

The strips with the depiction of the “ocean” in Cave 118 are placed on the lowest part of the barrel vaults; this emphasizes their link with the “mountains” above. As the left lunette of the cave illustrates (Fig. 9),¹⁸ the water of the strips flows into the sea surrounding Mount Sumeru (Fig. 10);¹⁹ the “shore” of this ocean surrounding Sumeru – filled with irregular sloping lines – continues on the walls above and below the strips. On top of Sumeru is Indra’s palace.²⁰ The World Ocean surrounding Sumeru illustrates commonly known cosmology; the strips along the long walls belong to it.²¹

illus. in: Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, fig. 237b (drawing); Le Coq and Waldschmidt, *Die buddhistische Spätantike VI*, fig. 89; Hiyama *Kizil Sekkutsu dai 118 kutsu* and Hiyama, *Wall Painting of Kizil Cave 118*; Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, fig. 161; water-coloured drawing by Grünwedel.

¹⁷ E.g. illustrated in: Isao Kurita, *Gandhāran Art (An revised and enlarged edition)*, Nigensha, Tokyo, 2003, vol. 2, figs. 695–704, 712, 720–721.

¹⁸ Fig. 9: Cave 118 (Hippokampenhöhle), left and rear wall; drawing based on historical photograph in the archives of the Musée Guimet, no. AP 7445.

¹⁹ Fig. 10: Cave 118 (Hippokampenhöhle), left wall; Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, no. III 8412, illus. in: Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, fig. 243 (drawing); Albert von Le Coq, *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien = Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen IV, Atlas zu den Wandmalereien*, D. Reimer, Berlin, 1924 [1974], pl. 2; Marianne Yaldiz, et al., *Magische Götterwelten: Werke aus dem Museum für Indische Kunst Berlin*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Indische Kunst, UNZE Verlags- und Druckgesellschaft, Potsdam, 2000, pl. 293; water-coloured drawing by Grünwedel.

²⁰ For the explanation of the paintings in the cave as the narrative of Māndhātā cf. Hiyama, *Kizil Sekkutsu dai 118 kutsu* and Hiyama, *Wall Painting of Kizil Cave 118*.

²¹ That the water on the strips flows into the ocean around Sumeru and belongs to the depicted narrative challenges the explanation given by Howard (cf. fn. 2) as “the outcome of meditation”. Howard sees the elements of the paintings – serpents, sea monsters or mussel in connection with vision in deep meditation (e.g. mussel like the symbol of the element air) and concludes (on p. 162) pointing to a text passage from the *Yogalehrbuch*: “‘Then in the middle of a lotus pond ... the yogin sees a boy sunk there and absorbed in the pleasure of Samadhi.’ In this case, there is a direct parallel between the text and the friezes, which both portray a young boy, a pond and lotuses”. All “boys” in the strip are, however, involved in different actions. Albeit expressing her gratitude to the present author for bringing to her attention the possibility of different explanations of the strips, Howard extends

The paintings in Kizil 118 in many respects differ from those in the later caves: the mountains in the barrel vaults do not contain narrative stories but – just like other caves of the 1st Indo-Iranian Style – illustrate a “landscape” populated by animals, gods, meditating monks and *ṛṣis*.²² Therefore the meaning of the “ocean” underneath may differ from that in the later caves. On the other hand, however, the strip in the apex above²³ showing flying monks, *nāgas*, *Garuḍa*, and the heavenly bodies, is quite similar to the later median strips, thus the basic concept of the image programme may have remained the same.

Konczak-Nagel has proposed a quite convincing interpretation of the “ocean” in Cave 38 (Figs. 5–6) comparing it with the Hippokampenhöhle (Figs. 7–10). According to her, Cave 38, not unlike other caves with mountainous landscapes on the vaults and celestial bodies in the apex, portrays Buddhist cosmology, the mythical geography of the universe with the cosmic mount Sumeru surrounded by the world ocean.

As mentioned before the sections of the “mountains” in the vaults in the 2nd Indo-Iranian Style were filled with narrative representations expanding the landscapes of the 1st Indo-Iranian Style into depictions of soteriological importance. An analogous process takes place in depictions of the “ocean” strips. There are insufficient examples

her elucidation to all similar representations in Kizil, inclusive our III 9023. As we will see, the persons are often shown fleeing from water.

²² The convention of decorating of the vaults with mountains is an invention of Kucha. It can have its origins in Parthian depictions of the landscapes, which root in Achaemenid art (cf. Waldschmidt in: Albert von Le Coq and Ernst Waldschmidt, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien, Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen VI, Neue Bildwerke II*, D. Reimer, Berlin, 1928 [1975], pp. 33–37; Akira, Miyaji, *Kizil Sekkutsu Daiichi Yoshiki no Vault Tenjokutsu Hekiga*, vol. 2. *Zenjoso, Sangaku kozo, Miroku no Zizo Kosei* [*The murals on the vault ceiling of the first style caves of Kizil grottoes vol. 2. Iconography of meditating monks, mountainous composition and Maitreya*], “*Ars Buddhica*” 180 (1989), pp. 29–60; Marilyn Martin Rhie *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia, Vol. II: The Eastern Chin and Sixteen Kingdoms Period in China and Tumshuk, Kucha and Karashahr in Central Asia*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, pp. 615–616) or perhaps in Indian custom of representing the rocky landscapes on the entrances to the sanctuaries. This pictorial convention is not limited to Buddhist temples and might go back on the imagery of approaching the gods after crossing the Himalaya (cf. Monika Zin, *Ajanta – Handbuch der Malereien / Handbook of the Paintings 2: Devotionale und ornamentale Malereien*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2003 and Monika Zin, *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 2: Devotional and Ornamental Paintings*, IGNCA, Delhi, forthcoming: Introduction “ ‘Romantic Mountain Landscapes’ in Indian Art”; Monika Zin, *Śabarās: The Vile Hunters in Heavenly Spheres*, in: *South Asian Archaeology 1999, Proceedings of the 15th International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Leiden*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen, 2008, pp. 375–394, and Monika Zin, *Pictures of Paradise for Good Luck and Prosperity: Depictions of Themes Irrelevant for Enlightenment in the Older Buddhist Tradition (with special reference to the paintings of Ajanta)*, in: *Mani-Sushma, Archaeology and Heritage (Dr. B.R. Mani Festschrift)*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 125–147. Hiyama (*Kizil Sekkutsu dai 118 kutsu and Wall Painting of Kizil Cave 118*) interprets the paintings in Kizil 118 as illustration of the moral decline described in several *sūtras* since some of the individuals in the landscape are shown with and others without nimbi; only the last ones are shown shooting. Howard (Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, pp. 150f.) speaks of magic landscapes generated in meditation.

²³ Illus. in: Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, figs. 239–242 (water-coloured drawings); *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang 2008 = Xinjiang Qiuci Shiku Yanjiusuo* (ed.) 2008, *Zhongguo Xinjiang Bihua: Qiuci / Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China: Kucha / Qiuci*. Urumqi, pl. 1, p. 5; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang 2009*, vol. 1, pls. 3–5, pp. 8–11; Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, pl. 154.



Fig. 9: Cave 118, left and rear wall (based on historical photograph in the archives of the Musée Guimet, no. AP 7445)

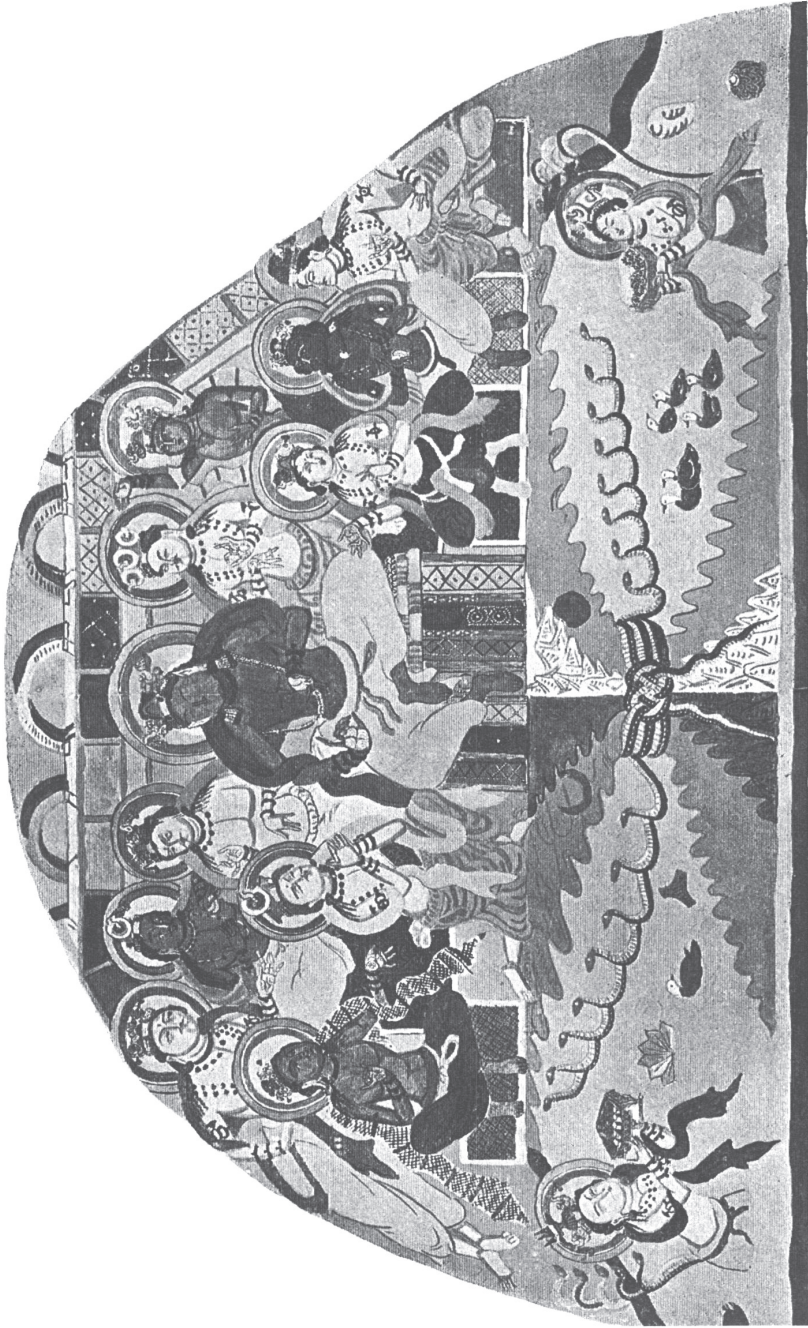


Fig. 10: Cave 118, left wall; water-coloured drawing by Grünwedel, from: Grünwedel 1912, fig. 243

to establish when and how the pictures of the “ocean” were infused with this added meaning; in Cave 38 (Figs. 5–6) or in the later beautiful representation running around the dome in Kumtura 34,²⁴ showing impressive haloed demons surrounded by tiny water creatures no additional meaning is traceable. Nothing can be said with certainty about the gorgeous depiction in the squinche of Cave GK 17 in Kumtura (Fig. 11)²⁵ since only this one squinche is preserved.



Fig. 11: Kumtura GK 17, squinche on the side of the dome (based on historical photograph in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1115)

Other “oceans”, however, also – as we will see – an early painting in Kizil 67, show more. As we have seen in Kizil 7, 13 and 14 (Figs. 1–4) the strips depict individuals trying to cross the water or to escape from it by climbing up the mountains. These strips need further explanation and the following considerations are an attempt to provide this explanation. The meticulously executed frieze in Cave 67 provides additional information and will thus be the starting point.

Cave 67 is a square domed cave; the preserved squinche illustrates a king adored by *nāgas*,²⁶ water is not depicted there. Our strip (Fig. 12)²⁷ was placed on the right side wall, underneath a frieze with a hitherto unexplained depiction.²⁸ The left wall of

²⁴ Illus. in: *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 2, pls. 140, 148–149, pp. 143, 151–152.

²⁵ Fig. 11: Kumtura GK 17, squinche on the side of the dome; drawing based on historical photograph in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1115.

²⁶ Illus. in: *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 166–167; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 2, pl. 165, p. 188; the king must be Virūpākṣa, one of the Caturmahārājas, the lord of the West with his retinue of the *nāgas*, for the textual references and representations in India cf. Zin, *Ajanta, Handbuch der Malereien 2 / Handbook of the Paintings 2*, no. 42 and Zin, *Pictures of Paradise*.

²⁷ Fig. 12: Kizil, Cave 67 (Rotkupelhöhle); illus. Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, fig. 192; Waldschmidt, *Gandhāra, Kutscha, Turfan*, pl. 29; Zhao, Li et al. *Haiwai Kezi'er shiku bihua fuyuan yinxiang ji [Compendium of Photographic Restoration of the Kizil Grotto Murals overseas]*, Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, Shanghai, 2018, fig. 54, 55, 58 (reconstruction).

²⁸ Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. III 8403; illus. Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, figs. 191a-b (original drawing is housed in the Archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. TA 6646); *Mural*

the cave is not preserved but it is still visible that it was also decorated with two wide friezes; the lower one of these may well have depicted the “ocean”, too.

The painting (Fig. 12) is carefully executed but the state of preservation is very poor;²⁹ only the detailed photographs provided by the Kucha Research Academy allowed for the preparation of a drawing.

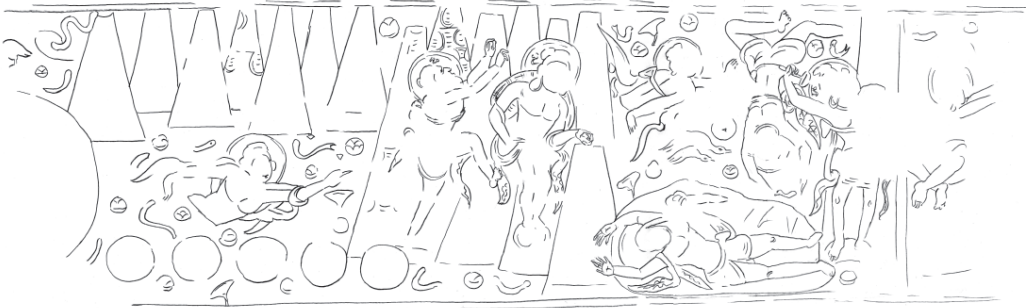


Fig. 12: Kizil, Cave 67, right side wall

Several elements in this depiction correspond exactly with the pictures already discussed. We see water with lotus flowers, geese, fishes, and conches; on the left edge must have been a “bubble”. A number of cone-shape “mountains” protrude from the water; seven are the background for a swimming male person. In front of him are five round objects, empty and painted black inside; perhaps small “bubbles”? Another swimmer is shown on the right side. In the centre of the composition there is a group of eight (?) mountains. A person is climbing one of them, just like in Kizil 7 (Fig. 4, right side). Another person – or perhaps the same one? – is standing on the slope of the next mountain looking down. Further to the right a male is shown falling down, and another one (or the same one?) lays with his arms stretched back in an unusual gesture: this person is apparently dead. Still further to the right stands another individual holding a hammer (?). Behind the mountain yet another seated person is shown. All these individuals are male and of bluish skin complexion; it seems that all are haloed, and all wear their hair piled up.

Obviously an interpretation of this and similar representations merely as the ocean around Sumeru is insufficient. The painting – just like those in Caves 7 and 14 (Figs. 4 and 1) – illustrates in an undisputable way individuals trying to cross the water swimming or to escape from it by climbing the mountains. In Buddhist context, the ocean is the metaphor par excellence for *samsāra* and reaching the shore is synonymous with *nirvāṇa*.

Paintings in Xinjiang 2009, vol. 2, pl. 164, p. 187. The unusual feature of the painting is that it includes both: persons certainly belonging to a narrative content (in “Indian way”, clad kings and a naked lady, accompanied by a skeleton), and typical male and female donors.

²⁹ The mural was in poor condition already in Grünwedel’s time, his description (Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, p. 86) demonstrates that he could not see the details and he did not even notice that the scenes play in water.

The most common imagery employed to illustrate *saṃsāra* is the “wheel of transmigration”, *saṃsāracakra*, familiar from countless Tibetan depictions.³⁰ The prototype of such representations is to be found in India but only a part of one example, in Ajanta XVII, survived.³¹ Preserved are, however, several literary sources in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese providing exact instructions on how such wheels should be depicted. Among them is a Sanskrit manuscript discovered in Duldur-Akur in the region of Kucha.³²

The texts instruct that the representation of the *saṃsāracakra* should contain in the middle five or six “realms”, in which a rebirth is possible – namely the realm of the gods, *asuras*, humans, animals, *pretas* and the dwellers of the hells. The texts explain which wheel is actually meant: it is the *ghaṭīyantra*, literally the ‘pot mechanism’, the machine, commonly known as the “Persian wheel”. This device was known in India from early times and it appears as a metaphor also in non-Buddhist literature.³³ The imagery alludes to a wheel mechanism with pots on the rim scooping the beings out of the water below and whirling them through the existences. In several depictions of the *saṃsāracakra* – like in Yulin, Pedongpo, Tabo or Dazu³⁴ – a row of pots with beings inside are indeed represented on the outer edge. As latest research shows,³⁵ the imagery was visualized also in Kucha, however in a later painting in Kumtura 75.

The visualisation of *saṃsāra* by means of the *ghaṭīyantra* is pictorial, however, not exactly matching the imagery since the beings in water are actually between rebirths. They are to be understood as beings before their existences, i.e. in the intermediate state (*antarābhava*).³⁶ In Sanskrit such a being is termed *gandharva*;³⁷ the texts giving instructions on how to depict the wheel call it *aupapāduka*, a being emerging spontaneously.

³⁰ Cf. e.g. in: Jacqueline Dunnington, *The Tibetan Wheel of Existence. An Introduction*, Tibet House, New York 2000.

³¹ Cf. Monika Zin and Dieter Schlingloff, *Saṃsāracakra, Das Rad der Wiedergeburten in der indischen Überlieferung*, Iudicium, Munich, 2007.

³² For references cf. Stephen F. Teiser *Reinventing the Wheel: Painting in Medieval Buddhist Temples*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2006; Zin and Schlingloff, *Saṃsāracakra*; Marek Mejor, *Painting the ‘Wheel of Transmigration’ (saṃsāra-cakra): A Note on the Textual Transmission*, in: *From Turfan to Ajanta, Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, Lumbini International Research Institute, Lumbini, pp. 671–690.

³³ For the literary sources and also representations of the “Persian Wheel” in later Indian cf. Zin and Schlingloff, *Saṃsāracakra*.

³⁴ Illustrated in: Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel*, pls. 11–14 and figs. 7.4, 8.8, 8.9, and 9.5.

³⁵ Cf. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Zhao Li and Xie Qianqian, *Kumutula di 75ku shuma fuyuan ji xiangguan bihua ticaì ji tiji yanjiu 75 (A Digital Restoration of the Paintings in Qumtura Cave 75 and an Examination of Relevant Motifs and Inscriptions)*, “Sichouzhilu yanjiu [Journal of the International Silk Road Studies]” 1 (2017), pp. 225–250;

Yamabe, Zhao and Xie *Kumutula di 75ku shuma*; fig. 30 in the paper contains infrared photograph allowing to see more details as on the usual picture.

³⁶ As Andrew Wayman, *The Intermediate-State Dispute in Buddhism*, in: *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner*, K. R., Springer, Boston, 1974, pp. 227–239 has shown, the concept of a being in the state between the existences caused controversy among Buddhist schools; the Sarvāstivādins accepted it.

³⁷ The denoting of the being before the new existence with the terminus indicating a minor deity is connected with a long development of the idea footing in *vedic* imagery (cf. Bryan J. Cuevas, *Predecessors and Prototypes: Towards a Conceptual History of the Buddhist Antarābhava*, “Numen” 43,3 (1996), pp. 263–302) and corresponds with

The painting instructions are unequivocal: *aupapādukāḥ sattvā ghaṭīyantraprayogeṇa cyavamānā upapadyamānās ca kartavyāḥ*,³⁸ the beings who stand before the new existence should be made (i.e. represented in the painting) as falling down and rising up in the pot mechanism. Later Tibetan representations, which do not visualise the *ghaṭīyantra*, often add a collateral ring around the hub of the wheel to show the beings falling down and rising up (Fig. 13).³⁹



Fig. 13: Middle part of the Tibetan *thangka*, Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente, no. 69-5-1

The strips with the “ocean” shown in Kucha underneath the *jātakas* correspond well with the visualisation of *samsāra* by means of the *ghaṭīyantra* (with water outside of rebirths). The strip may therefore show the raising and falling *aupapādukas*, however, first of all they visualise the beings in *samsāra* trying to escape from it.

Buddhist embryology (cf. Beatrice Dossi, *Samen, Seele, Blut. Die Zeugungstheorien des alten Indiens*, Akademischer Verlag, Munich 1998).

³⁸ *Divyāvadāna XXI*, (ed. Edward B. Cowell and Robert Alexander Neil, *The Divyāvadāna: A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1886) p. 298; cf. Zin and Schlingloff, *Samsāraccakra*, p. 23.

³⁹ Fig. 13: middle part of the Tibetan *thangka*, Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente, no. 69-5-1; for the photograph of the entire depiction cf. Monika Zin, *Imagery of Hell in South, South East and Central Asia*, “Rocznik Orientalistyczny” 67 (2014), pp. 269–296, fig. 1.

By no means all elements of the “oceans” can be explained. What are the “bubbles” and why are some individuals depicted inside them (and that in front of the pots on fire)⁴⁰ while others are shown swimming. The same is true about the persons approaching. Are the flying figures perhaps deities from heaven⁴¹ and others are demons emerging from below?⁴² In general the individuals floating in the ocean and trying to cross it correspond very well with the imagery of *samsārasāgara*.

If the pictorial programmes of the caves are derived from cosmology, and taking into account the “ocean” below and the mountain (i.e. existences in *samsāra*) in the middle, the median strip should represent the recourse, the way out of the necessity of being reborn. And indeed, these strips above (Fig. 14)⁴³ represent not only beings belonging to the sky – celestial bodies, *nāgas* in clouds or geese – but also flying monastic persons, i.e. enlightened *arhats* who will not be reborn again but will enter *nirvāṇa*.



Fig. 14: Kizil, Cave 34, median strip on the barrel vault (based on historical photograph in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1518)

Miao⁴⁴ and Konczak-Nagel⁴⁵ understand the strip above the “mountains” as part of the depiction of the Buddhist cosmology. Schlingloff takes the flying monks as a visualisation

⁴⁰ Could it perhaps allude to the folk etymology of the word *gandharva*, as a being eating smell? Cf. Cuevas, *Predecessors and Prototypes*, p. 283 with quotations from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

⁴¹ A Sogdian Zoroastrian representation on the sarcophagus comes into mind showing winged deities saving persons from the sea in which dwells a (Indian looking) *makara*; cf. Zsuzsanna Gulácsi and Jason Beduhn, *The Religion of Wirkak and Wiyusi: The Zoroastrian Iconographic Program on a Sogdian Sarcophagus from Sixth-Century Xi’an*, “Bulletin of the Asia Institute” 26 (2016), pp. 18–19 (with references to earlier Manichaean interpretation).

⁴² Compare the demon and the deity (?) leading the *aupapādukas* down and up in the Tibetan depiction (Fig. 13).

⁴³ Fig. 14: Kizil, Cave 34 (Höhle mit dem meditierenden Sonnengott), illus. in: *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 1, pl. 78; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 2, pl. 21, pp. 24–25; drawing based on historical photograph in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1518.

⁴⁴ Lihui, Miao, *The Ceiling Murals of Kizil as a Symbol of the Buddhist Universe*, in: *Kizil on the Silk Road: Crossroads of Commerce & Meeting of Minds*, Marg Foundation, Mumbai, 2008, pp. 84–93.

⁴⁵ Konczak-Nagel, *Painted Buddhist Cosmology*.

of the states of meditation;⁴⁶ similarly Howard⁴⁷ but she further narrows down the meaning to them being illustrative of the first phase of the Miracle of Śrāvastī, i.e. the so-called “twin miracle” of emanating water and fire from the body while hovering in the air as a demonstration of the spiritual powers gained through meditation. Konczak-Nagel further underlines the importance of meditation for an understanding of cosmological depictions: only through meditation, providing the detachment from the *kāmadhātu* (sphere of desire), it is possible to find the way out of rebirth in *samsāra*. Howard and Konczak-Nagel quote from the “Yoga Manual”, a text discovered in Kizil named in German *Yogalehrbuch* by Dieter Schlingloff.⁴⁸ The *Yogalehrbuch* reflects philosophical treatises in its detailed descriptions of the meditative states of the monks with their visions of heavenly spheres, of the past and the future; this correlates with the depictions of *jātakas* and of Maitreya in the pictorial programmes of the caves. The explanations of the paintings by means of the *Yogalehrbuch* presuppose a deep knowledge of the *abhidharma* and meditative practice by the viewer.

The question must be raised at this juncture by whom the painted caves in Kucha were used. Howard proved conclusively that the caves which were certainly used by monks – caves for individual meditation, dormitories and lecture halls – were all left undecorated; she emphasizes that the painted caves were not used to support meditative contemplation either. Certainly Howard is right in explaining the painted caves as a help for monks’ teachings;⁴⁹ rather difficult to understand is her parallel explanation of the paintings as illustration of visions of the monks.⁵⁰

Sharf⁵¹ has proposed the usage of the caves as mortuary chapels. As this paper will demonstrate, too, the connection with the death ritual can by no means be denied given the outstanding role of the *parinirvāṇa* cycles in the caves,⁵² but to reduce the caves decorated with so many varying narratives to a mortuary only does not seem adequate.

⁴⁶ Dieter Schlingloff, *Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene. Visuelle Meditation und Wundererscheinung in buddhistischer Literatur und Kunst. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch*, Iudicium, Munich 2015, and Dieter Schlingloff, *The Superhuman Faculties: Visual Meditation and Miracles in Buddhist Literature and Art. A Study in Religious History*, Iudicium, Munich, 2018, ch. 4, with parallel translations of descriptions of meditative states and demonstration of the miracles.

⁴⁷ Howard in: Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, pp. 123ff., and Angela F. Howard, *On “Art in the Dark” and Meditation in Central Asian Buddhist Caves*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 46,2 (2017), pp. 19–39.

⁴⁸ Ed. and German translation in: Schlingloff 1964/2006.

⁴⁹ Howard in: Howard and Vignato, *Archeological and Visual Sources*, p. 122.

⁵⁰ Schlingloff (*Mūrdhacchidra*, “Hörin. Vergleichende Studien zur japanischen Kultur” 10 (2003), pp. 109–124, repeated in: Schlingloff, *Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene/The Superhuman Faculties*, cf. fn. 46) and Howard conflate the private visions of the monks and illustrations of “real” miracles described in the narratives.

⁵¹ Robert H. Sharf, *Art in the Dark: The Ritual Context of Buddhist Caves in Western China*, in: *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Its Conservation*, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2013, pp. 38–65.

⁵² Cf. Monika Zin, *Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Story Cycle in Kucha*, Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig Kucha Studies II, Delhi, 2020, with analysis of representations in architectural context, their literary sources, comparative material and references to the earlier research.

In my opinion the caves were also used by monks but the focus is on lay visitors – donors, their families, travellers – seeking religious experience.⁵³ The pictorial programmes of the caves were invented for them to facilitate the perception of the paintings and to increase the religious experience. The programmes are sophisticated and must have been designed by learned monks.⁵⁴ The programme “organises” the representations and thus makes it viewer-friendly. As we have seen, the arrangement of paintings reflects commonly known cosmology; this makes “reading” the paintings even easier.

Deriving the representations on the median strips from the *Yogalehrbuch* confronts us with the possibility that they may not have been comprehensible for the lay visitors. Easier explanations seem more suitable, perhaps as depictions of a narrative matching the surroundings, like the flight of the monks to Lake Anavatapta,⁵⁵ or – following the explanation of the programmes by means of Buddhist cosmology – like the depiction of the intangible realm (*arūpadhātu*) which forms the uppermost level of the universe. The flying *arhats* might visualise the intangible, i.e. invisible, spheres since everybody probably was familiar with the idea that in a state of meditation monks can reach these spheres. As a matter of fact it is almost impossible to illustrate the *arūpadhātu* spheres in a different way. That the monastic persons in the median strips are usually shown carrying alms-bowls and staffs with clashing rings (cf. Fig. 14) may signify that they only visit the heavens temporarily.

It was noticed by Grünwedel⁵⁶ but forgotten afterwards,⁵⁷ that the flying “Buddhas” in the median strips are not always Buddhas. The painters found a way to distinguish between different monastic persons. Only some of them are surrounded by nimbi and mandorlas – those certainly represent fully enlightened Buddhas, *samyaksambuddhas*. This is also how “the Buddha” (Śākyamuni, but also the Buddhas of previous epochs) is depicted in narrative representations in Kucha. Flying persons without mandorla and

⁵³ Cf. Rajeshwari Ghose, *An Attempt at Linking the Doctrinal and the Textual with the Visual Representation of the Parinirvāṇa Scenes in the Kizil Grottoes*, “Kalakalpa: Journal of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts” 1 (2004), pp. 125–160, and Rajeshwari Ghose, *Linking the Doctrinal and the Textual with the Visual Representation of the Parinirvana Scenes in the Kizil Grottoes*, in: *History and Society in Central and Inner Asia*, “Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia” 7 (2005), pp. 61–91; Monika Zin, *The “parinirvāṇa space” in Kucha. An attempt to recognize their function*, in: *Proceedings of the Conference of the European Society for Studies of Central Asia and Himalayan Regions (SEECHAC), held in Naples, 3rd–5th November, 2018* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ The same conclusion can be given about the caves in Ajanta. The paintings are placed in the caves according to programme leading the viewer towards the devotional representations in the sanctuary; the added later individual donations make the reading of the programme difficult (cf. Zin, *Ajanta, Handbuch der Malereien 2 / Handbook of the Paintings 2*, nos. 42 and 48).

⁵⁵ Cf. Richard Salomon, *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra, An Introduction with Selected Translations*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville, 2018, pp. 199f. (with numerous references).

⁵⁶ Grünwedel, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten*, p. 6: “Zenit der Höhle: Garuḍa, Sonne und Mond, Windgötter, Pratyekabuddhas usw.”.

⁵⁷ The Japanese scholar Masaru Inoue (*Kizil Sekkutsu no Vault Tenjohekiga to “Hishosuru Hotoke” no Zuzo* [The iconography of the vault ceiling of Kizil caves and “the flying Buddha”], in: *Toyo Bijutsushi Ronso*, Yuhikaku Shuppan, Tokyo, 1999, pp. 25–44) came to the similar conclusion: he explains the Buddhas in the median stipes as *pratyekabuddhas*.

nimbus generally are enlightened monks. Puzzling is the third type: with nimbi but without mandorlas. It is tempting to link them to the *pratyekabuddhas*, the third category of *arhats* reaching *nirvāṇa*. Narrative representations, however, contain scenes with such a person and the Buddha, i.e. this can not be a *pratyekabuddha* since *pratyekabuddhas* leave the earth when the *samyaksambuddha* is born. The nimbate monastic person must be a monk (Fig. 15).⁵⁸ This is unusual; monks in Kucha are generally not depicted with nimbi. The representations of the nimbate monk in front of the Buddha are repeated frequently; they may, however, all represent only one narrative since the monk is almost always shown holding a fabric – he apparently offers it to the Buddha. They illustrate a belief in a particular kind of monk characterised by a tiny *uṣṇīṣa*. This may indicate either his kinship with the Śākya family or his future Buddhahood.⁵⁹ The third category of monastic persons on the median strips remains enigmatic; whomever these figures represent, the artists took efforts to differentiate between the *arhats*. Their different types – much more than depictions of only the Buddha – visualise in a convincing way that the *arhats* escaped the realm of rebirth depicted below and have access to the spheres above.



Fig. 15: Kizil, Cave 163, median strip on the barrel vault

⁵⁸ Fig. 15: Kizil, Cave 163, barrel vault, illus. *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 2, pl. 173; for similar representations cf. Kizil 172 (illus. *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 2, pl. 4, p. 6); Kizil 205 (illus. *Kizil Grottoes*, vol. 3, pl. 119; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 2, pl. 118, p. 129); Simsim 1 (illus. *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2008, pl. 256, p. 284); the scene repeats itself among the square sermon scenes on the walls, e.g. in Kizil 14 (*Kizil Grottoes* 1983–85, vol. 1, pl. 43) among many others.

⁵⁹ Cf. Monika Zin, *The uṣṇīṣa as a Physical Characteristic of the Buddha's Relatives and Successors*, "Silk Road Art and Archaeology" 9 (2003); Tianshu Zhu, *Images of Monks with the uṣṇīṣa from the Kucha and Turfan Regions*, "Art of the Orient" 4 (2015) pp. 9–43. A suggesting itself explanation of the scene would be a *praṇidhi* of a monk, however other monks receiving a *vyākaraṇa* from a Buddha (incl. the inscribed scene in Kizil 110) are depicted without nimbi (cf. Ines Konczak, *Praṇidhi-Darstellungen an der Nördlichen Seidenstraße: Das Bildmotiv der Prophezeiung der Buddhaschaft Śākyamunis in den Malereien Xinjiangs*, PhD Dissertation 2012, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Mikroform, Ketsch bei Manheim, 2014, pp. 122–129); the monk Mahākāśyapa, who offered the robe to the Buddha, has in Kucha his own iconography: he is depicted wearing a patchwork robe (cf. Monika Zin,

Particularly interesting are the representations on the median strips in Kumtura Caves 28, 29, and 50.⁶⁰ The strips recently have been identified by Konczak-Nagel.⁶¹ The representation in Cave 29 is best recognisable thanks to the historical photographs in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. According to Konczak-Nagel, the strip (Fig. 16)⁶² represents on the left side figures illustrating the possibilities of rebirth (i.e. *saṃsāra*)⁶³ followed by representatives of all previously mentioned categories of *arhats* and eight enlightened *arhat* monks: they are sitting in deep meditation, one of the visions experienced in this state can be that of a multiplication of one's own body. This is visualised by multiple heads in the picture. That the multiplication of the body is shown here, albeit in an abbreviated formula, i.e. the multiple heads of the *yogin*, suggests that the monks revealed their visions to the painters who in their turn developed the iconographic vocabulary to make these yogic visions feasible for the viewer.⁶⁴ One monk is shown in a chariot. This probably indicates that he is wandering through the sky with the heavenly bodies since sun and moon gods are often riding such chariots,⁶⁵ or perhaps that he is crossing the *saṃsāra* travelling in his *yāna*.⁶⁶ The destination of all *arhats* is shown on the right side: it is a fortified city. Inside the walls three persons are depicted, they represent the three categories of *arhats*. The city in this context must be the "city of *nirvāṇa*" (*nirvāṇanagara* or *nirvāṇapura*),⁶⁷ an imagery wide-spread in the area, as evidenced by

Representations of the First Council in Kucha: The Monk Kāśyapa in the Parinirvāṇa Cycle and the Furtherance of Buddhist Teaching, in: *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha*, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig Kucha Studies I, Dev Publishers, Delhi, pp. 107–172, 226–236) – and like other monks without nimbus.

⁶⁰ Schlingloff, *Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene/The Superhuman Faculties*, ch. 5.

⁶¹ Cf. Ines Konczak-Nagel, *Representations of Architecture and Architectural Elements in the Mural Paintings of Kucha*, in: *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha*, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig Kucha Studies I, Dev Publishers, Delhi, pp. 11–106, 186–225.

⁶² Fig. 16: Kumtura, Cave 29, drawing based on historical photograph in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1122, 1123 and 1094; the photograph was illustrated in: Ernst Waldschmidt, *Wundertätige Mönche in der osttürkischen Hinayāna-Kunst*, "Ostasiatische Zeitschrift N.F." 6 (1930), pp. 3–9, pl. 2e (middle part).

⁶³ Konczak-Nagel, *Representations*; cf. *ibid.* for references and further explanation of depicted three animals and representations in Kumtura 28 and 50.

⁶⁴ Multiheaded monks are a Kucha invention. The earliest depiction is the illustration of the narrative of Kāśyapa presenting miracles in front of king Bimbisāra (cf. Waldschmidt, *Wundertätige Mönche*) in the Cave 207 decorated in the 1st Indo-Iranian Style paintings, cf. Satomi Hiyama, *The Wall Paintings of "The Painters' Cave" (Kizil Cave 207)*, PhD Dissertation at the Freie Universität, Berlin 2014 (microfiche publication, Ketsch: Mikroform 2016), fig. IV-82 a–b. The narrative belongs to the most often depicted in Kucha: it shows three-headed Kāśyapa hovering in the air and emanating water and fire from his body. The depictions of the multi-headed Kāśyapa in Kizil predate the two-headed Buddhas (and also the travelogue of Xuanzang in which he describes such a Buddha in Gandhara) which Schlingloff (*Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene/The Superhuman Faculties*, ch. 4) takes for representations of the miracle of Śrāvastī.

⁶⁵ Cf. Tianshu, Zhu, *The Sun God and the Wind God at Kizil*, in: *Transoxiana Eran ud Aneran, Webfestschrift Marshak*, 2003 [<http://www.transoxiana.org/Eran/Articles/tianshu.html>]; Inoue, *Kizil Sekkutsu*.

⁶⁶ The "cart" for crossing the *saṃsāra* appears frequently in the Mahāyāna literature, e.g. in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, cf. Etienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna: Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, Bureaux du Musée, Louvain, 1944–80, vol. 1, p. 241.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hiromi Habata, *The City of Nirvāṇa: Conceptions of Nirvāṇa with Special reference to the Central Asian Tradition*, "The Eastern Buddhist" 46.2 (2017), pp. 61–83.



Fig. 16: Kumtura, Cave 29, median strip on the barrel vault (based on historical photographs in the archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. B 1122, 1123 and 1094)

Sanskrit and Tocharian manuscripts.⁶⁸ The term is also used in the previously mentioned *Yogalehrbuch*.⁶⁹ According to it the city of *nirvāṇa* can be reached in meditation (cf. *supra*, fn. 70) – exactly what the median strip depicts.

Of course, we do not know if all median strips in Kucha – particularly those without the “city of *nirvāṇa*” – were meant to indicate the way to leave the cycle of rebirths. However, the different categories of *arhats* floating among the heavenly bodies link them to the representations in Kumtura. The *samyaksambuddhas* (with mandorlas) often are not shown in the strips, for example in Kizil Cave 34 (cf. Fig. 14), where one monk is riding a chariot like in Kumtura (cf. Figs. 16).

The strips with flying *arhats*, especially those from Kumtura with *arhats* between the possibilities of rebirths, i.e. *saṃsāra*, and the *nirvāṇa*-city, give us an insight into how these cardinal categories were understood in Kucha: *nirvāṇa* apparently can only be accessed by the *arhats* – a truly Hīnayāna approach. The question remains who can become an *arhat*. This state can only be attained by those who overcame greed, hate, and delusion, and who generate equal feelings towards all beings, compassion and benevolence. The way to reach this perfection is depicted below the central strip. Most of the *jātakas* in Kucha illustrate the sacrifices of the Bodhisatva. The pictures do not evoke the feeling of *duḥkha*, the suffering in *saṃsāra*, but rather emphasize the quest for moral perfection. This understanding of *saṃsāra* as practising compassion and benevolence – which is, of course, open to everybody – puts the Hīnayāna understanding reflected in the paintings into perspective.

As stated above, we do not know if visions described in the *Yogalehrbuch* were disclosed to lay visitors of the caves by the monks. If they were, the final portion of the chapter dealing with the vision of the *nirvāṇa*-city is particularly telling. In the vision described there the

⁶⁸ The Tocharian term is *nervāṃṣṣai riś*; for references cf. Habata, *The City of Nirvāṇa*; interesting is the repeated use of the term in translations of Kumārajīva.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Yogalehrbuch*, ed. Dieter Schlingloff, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden 7*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung 59, 1964, Berlin, and Dieter Schlingloff, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, Nachdruck unter Beigabe aller seither bekannt gewordenen Fragmente*, eds., Jens-Uwe, Hartmann, Josef Röllicke, Iudicium, Munich, p. 169; Habata, *The City of Nirvāṇa*, p. 71.

yogin sees the gatekeeper of the *nirvāṇa*-city who prevents him from entering. The *yogin* sees beings in different states of existences who request his help and ask him not to enter the city of *nirvāṇa*. Overwhelmed by the vision of compassion, the *yogin* embraces the “ocean of beings” (*satvasamudra*).⁷⁰ As Schlingloff convincingly stated in his introduction to the edition of the *Yogalehrbuch*,⁷¹ the text clings to the dogma and mythology of the Sarvāstivādins but its ethical attitude mirrors the ideal of the Bodhisatva from Mahāyāna literature. This seems to be true for the paintings in Kucha as well.

But let us return to the representations of the “ocean”. One example still remains to be discussed, probably from Kizil (Fig. 17).⁷² The fragment is small; the cone-shaped “mountain” protruding from water, a characteristic feature of our “oceans”, allows for a secure identification. On the right side stands a demon with raised left hand; like in Fig. 1, he is probably conversing with somebody. The leaf-like shape on the left edge must belong to a boat (cf. *infra*, Figs. 18b, 18c, 20). Unlike all previously described representations, there is a red strip on the lower edge and the “accordion pattern” above it.

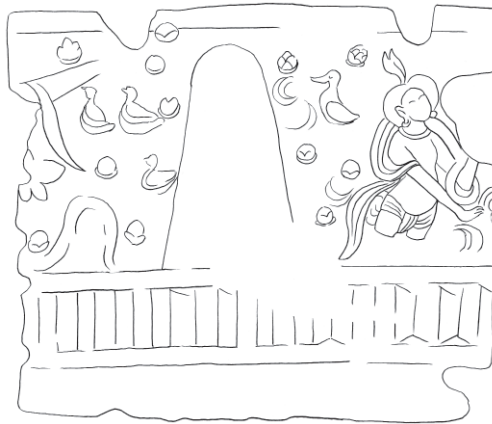


Fig. 17: Kizil (?), provenance not ascertained, Berlin no. IB 9108, war loss, today in St. Petersburg, Hermitage, no. VD 840

⁷⁰ Schlingloff, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*, p. 172: “(Der ihnen nachfolgende Yogin aber) wird von dem Torwächter zurückgehalten (...). Das gesamte (Meer der Lebewesen) erscheint (...) Auch die in schlechten Existenzformen Lebenden (...) und sprechen: ‘Errette uns, o Mitleidvoller; nicht ziemt es sich für dich, (zur Stadt des völligen Verlöschens zu gehen)’. In [seinem] Herzen (entsteht) die oben erwähnte Verkörperung (des Großen Mitleids. [Diese] faßt ihn) bei den Händen (und spricht): ‘Wohin wolltest du gehen, die Leidenden im Stiche lassend?’ Der Gleichmut weicht von ihm; Mitleid überkommt ihn. Mit [seinen] beiden Armen umschlingt er (das gesamte Meer der Lebewesen (...)).”

⁷¹ Schlingloff, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*, p. 10.

⁷² Fig. 17: Kizil (?), provenance not ascertained, Berlin no. IB 9108, war loss, cf. Dreyer, Sander and Weis, *Dokumentation der Verluste*, p. 188 (not illustrated), today in St. Petersburg, Hermitage, no. ВДсэ 840 (02.03.1426370). In the Archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst the fragment is designated to “Höhle oberhalb der Sechzehenschwerträgerhöhle” (i.e. cave above Cave 8, i.e. Cave 13), certainly because of its similarity to our III 9023 which was also supposed to be removed from this cave (cf. fn. 3).

In Kizil paintings of the 2nd Indo-Iranian Style this pattern exclusively appears immediately above the floor. Our Fig. 17 is therefore a part of an “ocean” strip which was once located in the lowermost part of a wall.⁷³ In this position the “ocean” is to be found in Kizilgaha, Caves 14, 21, and 30.

The strip in Kizilgaha 21 is preserved rather well (Fig. 18a–c).⁷⁴ The painting forms the lowermost part of the outer walls in all three corridors around the “central pillar”. The walls above are decorated with a series of seated Buddhas. This is not common since the space around the “central pillar” is often used for scenes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, but it occurs occasionally, e.g. in the caves in Kumtura with the previously described median strips (Fig. 16).

The depictions (Fig. 18) repeat several motives we have seen in Kizil, first of all the entire scenery of water animated with lotuses, birds, nautical creatures, and protruding mountains. Perhaps to emphasize the fact that we are looking at water, a *jātaka* was incorporated (Fig. 18c, left side); it is the *Mahātyāgavanjātaka*, about a prince who punished the *nāgas* for stealing his jewels which he needed for alms-giving by bailing water from the ocean.⁷⁵ As usual for the iconography of this narrative, two *nāgas* emerge from water on both sides returning the jewels. The background of the scene (unlike those in other representations of the story) corresponds exactly with the other scenes on the strip and includes a creature with a coiled body ending in a fin (like in Figs. 5–6). In other sections, we see persons crossing the water, two are swimming, one sits on a piece of timber (Fig. 18b, middle), one on an inflated animal skin (Fig. 18a, middle). Two boats with their passenger are also depicted and the pieces of another damaged boat. Like in Kizil 14 (Fig. 1), demons emerge from water; they seem to interconnect with the other persons here, too. On the right wall (Fig. 18c, right side), in front of one of the boats stands a white skeletal individual. Unlike in Kizil, several of the persons trying to cross the ocean and one person climbing a tree (Fig. 18a, left side) are wearing caps and coats familiar from depictions of Tocharian donors.

In Kizilgaha 14, the strips with the “ocean” are located in the lowest part of the side walls in the main chamber (Fig. 19)⁷⁶ and outer walls in the corridors (Fig. 20).⁷⁷ The paintings are poorly and only partially preserved, it is quite certain that the frieze on the left wall was continued to the left and the frieze on the right wall was continued to the right. The scenery with water, “mountains” and aquatic creatures is there; the painting

⁷³ In several caves in Kucha, the strips directly above the floor, were used to depict the *jātakas*. The *jātakas* were also represented underneath the scenes with the life-story of the Buddha in Kizil 110 (Treppenhöhle); should we see in it the meaningful representation that the last life of the Buddha bases on his previous deeds?

⁷⁴ Fig. 18: Kizilgaha, Cave 21, passage around the “central pillar”, a: left corridor, left wall, b: rear corridor, rear wall, c: right corridor, right wall; illus. *Kezi’ergaha shiku* 2009 = Xinjiang Qiuci shiku yanjiuyuan, ed., *Kezi’ergaha shiku neirong zonglu*, [Comprehensive record of contents of Kizilgaha Grottoes], Beijing, 2009, pls 20–21; *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 5, pl. 135, p. 211 (fragment with the boat from the right wall).

⁷⁵ Cf. Waldschmidt, in: Le Coq and Waldschmidt, *Die buddhistische Spätantike VI*, pp. 10–11.

⁷⁶ Fig. 19: Kizilgaha, Cave 14, main chamber, lowest part of the left wall, near the entrance to the left corridor.

⁷⁷ Fig. 20: Kizilgaha, Cave 14, left corridor, lowest part of the outer wall; illus. *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang* 2009, vol. 5, pl. 149, pp. 160–161.

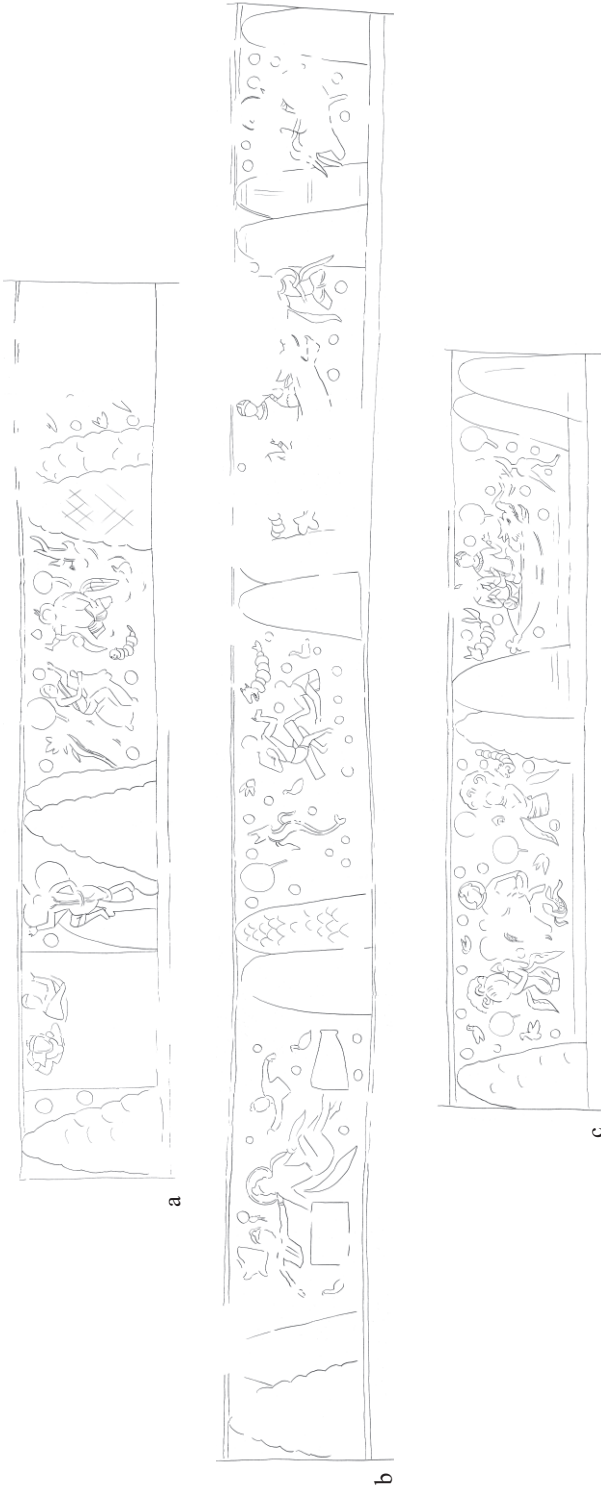


Fig. 18: Kizilgaha, Cave 21, passage around the “central pillar”, a: left corridor, left wall, b: rear corridor, rear wall, c: right corridor, right wall



Fig. 19: Kizilgaha, Cave 14, main chamber, left wall

in the corridor again contains the *Mahātyāgavanjātaka*, perhaps to show the impressive *nāgas* bringing jewels characteristic of the sea (compare Fig. 10). Further to the right the crossing of the ocean is shown: people are sitting in a boat, two of them wearing coats while the one on the right may be a monk. There is a demon in front of the boat; he is holding up a white skeletal person. The vivid scene on the right shows a nimbed person sitting on a piece of timber and two other men wearing coats who try to grasp it. The individual on the timber holds a sword; he seems to attack the man on the right side.

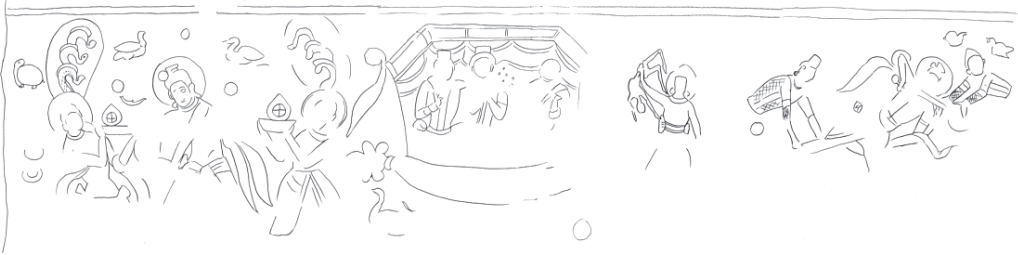


Fig. 20: Kizilgaha, Cave 14, left corridor, outer wall

The preserved fragment of the mural in the main chamber (Fig. 19) shows mountains with persons climbing them and falling down. It is no longer recognisable whom the demon emerging from water was facing; the space is not sufficient to show a boat.

In Kizilgaha 30, only a small fragment is preserved on the lowermost part of the right wall in the main chamber, adjoining the entrance to the right corridor (Pl. 2, Fig. 21).⁷⁸ The mural repeats the familiar iconography; the creatures with coiled bodies here are goat-headed. The scene shows a boat; like in other depictions in Kizilgaha the passengers wear coats in the Tocharian style; only one displays a nimbus. In front of the boat stands a demon. He holds his right hand out towards the boat as if preventing it from continuing its journey. The boat must have been equipped with a typical dragon's head but this part of the mural is destroyed. Contrary to that, the left hand of the demon is perfectly preserved: on the palm lies a round object, a coin. And it is this detail that turns the anonymous demon into a personage connected with the imagery of Charon.

The beliefs in Charon, who has to be rewarded with an *obolos* for ferrying the death across the Styx, or at least the belief that the deceased need a coin for their journey “to another shore” was familiar to the people of Central Asia as is evidenced by tombs where

⁷⁸ Fig. 21: Kizilgaha, Cave 30, main chamber, lowest part of the right wall, near the entrance to the right corridor; illus. in: *Kezi'ergaha shiku*, pl. 28.

the deceased had a coin in his mouth.⁷⁹ Nakao Odani⁸⁰ has provided literary references from the *Kalpanamaṇḍitikā*,⁸¹ and the *Liu du ji jing*⁸² demonstrating the custom. The *Kalpanamaṇḍitikā* of which Sanskrit fragments have been discovered in Kizil⁸³ may have been well known in the area. The custom mentioned was to my knowledge not practiced in India. The same is true for the explanation of the coin as a gift for “the King of the Great Mountain” given in the *Liu du ji jing*.



Pl. 2: Kizilgaha, Cave 30, from Kezi'ergaha shiku neirong zonglu 2009, pl. 28

⁷⁹ Cf. Jonathan K. Skaff, *Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian Silver Coins from Turfan: Their Relationship to International Trade and the Local Economy*, “Asia Major” 11,2 (1998), pp. 67–115 (esp. p. 74) for the area of Turfan.

⁸⁰ Cf. Nakao Odani, *A Burial Custom of Charon's Obol found in the Tombs During the Han and Tang Dynasties* [in Japanese], “Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Toyama” 13 (1988) pp. 1–19; cf. also Nakao Odani, *Gandhāra Bijutsu to Kushan Ōchō* [*Gandharan Art and the Kushan Dynasty*], Kyoto, 1996, pp. 72–105, Engl. summary pp. 418–419; I am extremely thankful to Professor Odani for providing me with information and the textual references.

⁸¹ T (T = *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, ed. Takakusu, J. and Watanabe, K. and Ono, G., Tokyo, 1924ff) 201, ed. vol. 4, 272c–274a; the passage is translated in French in: Édouard Huber, *Āsvaghoṣa, Sūtrālamkāra, traduit en française sur la version chinoise de Kumārajīva*, Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1908, p. 85: “Quand ton père est mort, on lui a mis dans la bouche une pièce d'or. Si tu vas dans son tombeau, tu trouveras peut-être cette pièce (...).” [When your father died, a piece of gold was put in his mouth. If you go to his tomb, you may find this coin (...)].

⁸² T 152, ed. vol. 3, p. 36b–c; the passage is translated in French in: Édouard Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues, extraits du Tripitaka chinois et traduits en français*, P. Leroux, Paris, 1910–34, vol. 1, p. 248: “Autrefois, ô mère, vous avez mis une pièce d'or dans la bouche de mon père défunt, avec le désir qu'il pût, par le moyen de ce cadeau, gagner les bonnes grâces du roi de la Grande Montagne (...).” [Formerly, O mother, you have put a piece of gold in the mouth of my late father, with the desire that he could, by means of this gift, win the good graces of the King of the Great Mountain (...)].

⁸³ Cf. Heinrich Lüders, *Bruchstücke der Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā des Kumāralāta*, Brockhaus, Leipzig, Kleinere Sanskrit-Texte 2, 1926.



Fig. 21: Kizilgaha, Cave 30, main chamber, right wall

The coin in the hand of the demon in Kizilgaha 30 (Fig. 21) was not noticed by the Kucha Research Academy who provided an explanation of the painting given in caption of its reproduction in the *Kezi'ergaha shiku* referring to the story of the “Questions of the Sea Deity”, in the *Xian yu jing*;⁸⁴ in the West the text is better known in the translation from Tibetan as *The Wise and the Foolish*.⁸⁵ The text was compiled in Central Asia⁸⁶ and mirrors common beliefs of the area. The narrative referred to by the Kucha Research Academy to explain the depiction is one of the popular fairy-tales about monsters asking tricky questions and being defeated by the bright answers of a clever human. The questions are asked here by the sea deity. At first he asks if there is anyone more terrible than him. The captain of the ship answers with statements concerning the *samsāra*: all sinners are much more terrible and they will be horribly punished in the hells. The sea deity appears again as a dreadfully emaciated individual (compare our Fig. 18c, right side) asking if anyone is skinnier. The captain answers giving examples from the existence of the *pretas*.⁸⁷

If we accept that the painting in Kizilgaha 30 (Fig. 21) certainly cannot be separated from the others belonging to the genre of “crossing of the ocean”, the narrative about the sea deity can hardly provide an explanation, especially when we take into account the coin in the hand of the demon. It is worth noting that the demons in Figs. 17 and 18b repeat the same gesture and may have held coins, too. It seems far more probable that motives of the story about the sea deity, so closely connected to *samsāra*, were blended into the representations of the “oceans”.

How are we to understand the strips with the “ocean” in Kucha? The topic apparently originated from the depiction of the ocean surrounding Sumeru as seen in Kizil 118

⁸⁴ T 202, ed. vol. 4, pp. 354b–355a.

⁸⁵ *Dzaṅgs blun žes bya ba'i mdo*, German translation by Isaak Jakob Schmidt, *Dsanglun oder Der Weise und der Thor*, 1–2, W. Graff's Erben, St. Petersburg and Leipzig, 1843, pp. 34–38.

⁸⁶ Victor H. Mair, *The Linguistic and Textual Antecedents of The Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish.*, PA: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 38, Philadelphia, 1993.

⁸⁷ The story continues that the sea deity appears again as a beautiful youth asking if somebody is nicer and receives the answer about the inhabitants of heaven. The ship crosses safely the ocean, the merchants offer their jewels to the Buddha and become monks.

(Figs. 7–10) and perhaps Kizil 38 (Figs. 5–6). The imagery of the ocean as habitat of aquatic animals and mythological beings was, however, enhanced and the depictions incorporated the soteriological message. It appears likely that the individuals in the water were understood as beings between existences, the *aupapāduka sattvas* before their next incarnation; this corresponds with imagery of the “wheel of existences” scooping the *aupapādukas* from the water, but the strips first of all visualise the struggle of crossing *samsāra*.

The imagery obviously developed further significance when the beings crossing the ocean started to be depicted in Tocharian coats and the imagery was connected with local beliefs of the coin due as a fare for Charon (or perhaps for a local equivalence of the “King of the Great Mountain”) and with local narratives.

As stated above, many details remain enigmatic. It is possible that the paintings carry additional meanings we have not even thought of. The denotation of the *Mahātyāgavanjātaka* represented within the “ocean” scenes in Kizilgaha 14 and 21 (Figs. 18c, left side; Fig. 20, left side) may – also when depicted among the *jātakas* on the vaults – have a meaning connected with the *samsārasāgara*. The “ocean” strip in Kizilgaha 21 (Fig. 18b, right side) seems to show the *Bālāhāśvajātaka* about a horse saving merchants from the ocean.⁸⁸ It might be a coincidence but the barrel vault directly above the “ocean” strip on the left wall in Kizil 14 (Fig. 1) shows the stories of *Mahātyāgavan* and *Bālāhāśva*. These and other scenes showing salvation from the “sea” – like the narrative of *Kacchapa*, the tortoise rescuing merchants⁸⁹ – may have been understood as allusions to the salvation from the “ocean of *samsāra*”.

It is worth mention that Tanabe⁹⁰ and Southworth⁹¹ recently pointed out the close connection of aquatic beings like *cetus*, *triton* or *ichtiocentaur* with funerary beliefs in the Mediterranean World. Southworth refers to the mainly funerary context of the representations, be it on urns, sarcophagi or in the painted decoration of graves. The imagery was in all probability adopted in Gandhara; this explains the popularity of these motifs in the decoration of *stūpas* understood as sepulchral monuments.

These considerations are closely connected to our representations of the “oceans” in Kucha, if we take into account that our Figs. 2–6 and 19–21 belong to caves with representations of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle in the corridors in the rear part of the caves, and our Fig. 18 was even located in this “*parinirvāṇa* space”. It should perhaps also be

⁸⁸ The *Bālāhāśvajātaka*, for textual tradition and depictions in Kucha cf. Waldschmidt in: Le Coq and Waldschmidt, *Die buddhistische Spätantike VI*, pp. 54–55.

⁸⁹ Cf. Waldschmidt in: Le Coq and Waldschmidt, *Die buddhistische Spätantike VI*, p. 60.

⁹⁰ Katsumi, Tanabe, *Gandhara Bijutsu no Zuzogaku teki Kenkyu (10): Shaku-Son ha Han-Nehan go, izuko ni omomuitanoka? – Teisei Roma ki Sekikan no Eros, Ketus zo to Shaku-Son no Bontenkai Ojo wo Yoji suru Nehanzu wo megutte* [Iconographical Studies on Gandhāran Art (10): Where Had the Buddha Śākyamuni Gone after the Mahāparinirvāṇa? – Eros Riding a Ketos on Roman Imperial Sarcophagi and a Mahāparinirvāṇa Relief Foretelling the Buddha’s Rebirth in the Brahmaloaka Heaven], “Bulletin of the Ancient Orient Museum” 34 (2014), pp. 31–63 [with Engl. summary].

⁹¹ Kirsten Southworth, *The Travels of Two Marine Beasts from the Mediterranean to Gandhara – A Transfer of Form and Meaning?*, “Art of the Orient” 5 (2016), pp. 101–108.

mentioned in this context that the shape of the dragon-boats in Kucha, i.e. the vessels crossing the “ocean”, corresponds precisely with the shape of the coffin in depictions of the cremation of Buddha’s body.⁹² The similarity is secondary but not implausible keeping in mind indigenous extensions like “Charon” or the skeletons. All that reveals a quite complex and developing understanding behind the pictures which might have been of substantial – and perhaps ritual-related – importance for the local laity visiting the caves.

Coming back to the original aim of this paper – to identify the meaning of III 9023 for the conference on “Collections of Texts and Artefacts” it has been shown that any interpretation of the painting fragments relies on comparisons and the precise knowledge about their original context. Removing a fragment to a collection is fatal since it destroys the context needed for a thorough analysis of the fragment while at the same time interrupting the sequence of the pictorial programme *in situ* thus preventing its decipherment by researchers and visitors of the site.

Bibliography

- Chavannes, É., 1910–34, *Cinq cents contes et apologues, extraits du Tripitaka chinois et traduits en français*, 1–4, P. Leroux, Paris.
- Cuevas, B.J., 1996, *Predecessors and Prototypes: Towards a Conceptual History of the Buddhist Antarabhava*, “Numen” 43,3, pp. 263–302.
- Divyāvadāna*, 1886, ed. Cowell, E.B. and Neil, R.A., *The Divyāvadāna, a Collection of Early Buddhist Legends*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dossi, B., 1998, *Samen, Seele, Blut. Die Zeugungstheorien des alten Indiens*, Akademischer Verlag, München.
- Dreyer, C. and Sander, L. and Weis, F., 2002, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Dokumentation der Verluste, Band III: Museum für Indische Kunst, Verzeichnis seit 1945 vermisster Bestände der ehemaligen Indischen Abteilung des Museums für Völkerkunde, des heutigen Museums für Indische Kunst, Berlin*, Museum für Indische Kunst, SMB, Berlin.
- Dunington, J., 2000, *The Tibetan Wheel of Existence. An Introduction*, Tibet House, New York.
- Ghose, Rajeshwari, 2004, *An Attempt at Linking the Doctrinal and the Textual with the Visual Representation of the Parinirvāna Scenes in the Kizil Grottoes*, “Kalakalpa: Journal of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts” 1, pp. 125–160.
- Ghose, Rajeshwari, 2005, *Linking the Doctrinal and the Textual with the Visual Representation of the Parinirvana Scenes in the Kizil Grottoes, History and Society in Central and Inner Asia*, “Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia” 7, pp. 61–91.
- Grünwedel, A., 1912, *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan, Königlich Preussische Turfan Expeditionen*, Verlag von Georg Reimer, Berlin.
- Gulácsi, Z. and Beduhn, J., 2016, *The Religion of Wirkak and Wiyusi: The Zoroastrian Iconographic Program on a Sogdian Sarcophagus from Sixth-Century Xi’an*, “Bulletin of the Asia Institute” 26, pp. 1–32.
- Habata, Hiromi, 2017, *The City of Nirvāna: Conceptions of Nirvāna with Special Reference to the Central Asian Tradition*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 46.2 (2017), pp. 61–83.
- Hiyama, Satomi, 2010, *Kizil Sekkutsu dai 118 kutsu (Kaibakutsu) no Hekiga Shudai: Mandataru ou Setsuwa wo Tegakarini* [The wall paintings of Kizil cave 118: the story of King Māndhātṛ as a new

⁹² Cf. Zin, *Representations of the Parinirvāna Story Cycle*, Occurrence 24, pp. 88–92.

- identification], "Journal of the Japan Art History Society" 168, Tokyo: Bijutsushi Gakkai, pp. 358–372. [in Japanese with English summary].
- Hiyama, Satomi, 2012, *The Wall Painting of Kizil Cave 118: The Story of King Māndhātṛ as a New Identification*, "Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology" 5, pp. 145–170.
- Hiyama, Satomi, 2015, *Identification of a Mural Fragment from Kizil Cave 84 (Schatzhöhle B) in the Asian Art Museum, Berlin*, "Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift" 19, pp. 28–36.
- Hiyama, Satomi, 2016, *The Wall Paintings of "The Painters' Cave" (Kizil Cave 207)*, PhD Dissertation at the Freie Universität, Berlin 2014 (microfiche publication, Ketsch: Mikroform).
- Howard, A.F., 2017, *On "Art in the Dark" and Meditation in Central Asian Buddhist Caves*, "The Eastern Buddhist" 46,2 (2017), pp. 19–39.
- Howard, A.F. and Vignato, G., 2015, *Archaeological and Visual Sources of Meditation in the Ancient Monasteries of Kuča, Studies in Asian Art and Archaeology* 28, Brill, Leiden.
- Huber, É., 1908, *Āsvaghoṣa, Sūtrālamkāra, traduit en française sur la version chinoise de Kumārajīva*, Ernest Leroux, Paris.
- Inoue, Masaru, 1999, *Kizil Sekkutsu no Vault Tenjohekiga to "Hishosuru Hotoke" no Zuzo* [The iconography of the vault ceiling of Kizil caves and "the flying Buddha"], in : *Toyo Bijutsushi Ronso*. Yuhikaku Shuppan, Tokyo, pp. 25–44 [in Japanese].
- Inoue, Masaru, 2017, *Kizil Sekkutsu Vault Tenjo Hekiga ni okeru Tenku no Hyogen – Tensho-zu' chu no nichigetsu oyobi Fujin no Zuzo ni tsuite* [Representation of the heaven in the murals of the vault ceilings of Kizil Grottoes: mainly on the iconography of Sun, Moon and the Wind god in the 'celestial representations'], in: *Ajia Bukkyo bijutsu ronshu – Chuo Ajia I (Gandāra – Tozai Torukisutan)* Tokyo, pp. 399–424 [in Japanese].
- Kezi'ergaha shiku* = Xinjiang Qiuci shiku yanjiuyuan, ed., 2009, *Kezi'ergaha shiku neirong zonglu*, [Comprehensive record of contents of Kizilgaha Grottoes]. Beijing.
- Kizil Grottoes* = *Shinkyō Uighur Jichiku Bunbutsu Inkai / Haikiken Kizil Senbutsudo Bunbutsu Hokanjo*, 1983–85, *Chugoku Sekkutsu: Kizil Sekkutsu* [The Grotto Art of China: The Kizil Grottoes], 1–3. Tokyo [in Japanese with English captions of the plates].
- Konczak, I., 2014, *Pranidhi-Darstellungen an der Nördlichen Seidenstraße: Das Bildmotiv der Prophezeiung der Buddhachast Śākyamunis in den Malereien Xinjiangs*, PhD Dissertation 2012, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Mikroform, Ketsch bei Mannheim.
- Konczak-Nagel, I., 2020, *Painted Buddhist Cosmology: The pictorial programme of central pillar caves in Kucha*, in: *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha*, Leipzig Kucha Studies I, ed. Franco, E. and Zin, M., Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Delhi, pp. 1–10, 183–185.
- Konczak-Nagel, I., 2020, *Representations of Architecture and Architectural Elements in the Mural Paintings of Kucha*, in: *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha*, Leipzig Kucha Studies I, ed. Franco, E. and Zin, M., Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Delhi, pp. 11–106, 185–225.
- Kurita, Isao, 2003, *Gandhāran Art (An revised and enlarged edition)*, Ancient Buddhist Art Series, 1–2, Nigensha Publishing, Tokyo.
- Lamotte, É., 1944–80, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna: Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, 1–5, Bureaux du Musée, Louvain.
- Le Coq von, A., 1924, *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*, = *Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen IV, Atlas zu den Wandmalereien*, D. Reimer, Berlin (repr. Graz, 1974).
- Le Coq von, A., 1926, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien = Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen, V, Neue Bildwerke I*, D. Reimer, Berlin (repr. Graz, 1975).
- Le Coq von, A. and Waldschmidt, E., 1928, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien, Ergebnisse der Kgl. Preussischen Turfan Expeditionen VI, Neue Bildwerke II*, D. Reimer, Berlin (repr. Graz, 1975).
- Lüders, H., 1926, *Bruchstücke der Kalpanāmaṇḍikā des Kumāralāta*, Brockhaus, Kleinere Sanskrit-Texte 2, Leipzig.

- Mair, V.H., 1993, *The Linguistic and Textual Antecedents of The Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*, PA, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, Sino-Platonic Papers 38, Philadelphia.
- Mejor, M., 2010, *Painting the 'Wheel of Transmigration' (samsāra-cakra): A Note on the Textual Transmission*, in: *From Turfan to Ajanta, Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Franco, E. and Zin, M., Lumbini International Research Institute, Lumbini, pp. 671–690.
- Miyaji, Akira, 1989, *Kizil Sekkutsu Daiichi Yoshiki no Vault Tenjokutsu Hekiga vol. 2. Zenjoso, Sangaku koku, Miroku no Ziko Kosei* [The murals on the vault ceiling of the first style caves of Kizil grottoes vol. 2. Iconography of meditating monks, mountainous composition and Maitreya], “Ars Buddhica” 180, Tokyo, pp. 29–60 [in Japanese].
- Miao, Lihui, 2008, *The Ceiling Murals of Kizil as a Symbol of the Buddhist Universe*, in: *Kizil on the Silk Road: Crossroads of Commerce & Meeting of Minds*, ed. Ghose, R., Marg Foundation, Mumbai, pp. 84–93.
- Mural Paintings in Xinjiang 2008* = Xinjiang Qiuci Shiku Yanjiusuo (ed.) 2008, Meishu Sheying Chubanshe, Urumqi.
- Mural Paintings in Xinjiang 2009* = Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua yishu bianji weiyuanhui, ed., 2009, 1–6, Meishu Sheying Chubanshe, Urumqi [in Chinese].
- Odani, Nakao, 1988, *A Burial Custom of Charon's Obol found in the Tombs During the Han and Tang Dynasties*, “Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Toyama” 13, pp. 1–19 [in Japanese].
- Odani, Nakao, 1996, *Gandhāra Bijutsu to Kushan Ōchō* [Gandharan Art and the Kushan Dynasty], Kyoto [in Japanese].
- Rhie, M.M., 2002, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia. Vol. II: The Eastern Chin and Sixteen Kingdoms Period in China and Tumshuk, Kucha and Karashahr in Central Asia*, Brill, Leiden.
- Salomon, R., 2018, *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra, An Introduction with Selected Translations*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville.
- Schlingloff, D., 1964, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden 7*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung 59, Berlin.
- Schlingloff, D., 2003, *Mūrdhacchidra*, “Hörin, Vergleichende Studien zur japanischen Kultur” 10, pp. 109–124.
- Schlingloff, D., 2006, *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, Nachdruck unter Beigabe aller seither bekannt gewordenen Fragmente*, eds.. Hartmann, J.-U. and Röllicke, H.-J., Buddhismus-Studien 5, Iudicium Verlag, Munich.
- Schlingloff, D., 2000, *Ajanta – Handbuch der Malereien / Handbook of the Paintings 1. Erzählende Wandmalereien / Narrative Wall-paintings*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Schlingloff, D., 2013, *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 1. Narrative Wall-paintings*, IGNC, New Delhi.
- Schlingloff, D., 2015, *Die Übermenschlichen Phänomene. Visuelle Meditation und Wundererscheinung in buddhistischer Literatur und Kunst. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch*, Eine Veröffentlichung des Hauses der Japanischen Kultur (EKO) in Düsseldorf, Iudicium Verlag, Munich.
- Schlingloff, D. 2018, *The Superhuman Faculties: Visual Meditation and Miracles in Buddhist Literature and Art. A Study in Religious History*, Eine Veröffentlichung des Hauses der Japanischen Kultur (EKO) in Düsseldorf, Iudicium Verlag, Munich.
- Schmidt, I.J., 1843, *Dsanglun oder Der Weise und der Thor*, 1–2, W. Graff's Erben, St. Petersburg and Leipzig.
- Sharf, R.H., 2013, *Art in the Dark: The Ritual Context of Buddhist Caves in Western China*, in: *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Its Conservation*, eds., Park, D. and Kuenga Wangmo and Cather, S., Courtauld Institute of Art, London, pp. 38–65.
- Skaff, J.K., 1998, *Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian Silver Coins from Turfan: Their Relationship to International Trade and the Local Economy*, “Asia Major”, 11,2, pp. 67–115.

- Southworth, K., 2016, *The Travels of Two Marine Beasts from the Mediterranean to Gandhara – A Transfer of Form and Meaning?*, “Art of the Orient” 5, ed. Kaminska-Jones, D. and Staszczyk, A., Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń, pp. 101–108.
- T = *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, ed. Takakusu, J. and Watanabe K. and Ono, G., Tokyo, 1924ff.
- Tanabe, Katsumi, 2014, *Gandhara Bijutsu no Zuzogaku teki Kenkyū (10): Shaku-Son ha Han-Nehan go, izuko ni omomuitanoka? – Teisei Roma ki Sekikan no Eros, Ketus zo to Shaku-Son no Bontenkai Ojo wo Yoji suru Nehanzu wo megutte* [Iconographical Studies on Gandhāran Art (10): Where Had the Buddha Śākyamuni Gone after the Mahāparinirvāṇa? – Eros Riding a Ketos on Roman Imperial Sarcophagi and a Mahāparinirvāṇa Relief Foretelling the Buddha’s Rebirth in the Brahmaloḥa Heaven], “Bulletin of the Ancient Orient Museum” 34, pp. 31–63 [in Japanese, with Engl. summary].
- Teiser, S.F., 2006, *Reinventing the Wheel: Painting in Medieval Buddhist Temples*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Waldschmidt, E., 1925, *Gandhāra, Kutscha, Turfan*, eine Einführung in die frühmittelalterliche Kunst Zentralasiens, Klinkhardt & Biermann, Leipzig.
- Waldschmidt, E., 1930, *Wundertätige Mönche in der osttürkischen Hīnayāna-Kunst*, “Ostasiatische Zeitschrift, N.F.” 6, pp. 3–9 (also in: Waldschmidt, E., *Von Ceylon bis Turfan*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1967, pp. 27–33).
- Wayman, A., 1974, *The Intermediate-State Dispute in Buddhism*, in: *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner*, ed. Cousins, L. and Kunst, A. and Norman, K.R., Springer, Boston, pp. 227–239.
- Yaldiz, M. (at al.), 2000, *Magische Götterwelten, Werke aus dem Museum für Indische Kunst Berlin*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.
- Yamabe, Nobuyoshi and Zhao Li and Xie Qianqian, 2017, *Kumutula di 75ku shuma fuyuan ji xiangguan bihua ticai ji tiji yanjiu 75* [A Digital Restoration of the Paintings in Qumtura Cave 75 and an Examination of Relevant Motifs and Inscriptions], “Sichouzhilu yanjiu” [Journal of the International Silk Road Studies] 1, pp. 225–250 [in Chinese].
- Yogalehrbuch*, cf. Schlingloff 1964 and 2006.
- Zhao, Li (et al.) ed., 2018, *Haiwai Kezi'er shiku bihua fuyuan yinxiang ji* [Compendium of Photographic Restoration of the Kizil Grotto Murals overseas], Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, Shanghai.
- Zhu, Tianshu, 2003, *The Sun God and the Wind God at Kizil*, in: *Transoxiana Eran ud Aneran, Webfestschrift Marshak* [<http://www.transoxiana.org/Eran/Articles/tianshu.html>]
- Zhu, Tianshu, 2015, *Images of Monks with the uṣṇīṣa from the Kucha and Turfan Regions*, “Art of the Orient” 4, pp. 9–43.
- Zin, M., 2003, *The uṣṇīṣa as a Physical Characteristic of the Buddha’s Relatives and Successors*, “Silk Road Art and Archaeology” 9, pp. 107–129.
- Zin, M., 2003, *Ajanta – Handbuch der Malereien / Handbook of the Paintings 2: Devotionale und ornamentale Malereien*, Wiesbaden / *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 2: Devotional and Ornamental Paintings*, Delhi.
- Zin, M., 2006, *Mitleid und Wunderkraft. Schwierige Bekehrungen und ihre Ikonographie im indischen Buddhismus*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.
- Zin, M., 2008, *Śābaras: The Vile Hunters in Heavenly Spheres*, in: *South Asian Archaeology 1999, Proceedings of the 15th International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Leiden*, ed. Raven, E.M., Egbert Forsten, Groningen, pp. 375–394.
- Zin, M., 2014, *Imagery of Hell in South, South East and Central Asia*, “Rocznik Orientalistyczny” 67, pp. 269–296.
- Zin, M., 2015, *Pictures of Paradise for Good Luck and Prosperity: Depictions of Themes Irrelevant for Enlightenment in the Older Buddhist Tradition (with Special Reference to the Paintings of Ajanta)*, in: *Mani-Sushma, Archaeology and Heritage (Dr. B.R. Mani Festschrift)*, ed. Kumar, V. and Rawat, B., B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1–3, vol. 1, pp. 125–147.
- Zin, M., 2020, *Representations of the First Council in Kucha: The Monk Kāśyapa in the Parinirvāṇa Cycle and the Furtherance of Buddhist Teaching*, in: *Essays and Studies in the Art of Kucha*, Leipzig Kucha

- Studies I, ed. Franco, E. and Zin, M., Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Delhi, pp. 107–172, 226–236.
- Zin, M., 2020, *Representations of the Parinirvāṇa Story Cycle in Kucha*, Leipzig Kucha Studies II, ed. Franco, E. and Zin, M., Dev Publishers, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Delhi.
- Zin, M., forthcoming, *Ajanta – Handbook of the Paintings 2. Devotional and Ornamental Paintings*, IGNCNA, New Delhi.
- Zin, M., forthcoming, *The “parinirvāṇa space” in Kucha. An Attempt to Recognize Their Function*, in: *Proceedings of the Conference of the European Society for Studies of Central Asia and Himalayan Regions (SEECHAC)*, held in Naples, 3rd–5th November, 2018.
- Zin, M. and Schlingloff, D., 2007, *Samśārācakra, Das Rad der Wiedergeburten in der indischen Überlieferung*, Eine Veröffentlichung des Hauses der Japanischen Kultur (EKO) in Düsseldorf, Iudicium Verlag, Munich.