

Can a Buddha Image be Untrue?

The Grahi Buddha and the Way to Make Buddha Images in Southeast Asia

Introduction

The Buddha, or Śākyamuni, the sage of the Śākya tribe as he is also called, was not only a historic person whose personal strength and struggle allowed him to reach supreme and perfect Enlightenment. For his followers he was also a Mahāpuruṣa, born with 32 major and 80 minor signs on the body (lakṣaṇa), predetermined to be a cakravartin or a Buddha. Some of Śākyamuni's signs, together with his gestures (mudrā), his postures (āsana) and his clothes, have been important distinctions in the artistic representation of the Buddha. The life of the Buddha has always been very important in Buddhism. It has been written, depicted and recited, over and over again. An image of the Buddha can be seen as a sacred biography through its different gestures and postures. But the mudrās can also distinguish different Buddhas, hence it can sometimes be difficult to decide if an image depicts Śākyamuni Buddha, a Buddha of the past or a transcendent Buddha.¹

One of the most beautiful and interesting sculptures in Tai² art is the well-known Grahi Buddha. It is a bronze sculpture (162 cm) where the Buddha sits in bhūmisparśamudrā sheltered by the nāgarāja Mucalinda [Fig. 1]. The date of this image has frequently been discussed by LeMay, Dupont and Coedès, among others. The image is very unusual. When the

1) This paper deals mainly with the Theravāda tradition of Southeast Asia, but because of the subject also with early Buddhism in India.

2) The word "Tai" is a cultural and linguistic term which refers in a broad sense to all Tai-speaking groups. This should be compared with the term "Thai" used for all the people living in the Thai Nation from the time of the Bangkok era in about the late 18th century.

Buddha was sheltered by Mucalinda, it is said that he sat in deep meditation and should naturally be depicted in *dhyānamudrā* and not in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, as he is in this image. *Bhūmisparśamudrā*, is a gesture connected with the Buddha's great battle against *Māra*, and is often regarded as a representation of the Enlightenment.

What exactly is a Buddha image? Why does a Buddha image take the particular shape it has, rather than some other form? Is it realistic to assume that someone has consciously composed an image like the Grahi Buddha? Has it, instead, been made by mistake, by mere chance or ignorance? There have been some attempts to explain the Grahi Buddha before. One aim with this paper is to elucidate these interpretations and see how valid they are, and if necessary work out an alternative interpretation of this unusual image. To do this and answer the questions above, we must examine the religious tradition behind Buddha images, both within historical times and in Southeast Asia today. A second aim is to be acquainted with this, not so well-known Buddhist tradition. The first thing we have to do is to ask the statue itself. Unfortunately, the inscription on the image does not mention the unusual shape of the image. It can however give us some information about the context in which the statue was made. A Buddha image is a complex object withholding different aspects, and taken in isolation it can be understood in many different ways, but its religious meaning becomes clear only when it is considered as a part of the religious tradition and the society at large.

As we are searching for thoughts and notions embedded in people's heads about 800 years ago, this study mainly uses old texts, both canonical and non-canonical, the aim being to uncover the religious tradition in traditional Theravāda Buddhism.³ As a complement we use studies about contemporary live religion to establish how the religious tradition is transmitted and what the texts have meant to later generations. Therefore, this study uses both written sources and contemporary descriptions. In the

3) I use the term "traditional Buddhism" in the way Heinz Bechert (1973: 10) uses it, as separate from both canonical and modern Buddhism. I am well aware that such terms as "Buddhism" and "Theravāda Buddhism" are ideological abstractions. There are important historical, political and organizational differences between the regions and countries within the Theravāda tradition. Just as Buddhism in the different countries of Southeast Asia shows considerable variety, so there are many similarities within the Theravāda tradition that sometimes make 'country-specific' studies inapplicable. The borders in Southeast Asia have not been the same throughout history and there are many crossroads and border districts that make country-specific studies sometimes too narrow and sometimes too broad.

study of old texts lies the danger that it is only the religious experiences of the elite of which we hear. We seldom find any evidence of the everyday religious activity of the people such a long time ago. Studies of contemporary live religion are an invaluable complement to textual studies, but must be used with great care. When we ask, why they make Buddha images the way they do, the question is mostly about the religious experiences of the elite and not of the ordinary people. Hence, it is the religious experiences of the elite in traditional Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism and their view about the way to make Buddha images that are our main task. Before we can answer the question why the Grahi Buddha is made as it is, we have to describe the image in its context and compare it with similar images, mainly from Myanmar (Burma). Much to my surprise, no one has compared the Grahi Buddha with similar images in Myanmar. There is an old and still existing tradition in Myanmar of depicting the Buddha in this way.

The Earth Goddess Torani

Let us first look a little closer into the two events in the life of Śākyamuni that have been brought together in one piece of art in the Grahi Buddha. A few weeks pass between the two events. One takes place shortly before and the other six weeks after the Enlightenment. Bhūmisparśamudrā, with the right hand palm turned inwards touching the earth, tells the story of the Buddha's defeat of Māra, the Evil One, just before his Enlightenment [Fig. 2]. The hand is a gesture to invoke the Earth Goddess (Bhūmidevī) to witness all his good deeds and his right to reach Buddhahood. In the biographies Mahāvastu, Nidānakathā, Lalitavistara and Buddhacarita we can read with small variations how Śākyamuni with his right hand touches the earth, which at the same moment trembles so Māra has to flee.

...extricating his right hand from underneath the folds of his robe he stretched it out towards the earth saying, 'are you or are you not witness to my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara?' And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand or a hundred thousand echoes as though to overwhelm the forces of Māra, and saying as it were, 'I was your witness to it then'...the followers of Māra fled in every direction. (Nidānakathā 1990: 98)

In Thailand the story also tells how the Earth Goddess Torani "wrung her long hair and a stream, a flood of waters gushed forth from it... [and Māra's]... elephant swept away by the water, his royal insignia destroyed,

and his whole army fled in utter confusion" (Alabaster 1971: 155). How Torani wrung her hair is a well known motif in both Tai, Burmese and Khmer art [Fig. 3]. Aditi is her name in Indian mythology and she is the bearer of all plants and animals and the mother of all beings. The name Torani is derived from the Sanskrit *Dharanī*, 'she who bears'.

This battle between Śākyamuni and Māra, visualized through *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*, was a very popular motif in late Indian Buddhist art. This Pāla-Sena art had a strong influence on Southeast Asia, first of all in Pagan in Myanmar and later in Tai Yuan (Northern Tai). It is interesting to see how both Pagan and Tai Yuan became so deeply influenced by a tantric art from India at the same time as the ordination and textual tradition follow Mahāvihāra, the most orthodox sect of Theravāda Buddhism. Especially the Vajrasana (Mahābodhi) in Bodh Gayā has been the subject of strong interest from Southeast Asia. Twice, around 1100 and the year 1298, the Burmese were in Bodh Gayā and restored it. A copy of it was built in Pagan in the 13th century and later also in Chiangmai, Chiangrai and Pegu. King Tiloka's so highly valued Phra Sing Buddha (The Lion Buddha) is a statue as close to Pāla-Sena art as possible. At the same time he favoured Mahāvihāra and planted a Bodhi tree from Anuradhapura at Mahābodhirama (Wat Jet Yot) his replica of the Vajrasana. Today most of the Buddha images in Thailand are depicted in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*. In Khmer art this *mudrā* is unusual and seems to occur for the first time in the 12th century (Bosselier 1966: 265).

The Nāgarāja Mucalinda

The nāga motif is very prominent in art and literature all over Southeast Asia. The serpent-like nāgas inhabit the water or underground domain and have the power to take various forms, including human. The nāgas are connected with water, rain and fertility and therefore with wealth, power and kingship. This was probably why the Pallava kingdom in southern India derives its descent from the nāgas. In the legends about the Khmer kingdom the nāgas play a prominent part. An Indian prince fell in love with Nāgī Somā, the daughter of a nāgarāja. As a gift to the couple the king reclaimed the soil that once was drowned with water. This is believed to be the origin of the Khmer kingdom (Cœdès 1911: 391–393; Bloss 1973: 41–42). The Chinese diplomat Zhou Daguan reported from his visit to Angkor at the end of the 13th century a ritual union between the king and a nāgī with nine heads. The king had to spend the first part of each night together

with the snake princess in the top of a golden tower. This must have occurred on the pyramid of Phimeanakas in the Royal Palace at Angkor Thom. If she failed to appear for one single night, it was a sign of the king's immediate death (Zhou Dagan 1993: 5). In many legends, and often in popular belief, the king is dependent upon a nāga whose power protects the territory. Since a nāga has power over rain and fertility he is a guarantor for agriculture and thus intimately linked with the prosperity of the kingdom (Bloss 1973: 38). The popularity of the nāga in Southeast Asia probably depends on the fact that a kind of indigenous nāga cult already existed there before it came from India, or at least that the "nāga of Indic tradition fits with indigenous patterns of belief" (Hall 1976: 65).

In Buddhist art and literature Mucalinda is not the only known nāga. There are many other nāgas involved in the life of the Buddha and other past Buddhas. Two nāga kings, Nanda and Upananda, bathed Śākyamuni shortly after he was born (Vogel 1972: 95). There is also a story where a nāga assumed human shape and was ordained as a Buddhist monk. When the true nature of the nāga was disclosed, the Buddha himself expelled the nāga from the monastery (Vogel 1972: 93–94). In memory of this attempt to obtain ordination the word nāga is also the name given to candidates for ordination in Buddhism (Wells 1975: 136–137).

The second event in the Grahi Buddha image tells about how Śākyamuni, the sixth week, or in some traditions the third week (Mahāvagga 1951: 3–4), after his Enlightenment was sitting in deep meditation when a terrible storm came up and threatened him. The nāgarāja Mucalinda saw that the Buddha was in danger and came up from his kingdom in the underworld and coiled his body around him and sheltered him from the storm with his hood [Fig. 4]. This is not one of the most prominent events in the Buddha's life, but we can read a few lines about it in both Mahāvagga and Nidānakathā.

And the Blessed One spent seven days there and repaired to the Mucalinda tree. There he spent a week in perfect security, experiencing the bliss of emancipation as though inside his scented bed-chamber, seated within the folds of the Nāga King Mucalinda who had wound his coils round him seven times to ward off the cold and other inclemencies, when rainy weather continued for a whole week. (Nidānakathā 1990: 107)

The Buddha sitting on Mucalinda was a little-used motif in the art of India, except the art of Amarāvati and Nāgājunarkonda.⁴ The art in this re-

4) In Amarāvati there are some Buddha images sitting on Mucalinda in abhaya-mudrā, for example on a 3rd century decorated stupa (Boisselier 1978: 77, fig. 46). Jean

gion greatly influenced Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. There is an image from Sri Lanka as early as the 6th–7th century where the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda (Boisselier et al. 1978: 144). It is in Southeast Asia that this motif became most prominent, especially in the art of the Khmer. It was probably in Dvāravatī art as early as the 7th–8th century (Boisselier et al. 1978: fig. 105) that this kind of image appeared for the first time in Southeast Asia, but not until the 10th century did it appear in Khmer art (Boisselier et al. 1978: fig. 244). The motif was also popular in Lopburi and related Tai styles, but was uncommon both in Pagan and Tai Yuan.

The Grahi Buddha

Before we examine the religious traditions behind the Buddha image, we must shortly look at the date of the Grahi Buddha and see under which conditions it was made. It was found in a paddy-field near Wat Hua Wieng in Chaiya, in the south of Thailand, in the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910) (Buribhand and Griswold 1951: 19) and the image is now in the National Museum in Bangkok.⁵ Foreign powers have been interested in this area because it was located in the centre of international trade routes. Southeast Asia was characterized by a multcentred political system, or in O.W. Wolter's words, "a patchwork of often overlapping maṇḍalas or 'circles of kings'... the maṇḍalas represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security" (Wolters 1982: 16–17). The centres of authority and political power shifted endlessly. This peninsular area, often referred to as Tāmbraliṅga, was for a long time connected to the Śrīvijaya kingdom. The first half of the 11th century marks the expansion of Khmer power to the west, particularly in the former Mon centre of Lopburi, and south toward Tāmbraliṅga. The Burmese were also expanding into the peninsula and superseded the Khmers around 1050. In the middle of the 12th century Tāmbraliṅga was probably under Sinhalese hegemony. According to an inscription Tāmbraliṅga got relative freedom in 1230, but the close contacts

Boisselier denies that this gesture is abhayamudrā. He is of the opinion that they are a kind of "general-purpose gesture with no precise meaning" (Boisselier 1980: 371).

5) There exists at least one more image of a similar kind to the Grahi Buddha in the same area. In Khua Sawan Cave in Surat Thani province, the stucco ornament has a small Buddha image sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā on a five-headed nāga made in the late 13th century. Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 67, colour pl. 16.

with Lanka continued, especially in the time of king Chandrabhānu. In the late 13th century, the area came under the influence of Sukhothai. The Ram Khamhaeng inscription [II/27–33] mentions that “the Mahāthera Sangharāja... who has come here from Mōaṅ Srī Dharmmarāja” (Griswold & Prasert na Nagara 1971: 212), located not far from Chaiya, established Theravāda Buddhism in Sukhothai.

The image is cast in three separate pieces, the Buddha, the body of the nāga and the hood of the nāga. On the base of the nāga is an inscription as follows: “11006 [or 11004] çaka, année du Lièvre, par ordre de Kamrateñ Añ Mahārāja Śrīmat Trailokyarājamaulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva, ... le Mahāsenāpati Galānai qui gouverne le pays de Grahi, invite le Mrateñ çrī Nāno à faire cette statue” (Cœdès 1929: 46–47). The language is Khmer, but the script is of an old Javanese type. The year has been interpreted by Reginald LeMay (1938: 49) as 1183 and by de Casparis (1967: 37–40) as 1279 or 1291. As we have seen the year is expressed in five characters. This has caused the interpretation 1105 mahā-sakarāja, as neither 1104 nor 1106 is a year of “the hare”. 1105 mahā-sakarāja is 1183 A.D., but we must remember it is only a vague assumption. LeMay is doubtful if the Buddha and the nāga were cast at the same time, since the nāga obviously points to a Khmer origin, whereas the Buddha itself is a late product of Mon art, in his opinion. It seems to indicate that either the Buddha is older than the nāga or Dvāravatī still influenced the art in 1183. LeMay suggests “that the two figures are contemporaneous and that it was an ‘artist’ still under Mon influence who modelled the image, while it was only a ‘craftsman’ under Khmer influence who manufactured the Nāga king” (LeMay 1938: 48–49). Since this is the normal way to cast this kind of complex statue, it is quite surprising that they pay so much attention to the fact that the nāga and the Buddha were cast separately.⁶ Since the nāga and the Buddha match so exactly, we must assume that they were created together.

Pierre Dupont calls in question the year 1183. He believes that the Grahi Buddha cannot be earlier than the end of the 13th century. He points out that its style is very close to “l’art thai du XIII^e et du XIV^e siècles” (Dupont 1942: 109–110). J.G. de Casparis agrees and states further arguments. He considers that the image cannot be as early as the 12th century, since there is no evidence that the twelve-animal dating cycle was used before the end of the 13th century (Casparis 1967: 34). Further, de Casparis points out the similarity between the names and titles of the king “Kamrateñ Añ

6) Compare the two images in (Bowie 1976: fig. 42 ; Lee 1969: fig. 28) which are also cast in three separate pieces.

Mahārāja Śrīmat Trailokyarāja Maulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva” in the inscription on the Grahi Buddha and a king in late 13th century Central Sumatra, “Śrī Mahārāja Tribhuvanarāja Maulivarmadeva” (Casparis 1967: 34–37). It is de Casparis’ opinion that the two refer to the same king. Since the identification of the king named on the Grahi Buddha has not been sufficiently solved, the argument seems convincing. Hence, de Casparis draws the conclusion that the Grahi Buddha was made between the second expedition by Chandrabhānu to Lanka in 1270 and 1292, when Chaiya must have come under Sukhothai’s authority. Then there are only two possibilities according to de Casparis: either mahā-sakarāja 1201 or 1213 (= 1279 or 1291 A.D.) (Casparis 1967: 37–38). If Trailokyarāja in the Grahi Buddha inscription is the same as the Śrīvijaya king from Jambi-Malāyu, the images were probably made according to his order. However, an inscription from Phimai seems to knock holes in de Casparis’ most important argument. The twelve-animal dating cycle used in the Grahi Buddha inscription is also used in an 11th century inscription found in Phimai (Hall 1985: 207–208). Most probably the Grahi Buddha was actually made in the late 12th century and it is not unlikely that the Tai people had already come to this area by this time.

The Myanmar Tradition

It is not only in southern Thailand that the Buddha can be seen on Mucalinda sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. As already mentioned, no one who has discuss the Grahi Buddha has paid any attention to the tradition in Myanmar to depict the Buddha in the same way. It is of course not the most common way, but in modern times it is not so unusual. There are even a few very old ones. The oldest one is to my knowledge a high relief Buddha image inside Myinpyagy in Pagan, which is probably even older than the Grahi Buddha [Fig. 5]. Inside the west corridor in the ‘stupa-temple’ Myinpyagy there is according to G.H. Luce, a “life-size brick image of the Earth-touching Buddha seated under the seven-headed Mucalinda Nāga” (Luce 1969–70/2: 95). The peculiar thing about this image is that under the Buddha there is no tail of the nāga. Instead he appears to be sitting on a lotus throne. According to Luce (1969–70/1: 292), Myinpyagu can be dated between the end of Aniruddha’s reign and until Kyansitta’s, not later than 1084.

The image in Myinpyagu is probably the origin of later similar ones. A small bronze sculpture (28 cm) is known from the Shwesandaw monastery



Fig. 1. The Grahi Buddha, Chaiya, south Thailand, 12th or 13th century. The Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā.



Fig. 3. The Earth Goddess Torani at a monastery in Chiangmai.



Fig. 2. The "twin Buddhas" sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā at Dhammayangyi (middle of 12th century) in Pagan. The one to the left is Śākyamuni Buddha and the one to the right probably Prabhūtaratna Buddha.



Fig. 4. Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in dhyānamudrā. Lopburi, 13th century.



Fig. 5. A high relief Buddha image sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā inside the stupa-temple Myinpyagy in Pagan, 11th century. Reprinted with permission from plate 152 (c) in G.H. Luce: *Old Burma, early Pagan*. Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin, 1969 (*Artibus Asiae Supplementum*, 25).



Fig. 6. The Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā within Kaunghmudaw monastery in Sagaing, Myanmar. 19th or 20th century.

in Pagan (Gatellier 1985: 38). A life-size image is within the Kaunghmudaw monastery from the 17th century, in Sagaing, about 20 km southwest of Mandalay [Fig. 6]. This Buddha image is made of light marble or alabaster, and has a gentle face in Mandalay style. Most likely this image was made no earlier than the 19th century. The nāga has only one head and is covered with glass mosaic, which indicates a relative late making. The tradition of making an image where the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda in *bhūmisparśamudrā* has been alive from the time of Pagan and is still alive in Myanmar today. We can see one 20th century wooden image sitting in this position in a paper published by Sylvia Fraser-Lu (1981: 136).⁷

The Buddha Image in its Religious Tradition

Let us now try to see why a Buddha image assumes a certain shape. To do this we must see the Buddha image in its religious tradition and ask what a Buddha image really is. A Buddha image is a complex object withholding different and even contradictory aspects. One very important reason to make a Buddha image is derived from the doctrine of karma and the desire to make merit (*puṇya*) as a way to produce good fortune in this or the next life. The way to make merit is first of all to offer and give alms to the Buddhist Saṅgha. This means giving food, cloth, and making religious buildings and Buddha images. It has been very popular in Southeast Asia to make merit for the purpose of being reborn in the time of Maitreya.

To explain the special appearances of the Buddha images, we have to go back to the beginning, but there is no reason to go into the question where and when the first Buddha image was made. In this case it is much more important to ask why it was made. The first Buddha images could have been made as cult objects for veneration or as narrations for educational purposes. They could also have been made as objects for meditation. One of the essential parts of Buddhism has always been meditation. Dieter Schlingloff (1990: 6–7) has strongly emphasized this aspect of Buddhism and he believes that the first Buddha images were made because the Buddha and his life were important objects in meditation. One of the main points in meditation is concentration on objects. The wheel is, of course, a

7) Irene Moilanen at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland tells me in a letter (27.2.96) about the response she got from woodcarvers in Myanmar about images in this position. They do not pay attention to the problem at all. "It is what the customers request" that is the usual answer. See also her newly published dissertation about the surviving woodcarving tradition in Myanmar.

sign for the Buddha's first teaching of the dharma, but for someone who concentrates on the wheel in meditation it probably symbolizes the dharma itself. Early signs like the wheel, the Bodhi tree and the stupa were a starting point for depicting the life of the Buddha and for making Buddha images. The Buddha image could in this way have been a further development of the early and simple signs of the dharma, the Enlightenment and Nirvāṇa. One explanation does not exclude the other. The first Buddha images could at the same time have been made for veneration, education and meditation.

A Buddha image is narrative and a reminder (*uddeśaka*) about the life of the Buddha and his teaching. Śākyamuni's life has always been very important in Buddhism, particularly for lay devotees. The different events in his life have been described, recited and depicted in pictures and images, again and again. The places that are connected with his life early became sites for worship and pilgrimage. In *Mahāparinibbāna suttanta*, Śākyamuni tells Ananda about four places that are associated with important events in his life and should be visited in pilgrimage.

There are these four places, Ananda, which the believing clansman should visit with feelings of reverence... Here the Tathāgata was born... Here the Tathāgata attained to the supreme and perfect insight... Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathāgata... Here the Tathāgata passed finally away which leaves nothing whatever to remind behind... These are the four places, Ananda, which the believing clansman should visit with feelings of reverence... And they, Ananda, who shall die while they, with believing heart, are journeying on such pilgrimage, shall be reborn after death, when the body shall dissolve, in the happy realms of heaven. (*Mahāparinibbāna suttanta* 1959: 153–154)

At least from the time of Aśoka we know that making a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites was a well established tradition and a major practice in Buddhist soteriology. In *Aśokāvadāna* it is said that Aśoka went on a pilgrimage in order to honour all the places connected with the Buddha. At each of the major sites he built a *caitya* (Strong 1983: 244–251). This narrative of Aśoka's pilgrimage is strong evidence that he followed an already established practice. The cult of the Buddhist sites was more "focused on the loci of sacred acts, rather than on the persona of the Buddha" (Huntington 1987: 56). The sites were very important in the cult, and depicting events from the life of the Buddha was a way to constantly have at hand these cultic sites.

The earliest depiction of the Buddha that we know is from the beginning of the Christian era, about the same time as the first complete biography of

the Buddha was written (Boisselier et al. 1978: 46).⁸ In the same way as different events were compiled to make complete biographies, different events were compiled in depictions, like 'the Eight Great Miracles' (Aṣṭamahāprātihārya)⁹ or 'the Seven Holy Stations' (Sattasattāhāṭṭhāna).¹⁰ In Pāla art these 'Eight Great Miracles' were very often depicted, each event alone or all eight events in one and the same image. "Devotions before an image depicting all of the eight events... serving as a surrogate of the whole route [the pilgrimage]" (Huntington 1987: 55). Making a pilgrimage even in this manner produces merit. In Pagan these eight events occurred often, since Pāla-Sena art greatly influenced Pagan (Luce 1969-70/3: pl. 400-405).¹¹ "The Seven Holy Stations" are also depicted in art. In 1451 King Tiloka built Wat Jet Yot (the Temple of the Seven Spires) just outside Chiangmai, as a copy of Mahābodhi at Bodh Gayā. Dhammaceti did the same in Pegu, and built Schwegugyi in about 1460-1470 as a copy of Mahābodhi. The seven stations were made around the buildings both in Chiangmai and Pegu. It is likely that the replicas in Pagan and Chiangrai also included 'the Seven Holy Stations', but of this there is no proof (Griswold 1965: 214-217; Stadtner 1991: 46; Brown 1988: 108).

8) Étienne Lamotte (1958: 726) is of the opinion that the first complete biography of the Buddha was not written until the second century A. D. Erich Frauwallner (1956: 27) is of another opinion. He thinks that there existed a lost biography, written about one hundred years after the nirvāṇa.

9) (1) The first event is the birth to Queen Māyādevī. (2) The second is how Śākyamuni touched the earth to witness and defeat Māra. (3) The third is how he set the wheel of Dharma in motion at the Deer Park at Sārṇāth. (4) The great illusion at the Jetavana monastery is the fourth event. (5) The fifth event is the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. (6) The sixth event is Buddha's taming of the wild elephant Nalāgiri. (7) The seventh event is the gift of honey by the monkey. Here the Buddha is depicted sitting with a small bowl in his lap. (8) The eighth and last event is the parinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara.

10) (1) The first week after the Enlightenment the Buddha stayed under the Bodhi tree, and is depicted in bhūmisparśamudrā. (2) The next week he stood gazing at the Bodhi tree for seven days. Here he is depicted with his hands crossed over his trunk. (3) The third week he was walking without touching the jewelled walkway. (4) The Gods built a jewelled house for him: there he was sitting and reflecting on the Abhidharma. He is here depicted standing with his hands crossed over his breast. (5) The fifth week he sat under a goat-herd's tree, when Māra and his daughters tried to tempt him a second time. He is here depicted with his right hand lifted in abhayamudrā. (6) The sixth week the Buddha was sheltered by Mucalinda. (7) Finally, the last week the Buddha received a myrobalanfruit and a toothpick from Sakka. The Buddha is here depicted sitting with his right hand on his right knee holding a fruit.

11) The Pyu's, who were the forerunners of the Burmese, have added a ninth scene, Sujātā's offering of milkrice to the Buddha (Luce 1969-70/1: 150-151)

Another aspect that can help us understand the particular shape of the Buddha images, is that a Buddha image is considered to be a true copy of the Buddha and that each new image of the Buddha must trace its lineage back to one of the authentic copies supposedly made during his lifetime. A.B. Griswold has stressed this aspect of the Buddha image (Griswold 1957: 17; Griswold 1966: 37; Griswold 1974: 17). This conception emanates from legends that narrate the making of the first Buddha image. They all tell how a king had the first image made. This was as far back as during the lifetime of the Buddha, or at least not long after his death.¹² This first image of the Buddha was, according to the legends, an exact copy of the Buddha and inherited some of the infinite power the Buddha himself possessed. All copies are expected to trace their lineage back to one of these images.

Two Chinese travellers, Faxian in the 5th century and Xuang Zang in the 7th century, in India heard the legend about the Sandalwood image (Jaini 1979: 183–184). Faxian tells that the image was made in the absence of the Buddha, when he was preaching in the Trāyastriṃśat heaven to his mother. Prasenajit, the king of Kosala, had an image made and put it in the place where the Buddha used to sit. When the Buddha returned to the Jetavara monastery, the image came to life, left its seat and came to meet him. The Buddha spoke to the image and told him to sit down again.

Return to your seat. After I have attained to pari-nirvāṇa, you will serve as a pattern to the four classes of my disciples, and on this the image returned to its seat. This was the very first of all the images (of Buddha), and that which men subsequently copied. (Faxian 1965: 56–57)

The legend of this Sandalwood Buddha is well known in Southeast Asia.¹³ In *Jinakālamālipakaraṇaṃ* (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 178–180), a chronicle written in Chiangmai at the beginning of 16th century, we are told that the Sandalwood (Candanabimba) image was made seven years before parinirvāṇa and came to Nibbisi (Chiangmai) in 1478. At the same time the text tells us that king Muang Keo had the Sandalwood image made in Chiangmai in 1521. “He [Muang Keo] commenced the preliminary work of carving the Great Sandalwood Image” (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 175). The image that was made in Chiangmai was at the same time regarded as

12) There are similar legends among the Jainas that an image was carved during the Jina's lifetime.

13) Compare it with the legend in East Asia about the Udayana image.

identical with the original Sandalwood image.¹⁴ Jinakālamālipakaraṇaṃ also tells stories of how Sihala Buddha and the Emerald Buddha (Phra Keo) were created very early and got their power from a nāgaking, respectively Indra (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 120–127, 136–145). The origin of the Sandalwood image is also told in *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājajātaka* (1986: 104, 114–116), one of the ‘Fifty Apocryphal Birth-Stories’ (Paññāsa-Jātaka). These jātika-stories are spread over Southeast Asia, and were probably written in 15th century Tai Yuan. *Kosala-Bimba-Vaṇṇavā* from Sri Lanka is another text which tells the story of the Sandalwood image (Gombrich 1978: 281).

The Mahāmuni Buddha is believed, in a similar way as the Sandalwood image, to have been made during the lifetime of the Buddha. Before the Mahāmuni Buddha was removed to Mandalay in 1784, it was located on the Sarigutta Hill in Arakan, at the same place as the ancient kingdom Dhañāvati. The legend tells that the Buddha visited Candrasuriya, the king of Dhañāvati. On the king’s inquiry, the Buddha gave the king permission to make an image of him. Within a week it was finished and the likeness was extraordinary. The Buddha then breathed upon the sculpture so it became alive and talked to it. “I shall pass into nirvāṇa... but you, instinct with my essence, will live the five thousand years which I have prescribed for the duration of the religion” (Collis 1942: 135–138).

That a Buddha image was regarded as an authentic and true copy of the Buddha was a well known and accepted fact in Theravāda Southeast Asia. But what is the meaning of a true copy of the Buddha? A copy is naturally a representation of something, but in this case it is more. The copy must contain the essence of the original, but it does not need to be similar in every detail. A cutting of the Bodhi tree is at the same time a new plant and identical with the original. A new image of the Buddha is considered in a similar way to be identical with the original, or as Tambiah expresses it “a reincarnation of it” (Tambiah 1984: 254), exactly as the Sandalwood image in Chiangmai was considered to be identical with the original Sandalwood image. This way of copying makes it possible for the spectator to be in the presence of the Buddha and the events that are depicted in the image, even if it is impossible to be at the original place associated with the event.

The relics of the Buddha are of three kinds. Firstly we have the pieces of his body (śarīrika); secondly, the things he used in his life (paribhogaka)

14) Sandalwood chronicle (*Varacandanāsāra*) seems to have existed. Coëdès (1925: 137) is of the opinion that this chronicle was written in Thai under the name *Tamnan Phra Chao Ken Chan* and cannot be found in Pāli.

and thirdly, we have the reminders (*uddeśaka*), and it is in this group that the Buddha images belong. But an image of the Buddha is not only a reminder, it is also a sacred image and an object of veneration. A Buddha image is always treated as a sacred object, because it contains the “immanent presence” (Tambiah 1984: 254) of the Buddha himself. To contain this power from the Buddha, a new image must always be a copy of an earlier image. A new image, created without a former image as a model, will not contain this power because it is not regarded as a true copy of the Buddha. But this is not enough, a new image must also pass through a ritual, to be consecrated and withhold the sacred power. We just have to agree with Richard Gombrich when he says that “only when a statue has been consecrated can it be an object of worship, and this fact is sufficient to show that a Buddha statue is more than a mere reminder of the Buddha” (Gombrich 1966: 24). The consecration ritual (*netra pinkama*) in Sri Lanka that Gombrich describes in his paper is both similar and different from the rituals in Southeast Asia.¹⁵ In the consecration ritual (*Suat Poek*) in Thailand the new images are connected with an old venerated image through a cord (Wells 1975: 126–129; Piriya Krairiksh 1979: 220–224). According to Tambiah (1984: 248) the cord is also connected with a candle representing the donor of the new image. A new image is then part of the sacred power from an old one. All Buddha images, both the great ones at the monasteries and the private ones at home, must pass through this ritual to be treated as a sacred object. Without this ritual an image should be regarded as an ordinary object, without any sacred contents. The image is regarded as containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself, first when the image is given life through this ritual. Gombrich (1978: 283) has pointed out that a Sinhalese version of the *Kosala-Bimba-Vañṇanā*, mentioned above as containing the legend of the Sandalwood image, is recited in the consecration ritual at Sri Lanka.

A relic or a sacred manuscript is sometimes enshrined within a Buddha image to make it more sacred. Is it the implanted relic that makes the image sacred, and is an image without a relic just a reminder? It is possible that this was the case in the earliest times, and that this was a reason why the Buddha images were later regarded as something more than just reminders. But if we read chronicles from Southeast Asia, we realise that the sacredness and power in a Buddha image do not need to come from a relic inside.

15) The consecration ritual (*Nekaza* or *Ane-kaza Tin-thi*) in Myanmar is shortly described by Scott (1989: 198) and Spiro (1982: 205)

We have seen that a Buddha image must be a true copy of the Buddha, but it must also pass through a ritual to contain the sacred power from the Buddha. Buddhist kingdoms in Southeast Asia have brought a couple of highly venerated and powerful Buddha images into prominence. Among the best known are Mahāmuni Buddha, Sihala Buddha and the Emerald Buddha. In the history of Southeast Asia, the kingdoms have several times used a powerful Buddha image as a royal palladium to strengthen their religious and political legitimacy.¹⁶ Sponsoring an expensive Buddha image is a way of making merit, but also a way of making oneself a powerful and miraculous device which gives prestige and reputation.

We have now seen that there exist different and even contradictory aspects regarding the way to make Buddha images in traditional Theravāda religion. The Buddha image is a narrative and a reminder of the life and the teachings of the Buddha and at the same time it is also a sacred object containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself. Further, it is regarded as an authentic copy of the Buddha and at the same time a powerful and miraculous device giving prestige and reputation to its sponsor. This tradition has, in many respects, maintained a homogeneous and conservative way to make images of the Buddha. This tradition has been maintained principally by learned monks and specialists in iconographic matters, who have had the responsibility for the correctness of the images. We can borrow an expression from John Huntington and call this person an "iconographic authority" (Huntington 1987: 59). We have seen that there are many images that have been made contrary to this tradition and that the artists and craftsmen that made them did not follow the common rules. Should we regard them as anomalies and not as true Buddha images? Of course not. They are an essential part of a living religious tradition and must be regarded as true Buddhist images, in spite of the way they have been made. This does not prevent us from being curious about why the Grahi Buddha was made the way it has. Therefore we shall now try to examine some interpretations, and see if they can bring us closer to the reason why the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā.

16) The importance of Buddha images to the kingship has been studied by Tambiah (1982: 5–17) regarding the Sihala Buddha and by Reynolds (1978: 175–193) regarding the Emerald Buddha.

Why is the Buddha Sitting on Mucalinda in Bhūmisparśamudrā?

We can never be absolutely certain why the Grahi Buddha is made the way it is as long as we do not find any written source from the time of the Grahi Buddha that explains its odd shape. All the same, we must try to find the best possible interpretation. When we try to explain the meaning with an image of the Buddha or some other religious work of art, we must always have in mind the context in which it was made and what kind of role a particular person has to it. It is one thing to see an image as a symbol of something, quite another to intentionally make an image as a symbol. Artists, craftsmen, patrons, monks and laymen all have different roles and relations to an image. Especially if we see an image in a historical perspective, it is obvious that meanings can change. This should not be exaggerated, for the tradition is often very strong. It is, however, important to distinguish interpretations about the way to make images and interpretations about how an image has been perceived by ordinary people or later generations.

Whatever the reason was for making the Grahi Buddha, we must notice the multivalency of the image. A Buddha sitting on Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā must have been significant and most likely associated with various meanings. At the same time as the image tells a sacred story, or rather two stories, there is a mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the image. We know that some Buddha images have been regarded as very powerful and that they were closely associated with the royal powers. As the Grahi Buddha is very expensive and extravagant, we can assume that it had some relations with Trailokyārāja, a king named in the inscription on the image. We have already seen the connection between nāgas and the kingship and its importance for the prosperity of the kingdom. The spectators must have been aware of this, and connected the image closely with the authority. Seen in a mythological context the Grahi Buddha is connected with the underworld in a double sense. Both the events depicted in the Grahi Buddha are connected with the underworld. Mucalinda and the Earth Goddess Torani came up from the underworld to help the Buddha. As already mentioned, the inhabitants in the underworld are connected with fertility and wealth. Therefore it is not unlikely that the Grahi Buddha was seen in conceptions of fertility, wealth and power and had a close connection to the kingship.

From this we must turn to the question what the Grahi Buddha was intended to represent. We have seen that the way to make Buddha images is

embedded in a rich religious tradition which is maintained by the iconographic authorities. Therefore, the most natural way is to follow that tradition and regard the Grahi Buddha as a result of a mistake or a misunderstanding. Especially as the iconographic authorities would hardly have given permission for its unusual appearance. As we have seen above, a Buddha image is believed to be a true copy of the Buddha, tracing its lineage back to one of the authentic copies supposedly made during his lifetime. Therefore it is not natural to make an image in a new position, without having any visible or narrative original. Can we therefore regard the Grahi Buddha as a mistake?

If we leave the Grahi Buddha just a moment and look at the tradition in Myanmar, there are many indications that from the time of Pagan until today there has been an unbroken tradition to make images in this unusual position. If we start with the old one in Myinpyagy in Pagan, we can assume that other later images have been copies of that one. We have already mentioned that in this image the *nāga* cannot be seen under the Buddha, only above him. Instead it looks as if the Buddha is sitting on a lotus throne. I think that this is an indication that something went wrong at the fabrication. This high relief Buddha is not one of the main images in the Myanpyagy. It is only one of approximately fifty, running around the dark corridors inside the stupa-temple. All sitting images are depicted in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*, except one, where a thin Buddha image is sitting in *dhyāna-mudrā* telling about his extreme asceticism. There must have been many artists and craftsmen working together with these images. Maybe some worked with the Buddha's head and body, others with his legs and arms. It is not entirely unlikely that a mistake could have occurred with so many images. A bold speculation is that the Myanpyagy Buddha was made because of a mistake or some misunderstanding. Once it was made, it probably drew public attention because of its odd shaping. We can assume that all later images in Myanmar in the same position were made as copies of the Buddha image at Myanpyagy. There is of course no conclusive evidence for this, but once a Buddha image sitting in a new position had been made, it was natural to copy it. This is not a definite explanation of the Grahi Buddha, but it must be our starting-point until we find something more reasonable.

One alternative solution is that the Grahi Buddha is not Śākyamuni at all, but another Buddha. It can, for example, be a Buddha of the past or a transcendent Buddha. Piriya Krairiksh has suggested that the Grahi Buddha "was probably intended as a presentation of the supreme Buddha" (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 67). It can sometimes be difficult to decide if an

image represents Śākyamuni or some other Buddha. In fig. 2 Śākyamuni is sitting to the left in bhūmisparśamudrā, with another Buddha to the right of him in the same position, which probably is Prabhūtaratna Buddha (Luce 1969–70/2: 170). We do not know exactly what Piriya Krairiksh means by a supreme Buddha. Maybe Vairocana, one of the five Jina Buddhas, but Vairocana is never represented sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. Akṣobhya, ‘the Immovable from the Eastern Paradise’, another of the five Jina Buddhas, is, however, often depicted sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. There is a 10th century image of Akṣobhya in stone from the same area as the Grahi Buddha. This statue is easy to identify, since he is sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā on a throne with a lion on each side and a vajra in the middle. The image sat at the east side of a chedi and all this makes it easy to identify him as Akṣobhya (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 154, pl. 38). The only feature that connects the Grahi Buddha with Akṣobhya is that he is sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā, and this is of course not enough. We can, however, not with certainty exclude that the Grahi Buddha represents some other Buddha than Śākyamuni, but it is unlikely, as we cannot identify it with any particular Buddha. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that Mahāyāna was dominant in this area until the 13th century (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 72–73), which means that the date of the Grahi Buddha is very important.

Another possibility is that the Grahi Buddha is a Buddha of a general type, and not someone special. There have been some attempts to separate those Buddha images that are narrative and those with universal validity. The latter are regarded as being “liberated from all biographical and other bonds of the phenomenal world” (Boisselier et al. 1978: 37). Should a universal Buddha be depicted, in dhyānamudrā or in bhūmisparśamudrā? In one well-known monograph on Buddhist iconography, ‘The image of the Buddha’, it is stated that it was the meditating Buddha that “became the most generally accepted type in that it shows the Buddha in an archetypal form” (Boisselier et al. 1978: 37). If this is so, how is it possible to separate these two kinds of images from each other? Which are depicting Śākyamuni in meditation and which are the Buddha in an archetypal form? Further, the events depicted in a Buddha image are not only narrative, they are at the same time a visualization of the dharma. It is my suggestion that this separation of a historical Buddha and an archetypal Buddha is illusory, and that both aspects can be found, more or less, in all Buddha images. This becomes clear if we see it from the view of the spectator. No one can prevent a Buddha image made in a general archetypal form from being seen in its narrative context.

Yet another possibility is that the Grahi Buddha was made after some local legend about which we have no information. We can find different odd images where a legend is closely connected to the image. The Buddha image on Mandalay Hill who points with his finger is a depiction of a legend about the Buddha's visit to Myanmar. In Myanmar there are images of a kind called 'Magic Buddhas', which are believed to possess supernatural powers. They often have a divergent shaping derived from some local legend. 'Dakkhina Sakkha' is one of these 'Magic Buddhas' and is a rather plump figure with an inverted lotus flower on his head. This image is believed to bring wealth and prevent fire and its supernatural power and extraordinary shaping are considered to come from the wood from which it was originally made, viz. the Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura (Fraser-Lu 1981: 136). As long as we do not have any legend regarding the Grahi Buddha or the images in Myanmar in the same position, this theory seems rather speculative.

Another possible interpretation is quite different. Robert L. Brown suggests that the nāgahoods on the Grahi Buddha were developed from depicted branches of the Bodhi tree. In Khmer art, bhūmisparśamudrā occurs quite late, in about the 12th century. The form it takes, he argues, "was to be represented within a tabernacle, a semi-architectural niche, topped by branches of the Bodhi tree. These Bodhi tree branches take a particular form and arrangement; the branches are thick, end in lotus-like buds, and have flame-shaped leaves. These branches stand straight upward and are arranged neatly in descending height from a central branch, usually being grouped in fives or sevens. The arrangement and shape of the branches clearly suggest those of the snake hoods over the heads of the Mucalinda Buddhas" (Brown 1988: 119). From the collection at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, he points to an earth-touching Buddha placed within a tabernacle, but the Bodhi tree branches are unfortunately missing (Brown 1988: fig. 21). In his paper he presents a drawing showing his reconstruction with the lost branches attached (Brown 1988: fig. 22, 23). This is very hypothetical and do not say how and why it happened. The only conclusion that Brown makes is that "the merging of iconographical imagery was intentional" (Brown 1988: 121). Maybe his theory can explain a Buddha image from Khmer-influenced areas, but it does not seem to fit images from other parts of Southeast Asia.

It has been proposed that the Grahi Buddha was made to symbolize the Enlightenment. Subhadradis Diskul suggests that "the statue is intended to be a conflation of the first and sixth weeks following the Enlightenment" (Bowie 1976: 67). Bhūmisparśamudrā is aimed first of all at the events just

before the Enlightenment and is often assumed to be a symbol of just the Enlightenment. The first week after the Enlightenment the Buddha supposedly sat under the Bodhi tree and is here depicted in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. During this first week Māra came a second time and gave a proposal that the Buddha should enter *nirvāṇa* without bringing his knowledge to the people. Mary Cummings expressed a similar view a couple of years later, when she suggested that the Grahi Buddha might be a symbol for the Buddha's Enlightenment. She wrote that "...the earth-touching pose... here is meant to call to mind for the viewer the whole sequence of events leading to the Buddha's Enlightenment and the enjoyment of that bliss while with Mucalinda" (Cummings 1982: 176–177). This makes sense, but there is a weakness in her line of argument. We have seen that a Buddha image is regarded as a sacred narrative with the authentic likeness of the Buddha, and that it is important to make a true copy so the image can contain the essence of the Buddha. Why, then, should someone want to make a copy of the Buddha in this unique position? Neither Subhadradis Diskul nor Mary Cummings reflects on this. Both of them assume a free and creative artist behind the Grahi Buddha, an idea emanated from an Occidental approach that is unfamiliar in Buddhist art, at least in the time of the Grahi Buddha. As long as we do not have any reason behind the making of the Grahi Buddha as a symbol of the Enlightenment, this explanation seems not convincing.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a possible reason. As it is several weeks between the two events, the Grahi Buddha as a symbol of Enlightenment must include the absence of time. This does not seem to fit with the Buddha image as a narration. Where can we find absence of time? *Nirvāṇa* is often described as without time, but experiences in meditation can also be regarded as without time. The Buddha's attainment of *nirvāṇa* is about forty-five years after his Enlightenment, but this is not the whole truth. The Theravāda tradition also has a notion of three different kinds of *nirvāṇa*. In the Tai cosmology *Traibhūmikathā* (Trai Phum Phra Ruang), written in the 14th or 15th century, the Buddha attained his first *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *kilesa-nibbana* = *nibbana* from impurity) "when our Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment and Omniscience under the great gem Bodhi tree" (*Traibhūmikathā* 1982: 330). He attained his second *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *khandha nibbana* = *nibbana* from the body) at the time of his great decease. The third *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *dhatu nibbana* = *nibbana* from the relics) will come "when all of the relics without exception come together under the great Bodhi tree, when they rise up and once again become the body of the Lord Buddha... at that time the Lord Buddha will attain the Nibbana of the rel-

ics" (Traibhūmikathā 1982: 330–331). So when the Buddha is sheltered by Mucalinda, he has already attained the first nirvāṇa.

As previously mentioned, it is not unlikely that the first Buddha images were made as meditation devices. There is a meditation technique where the meditator concentrates on the body of the Buddha as it is shown in images. In this recollection of the Buddha (Skr: buddhānusmṛti; Pāli: buddhānussati),¹⁷ the meditator then contemplates on the qualities (guṇa) of the Buddha and finally proceeds to the dharma-body (Conze 1956: 60). One of the characteristics of meditations is that there are levels in the meditation when time is absent for the meditator. The Grahi Buddha could have been made as a result of a meditation or served as a meditation device. This could be the reason, but it is hardly likely, as the Grahi Buddha is too extravagant and expensive to have been made for this purpose. The time has been reduced in a similar way in some famous jataka-reliefs from Bhārhut (c. 100 B.C.). Various appearances of a figure has here been conflated into a single figure. The most well known is probably the "deer-jataka", with the central deer intended to be read as participating in three of the four episodes of the narrative. Even if there are points of similarities in some respects between this jataka-relief and the Grahi Buddha, there is nothing to indicate that we here have an unbroken millenarian tradition.

We have previously seen that some Buddha images in Southeast Asia have been highly venerated and used as powerful and miraculous devices for the political authority. The Grahi Buddha could in the same way have been made by order of Trailokyārāja, the king named on the image. If the Grahi Buddha can be dated to the late 13th century, this king may be identical with Tribhuvanārāja, who ruled the Śrīvijaya kingdom from Jambi-Malāyu on the east coast of Sumatra. If we can establish the common identity or some other connection between the two kings, the image could have been made as a device and a representative of the king. If he wanted an image in order to legitimate his sovereignty in this distant part of his domain, the Grahi Buddha must have been perfect. Most probably, however, the Grahi Buddha was made a century earlier. Whoever king Trailokyārāja may be, the mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the Grahi Buddha, viz. fertility, wealth and power, makes it a perfect representative for a king in need of religious legitimation. This does not have to be interpreted as the king regarded himself as a Buddha, or that the es-

17) Recollection of the Buddha is one of the six anussatis; viz. Buddha, dhamma, sangha, sila, cāga, devatā. They are explained in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga (1976: 204–230).

sence of the king was believed to be inherent in the image. The Grahi Buddha's connection with the kingship was maybe the reason why it was later thrown away or hidden. There is also the possibility that it was the new Theravāda clergy that saw the image as a representative of an old corrupt religion.

Summary

There is a strong religious tradition how to make a Buddha image. A Buddha image is narrative and a reminder about the life of the Buddha, but also a sacred object containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself. Further, a Buddha image is regarded as an authentic copy of the Buddha and every new image must trace its lineage back to one of the copies supposedly made during the Buddha's lifetime. The making of Buddha images is therefore a very conservative form of art. Despite its variations in style, a Buddha image looks nearly the same today as it did 2000 years ago. To maintain the right way to make images there have been monks and specialists in iconographic matters, who as iconographic authorities have been responsible for the correctness of the images.

One of the most famous Buddha images in Thailand, the Grahi Buddha, does not correspond to this tradition. As the Buddha is sitting in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā* upon the *nāgarāja* Mucalinda, the image is depicting two events at the same time. Hence, the Grahi Buddha ought to be regarded as a mistake or a misunderstanding. But since the image is so expensive and extravagant, it would surprise me if this was the reason for its unusual shape. I would rather think that the tradition in Myanmar of depicting Buddha images in the same way may have originated from a mistake or a misunderstanding. The 11th century high relief Buddha image in Myinpyagu is not one of the main images, but only one of approximately fifty in the corridors running around the stupa-temple. It is not unlikely that a mistake could have occurred with so many images and all later images depicted in the same way in Myanmar were probably made as copies of the high relief Buddha at Myanpyagy.

We have seen that there are many possible explanations, but we can never be absolutely certain why the Grahi Buddha was made the way it was, as long as we do not have any further evidence. Both events depicted in the Grahi Buddha are embedded in a mythological context, connected closely with fertility, wealth and power. Therefore the most probable solution, in my opinion, is that the Grahi Buddha was in some way connected

with the kingship. If a king wants an image in order to legitimate his sovereignty, he would not bother about what the iconographic authorities prescribed. The mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the Grahi Buddha makes it a perfect representative for a king in need of religious legitimation. This is one of several possibilities, but in my opinion the most likely. More research about the religious and political relationship in the area needs to be done before we can say anything more definite about the Grahi Buddha, but I am convinced that it is worth the trouble.

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