

## THE AMOGHAPĀŚA – LOKEŚVARA IN ORISSA

Adalbert J. Gail  
Berlin

Next to Maitreya Avolokiteśvara, or more briefly Lokeśvara<sup>1</sup>, is the oldest Bodhisattva of an evolving Buddhist pantheon. In Gandhāran art no other individual Bodhisattva can be identified. Vajrapāṇi, protector of the wandering Buddha, is still a *yakṣa*, and whether Mañjuśrī is represented in Gandhāra remains a matter of debate (Quagliotti 1990).<sup>2</sup>

But even the lengthy development of an imposing Buddhist pantheon, Lokeśvara remains the most beloved Bodhisattva throughout the Buddhist world with his image being differentiated in various forms (Mallmann 1975: 105–114).

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One of these forms is Amoghapāśa, or the one with the unfailing noose. Although quite a prominent aspect of Lokeśvara, this form is not described in the most important compendia, the *Sādhnamālā* and the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*.

There are, however, testimonies in Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese textual collections. Meisezahl published descriptions preserved in the Tibetan Tanjur, originally deriving from India, of twelve-, ten-, six- and four-armed forms of Amoghapāśa (Leoshko 1985: 129).

The general attitude of scholars now seems to be that provided a particular image does not offer salient features pointing in another direction, the existence of a noose in one of Lokeśvara's hands allows the use of the denomination Amoghapāśa, whether two-, four-, six-, eight-, ten- or twelve-armed.

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Amoghapāśahṛdaya-dhāraṇī* Avalokiteśvara is also invoked as Lokeśvara (Meisezahl 1962: 296).

<sup>2</sup> In my view the depiction of Mañjuśrī in its most simple and natural form – Siddhaikavīra type with one hand, two arms with *varada mudrā* and *utpala* – begins only in the 7th century AD both in India and in Nepal.



*Fig. 1.* Four-armed Amoghapāśa. Pāla art, 9th century AD. Bihar. Patna Museum.<sup>3</sup>

Janice Leoshko, in a paper on the appearance of Amoghapāśa in Pāla period art (8th to 12th century) establishes that in the Pāla period of Bihar and Bengal, the homeland of Amoghapāśa seems to have been Bihar, and in particular the Gayā/Kurkihar area.

Among the six-armed pieces are two, in which the three left hands carry not only three emblems but four, *padma* and *pāśa* being combined (Leoshko 1985). These cases are from Bodhgayā (the Mahābodhi temple) and Patna Museum (fig. 1). This asymmetrical design, in which the noose appears as a continuation or duplication of the *padma* circle, is surely very unusual, even rare, and confined to the Gayā area of Bihar.

Let us now turn to Orissa, and to the Ratnagiri area some 100 km to the north of the capital Bhubaneswar. A four-armed Lokeśvara in the porch of Monastery 1 holds *kamaṇḍalu* and *padma* in the left hands, and *varada* and *aṣṣamālā* in the right (fig. 2).

The same distribution of emblems holds good for a Lokeśvara slab from Udayagiri nearby (fig. 3).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> All photos in this article are by the author.

<sup>4</sup> One more specimen lies on the ground, another one is in Ratnagiri museum.



*Fig. 2.* Four-armed Lokeśvara from the porch of Monastery 1, Ratnagiri, Cuttack District, Orissa. 9th/10th century AD.



*Fig. 3.* Four-armed Lokeśvara from Udayagiri, Cuttack District, Orissa. 9th/10th century AD.



*Fig. 4.* Four-armed Amoghapāśa, Monastery 1, Ratnagiri, Cuttack District, Orissa. 9th/10th century AD.



*Fig. 5.* Four-armed Amoghapāśa, Monastery 1, Ratnagiri, veranda. 9th/10th century AD.

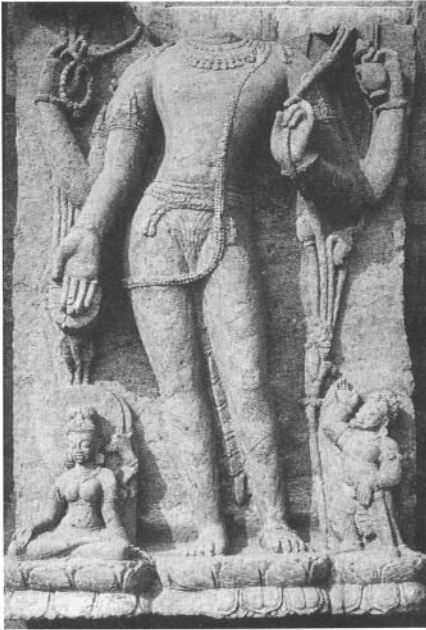


Fig. 6. Four-armed Amoghapāśa with Tārā and Hayagrīva. Ratnagiri, Monastery 1, 9th/10th century AD.



Fig. 7. Four-armed Amoghapāśa with Tathāgatas. Udayagiri area. 9th/10th century AD.

An Amoghapāśa from Ratnagiri, Vihāra 1, to the left of the staircase (Mitra 1983, I, Pl. CV) is also four-armed, but replaces the *kamaṇḍalu* by a *pāśa* held on top of the *padma* (fig. 4).

Our next Amoghapāśa is four-handed, but acts, however, like a six-handed figure. On his proper right he shows *varada-mudrā*, while the upper hand holds *akṣamālā* combined with the noose. The proper left lower arm both guides the *padma* stalk and touches the head of Hayagrīva who has been turned into a *pāśa-puruṣa*. Lokeśvara's upper left hand grasps a *kamaṇḍalu*. (fig. 5.)

These same features, in particular the combination of *akṣamālā* and *pāśa* in one hand, can be observed on a headless Lokeśvara from Ratnagiri (fig. 6) – the *padma* stalk now being disconnected from Hayagrīva – and on a slab erected in Udayagiri (fig. 7).

Now, the main point of comparison should be that both in Gayā District and in the Ratnagiri area the noose of Amoghapāśa is not really held in one of his hands but attached to another circular object: in Gayā to the lotus, in Ratnagiri to the *akṣamālā*. This way of handling the emblems by the sculptors cannot be accidental. Who is the borrowing party, and who gleaned the inspiration that he then modified in his own way?

I think the Gayā area was the source of the inspiration.

In conclusion, it can be said that

- 1) in general Buddhist art in Orissa was influenced to a great extent by ideas coming from Bihar and Bengal
- 2) in this particular case the fact that Gayā was a famous place of pilgrimage made an impact for the promulgation of ideas and images.

The concept of Avalokiteśvara as Amoghapāśa seems to have been conceived in Bihar.

In the Hindu context the noose is a negative symbol which refers to the captivity of sinners (Yama, Varuṇa). Buddhism turns the *pāśa* (noose) into a benevolent symbol, an instrument able to collect those to be saved from a non-Buddhist path. In that way it is unfailing (*amogha*) in promoting *mokṣa*.

The Orissa Amoghapāśa may be considered as a transformation of the Bihar model: it takes up the incongruence of arms and emblems, but avoids, however, Avalokiteśvara figures with more than four arms.

In comparison with the rich variety of forms conceived and realised in Nepal and Bengal, Orissa presents only the one-headed form, either two-armed or four-armed, and the latter is obviously dependent on a Bihar form.

## REFERENCES

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