

# On the pregnancy of Māyā III : Late episodes

A few more words on the textual sources

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## INTRODUCTION

The two preceding articles in this inquiry on the content of the textual tradition about the period of pregnancy of Māyā, mother of the Buddha, centered on two important Indian sources on the legendary biography of the Buddha. The first article made use of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, and especially of the section entitled *Samghabhedavastu*, whose manuscript, from Gilgit, has been edited by Prof. Raniero Gnoli. This section was translated (T. 1452) into Chinese by Yijing 義淨 at a late date, the mid-Tang period. The second article made use of the *Lalitavistara*, well known in China through two translations, the first, “archaic” (*Puyao jing* 普曜經, T. 186, 8 j.), by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護, and the later, a mid-Tang production (*Fanguang dazhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經, T.187, 12 j.), by Divākara 地婆訶羅. In this and later articles, I intend to look at what was written on Māyā in a few other texts which have been associated with the “biography” of the Buddha. Most of them belong, for their translation or for their edition, to the end of the period of the Six Dynasties and to the Sui period, broadly speaking to the end of the 5th century and the 6th century. It is no longer the pregnancy of Māyā, whose destiny had been defined in a few words: “ten months of pregnancy, seven days of life,” which concerns us, but, after her accession to the world of the gods, her role as a protecting deity for her son and as an audience for

his teaching.

At the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century, a “systematisation” of the life of the Buddha was launched by encyclopedists such as Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) and his disciple Baochang 寶唱, whose works will be studied later. However, one must also take into account the translation at the end of the 6th century of an influential and voluminous narrative, often inappropriately called the “Sūtra of the Departure” *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*.<sup>1</sup> Its Chinese title, which will be used here, is *Fobenxingji jing* 佛本行集經 (T.190, 40 j.), which could be translated as “Sūtra on the Collected Original Activities of the Buddha.” As we shall see, this narrative shows a few correspondences with the *Buddhacarita*. S. Beal, who translated into English both the *Fobenxingji jing*<sup>2</sup> in 1875 and the Chinese *Buddhacarita* (T.192)<sup>3</sup> in 1879, could refer only to the relation between the *Fobenxingji jing* and the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara*, which around his time, had been translated into French by Philippe Edouard Foucaux, first from its Tibetan version,<sup>4</sup> then from its Sanskrit original.<sup>5</sup> He did

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<sup>1</sup> As deplored by Matsuda Yūko in “Chinese Versions of the Buddha’s Biography” (*IBK* 37. 1 [1988], p. 482, n. 20), *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra* is a title attributed in the Nanjio catalogue to two completely different works, T. 188 (Nj. 509), a short archaic biography of the Buddha, and T. 190 (Nj. 680), which will be studied here.

<sup>2</sup> *The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha, From the Chinese-Sanskrit*. London: Trübner & Co., 1875.

<sup>3</sup> *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King, A Life of Buddha by Asvaghosha Bodhisattva, translated from Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha, A. D. 420 and from Chinese into English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879 (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XIX). Multiple reprints.

<sup>4</sup> *Rgya tch’er rol pa, ou Développement des Jeux, contenant l’histoire du Bouddha Çakya Mouni*. Tr. sur la version tibétaine du Bkash hgyour, et revu sur l’original sanscrit (*Lalitavistara*). 2 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1847-

not have access to the Sanskrit edition of the *Buddhacarita*, by E. B. Cowell,<sup>6</sup> which appeared later, in 1893.

The account of the *Fobenxingji jing*, ending after the first conversions by the Buddha, crosses two Indian traditions: the “narrative” current of the *Lalitavistara*, ending after the *bodhi* of the Buddha, and the “epic” current of the *Buddhacarita*, more literary but endowed with a global vision of the career of the Buddha, including his *nirvāṇa*. (A few remarks on Māyā in the Sanskrit *Buddhacarita* will introduce here the Māyā tales from the *Fobenxingji jing*).

Another characteristic of the *Fobenxingji jing* is that this work, coming late and collecting data from various sources, helps us better understand those fugitive pieces of information telling that at crucial moments Māyā remained close to her son after her passing away. It throws some light on an allegation, found in one of the four Chinese versions of the early *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, on the presence of Māyā at the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, and on another allegation, found only in the Sanskrit version of the *Lalitavistara*, but popularized in Tibetan and in Mongolian, on the presence of Māyā when the Bodhisattva was close to death, having reached the extreme limit of his physical resistance at the end of his six years of severe asceticism. These episodes achieve some consistency when confronted with episodes from the *Fobenxingji jing*. Generally speaking, the pattern, in Buddhist biographies, of the *Mater dolorosa* (which will be alluded to hereunder) deserves a comparative study.

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1848.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Lalita Vistara. Développement des Jeux, contenant l'histoire du Bouddha Çakya Mouni: depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa prédication.* Tr. du sanscrit. 2 vols. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1884-1892. Repr. Paris: 1988.

<sup>6</sup> *The Buddha-Karita of Aśvaghosha.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893.

The *Fobenxingji jing* is the most detailed and voluminous biography of the early years of the Buddha in Chinese translation. For the volume of information, it can be compared only with the traditions passed down in different sections (*vastu*) of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. Although its compilation in India seems to have been comparatively late, its translation by Jñānagupta 闍那崛多在 the Sui Period (589-618) seems to have influenced the later Chinese hagiography and iconography of the Buddha.

*The tradition of the Buddhacarita and the Fobenxingji jing*

In the early Chinese translations of texts on the life of the Buddha, we are confronted with a vast multiplicity of episodes. The first approach to these episodes is to relate them to the Vinaya and the Āgama traditions, as they are retained in Chinese or eventually in Pāli, in Sanskrit or in Tibetan. Most of them may be easily identified. In some cases, as, for example, the tradition on what has been called recently “the bad karma of the Buddha,”<sup>7</sup> a comparison between the different traditions may lead to a more refined stage, where the identification of sectarian characteristics becomes possible. In any case, the wish expressed in 1958 by Etienne Lamotte,<sup>8</sup> for a synopsis of

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<sup>7</sup> See Jonathan Walters, “The Buddha’s Bad Karma: a Problem in the History of Theravāda Buddhism”, *Numen* XXXVII. I (1990), pp. 70-95. The following articles take also into account the Chinese sources: Paul Harrison, “Some Reflections on the Personality of the Buddha”, *Otani Gakuho* LXXW. 4 (1995), pp. 1-29; Guangxing, “The Bad Karma of the Buddha,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 19. 1 (2002), pp. 19-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, p. 733. See also by the same author, “La légende du Buddha,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 134 (1948), pp. 37-71. The collective attempt launched in Tōyō University, “A study of the Biography of Sakya-muni Based on the Early Buddhist Scriptural (*sic*) Sources,” seven

all the lives of the Buddha remains a necessity.

The chronology of these translations remains controversial. While Erik Zürcher<sup>9</sup> considers that *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (T.184, 2 j.) and *Zhong ben qi jing* 中本起經 (T.196, 2 j.), are parts of a single work that is the earliest specimen of a life of the Buddha in Chinese, Antonello Palumbo<sup>10</sup> has argued that the first text may be later than its traditional attribution to the translator Kang Mongxiang 康孟詳, active at the end of the 2nd century. A more general problem is the parallel existence until the mid-Tang period of a certain type of “incomplete” biography, ending with the events following the *bodhi* of the Buddha, and of another type of “complete” biography, ending with the events following his *parinirvāṇa*.

Needless to say this bibliographical qualification of “complete” and “incomplete” does not mean that most of the monographical biographies of the Buddha were left “unfinished.” It should be more fair to substitute “*bodhi*-ending” for “incomplete” and “*nirvāṇa*-ending” for “complete.”

The *bodhi*-ending biographies in Chinese belong to what seems to be an earlier type, given to the antiquity of *Tai zi rui ying ben qi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (T. 185, 2 j. ), attributed to Zhi Qian 支謙,<sup>11</sup> with more

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volumes published by the Chūō Academic Research Institute, Tokyo, since 1999, deserves to be enlarged and encouraged.

<sup>9</sup> *Het leven van de Boeddha Vertaald uit de vroegste Chinese overlevering* [T. 184 & T. 196] Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> “Dharmarakṣa and Kaṅṭhaka: The origins of the White Horse Monasteries in Early Medieval China” in Giovanni Verardi and Silvio Vita, eds., *Buddhist Asia 1 : Papers from the First Conference of Buddhist Studies Held in Naples in May 2001*. Kyōto : Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2003, p. 204, n. 107.

<sup>11</sup> See Jan Nattier, “The ten epithets of the Buddha in the Translations of Zhi Qian” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology* (Soka University, Tokyo) 2003, p. 210.

certainly than the attribution of the above-mentioned T. 184 to Kang Mongxiang. The *nirvāṇa*-ending biographies appear a little later in the Chinese ambience, but they belong to a different kind of literary works. They are poetical works, translations of versified *Mahākāvyas* which seem to have enjoyed some popularity in the Kushan kingdom. Among the Buddhist *Mahākāvyas*, apart from a few fragments, the only remnant Sanskrit text seems to be the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa.

In the case of this Sanskrit literary masterpiece, it seems that it reached us in an incomplete state. The Sanskrit version is interrupted at the events following the illumination of the Buddha, but its translation Chinese (T.192), rendered into English by S. Beal,<sup>12</sup> and its Tibetan translation reveal that the original Sanskrit composition was extended until the events following the death of the Buddha.

The Sanskrit verses of the *Buddhacarita* also comes down to us with a puzzling number of variants that may have been introduced at different times difficult to determine. In 1936 E. H. Johnston<sup>13</sup> produced a “purified” edition of the text, based on ancient manuscripts, older than those that E. B. Cowell<sup>14</sup> had used for his own edition of the *Buddhacarita*. Johnston has also taken into account, in his translation, the content of those verses existing only in Tibetan and in Chinese. Moreover, Johnston prepared a concordance of the verses originating in the Sanskrit *Buddhacarita* that found their way in the *Fobenxingji jing*.<sup>15</sup>

The popular editions used in contemporary India are close to the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf *supra* note 3.

<sup>13</sup> *The Buddhacarita: or, Acts of the Buddha. Part I Sanskrit Text*. Lahore 1936 (Multiple reprints), pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>14</sup> *Supra*, note 6.

<sup>15</sup> E. H. Johnston, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-165.

Cowell edition. They contain interesting verses discarded by Johnston, especially about Māyā's pregnancy. Reinforcing a tradition that I had thought limited to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, these verses refer to the longings (*dohada*) of the pregnant Māyā toward the Lumbinī garden and to the attention she showed to poor people. There is even an allusion to her curative power. These Sanskrit verses, considered as spurious, have no equivalent in the corresponding Chinese passages, either in the versified T. 192 or in the *Fobenxingji jing*, that can be considered as a repository of some of the verses of the *Buddhacarita*.

Let me conclude this *excursus* by pointing out that the question of the *Buddhacarita*, only alluded here, deserves more investigation. Especially rewarding would be the comparison of the Chinese translations of three complete, more or less poetical, biographies of the Buddha of the *Buddhacarita* type. They have an Indian origin. Chronologically, the first of those texts is the partly versified *Sengqieluocho suoji jing* 僧伽羅刹所集經 (T. 194, 3 j., complete biography with an appendix on Aśoka), translated by Saṃghabhadra 僧伽跋澄 in 384. The origin of this composition may have been, according to Lamotte,<sup>16</sup> a *Buddhacarita* in verses and prose authored in Gandhāra by Saṃgharakṣa 僧伽羅刹, master of Kaniṣka. The second text is the already mentioned versified *Fosuoxing zan* 佛所行讚 (T.192, 5 j.), the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa 馬鳴 in 28 chapters (from the birth of the Bodhisattva to the division of the relics), translated by Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 between 414 et 421. The third text is the versified *Fobenxing jing* 佛本行經 (T. 193, 7 j., complete life up to the division of the relics), written by an unknown author and translated by Bao-yun 寶雲 between 427 and 449. It seems that of these three “poetical” lives of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Op cit.*, p 726

Buddha, the last one found a larger audience in China, as shown by the late Chinese hagiography and iconography of the Buddha.

*Place of the Fobexingji jing in the literature about the life of the Buddha*

The *Fobexingji jing* is an ample and rather verbose biography of the Buddha in 60 *juan* and 60 chapters (the division in chapters not coinciding with the division into *juan*). This Sui translation was late among the biographies translated from an Indian language. Only the mid-Tang Divākara's "new" translation of the *Lalitavistara* (T. 187) and the *Zhongxumohedi jing* 衆許摩訶帝經 (T. 191, 13 j.), a Song re-writing of some episodes of the Buddha's life, already made known by Yijing's translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, were issued in later periods. In the West, its abbreviated translation "from Chinese-Sanscrit" into English by S. Beal in 1875 as *The Romantic Legend of the Buddha*, acquired some notoriety.

In this uninterrupted narrative, the best known passage is perhaps its last lines,<sup>17</sup> devoted to the name to be given to the work. In this kind of colophon, it is said that by the Mahāsāṃghikas it is called "Great Matter" *Dashi* 大事 (*Mahāvastu*); by the Sarvāstivādins, it is called "Great Ornament" *Dazhuangyan* 大莊嚴 (approximately the title that will be adopted by Divākara for his version of the *Lalitavistara*); by the Kāśyapiyas, it is called "Cause and Conditions of the Life of the Buddha" *Fosheng yinyuan* 佛生因緣; by the Dharmaguptakas: "Original Activity of the Buddha Śākyamuni" *Shijiamuni fo benxing* 釋迦牟尼佛本行 and by the Mahīśāsakas: "Root of the Vinaya-ṭīṭaka" *Binizang genben* 毘尼藏根本.

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<sup>17</sup> T. 190, j. 60, p. 932a17-21.

With its universalizing character, such a proclamation was perhaps made in order to illustrate the lack of importance of sectarian distinctions in the case of a narrative work. We may also observe that in this list are not included the different *Buddhacaritas* issued during the age of Kaniṣka and known through Chinese translations. It shows definitely that the author of the text translated as *Fobenxingji jing* was a late-comer, informed on the work of his predecessors. Did the Indian Buddhists resent the need for a kind of synoptical compilation for the biography of the Buddha ? The mention of the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* as one (and the last) of the listed texts weakens rather than strengthen the theory of Erich Frauwallner that an Epic of the life of the Buddha might have been the ancient *Skandhaka*, an original composition preceding the Vinaya.<sup>18</sup>

In the *Taishō Daizōkyō* edition, we find here and there references from the *Fobenxingji jing* to alternative Chinese translations or transcriptions used in sectarian works. This work appears thus as a large compilation, often close to the *Lalitavistara*. It is known from the *Shijia pu* 釋迦譜 (T. 2040) of Sengyou, the first systematic Chinese-made compilation of the events of the life of the Buddha, that in the Qi period the most used life of the Buddha was the *Pu yao jing* 普曜經 (T.186), the archaic version of the *Lalitavistara*, translated by Dharmarakṣa, but that in the Liang period, it was superseded by the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經 (T.189, 4 j.) or *Yinguo jing* [jap. *Ingakyō*], a vivacious work of rather popular character, translated by Guṇabhadra.<sup>19</sup> Was Jñānagupta commissioned to translate a more

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<sup>18</sup> *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Serie Orientale Roma 7, Roma: Ismeo, 1956.

<sup>19</sup> See H. Durt, “On the Selection of the Episode in the Chinese Buddhist Anthologies of the 6th century,” forthcoming in the *Acts of the Symposium* on

detailed and comprehensive work, compensating for some inadequacy in the *Yinguo jing* ? As far as I know, no document points to such a substitution, but the late Chinese hagiography and iconography of the Buddha show that extracts from the *Fobenxingji jing* took up more space to the detriment of the *Yinguo jing*. Such a situation did not exist in Japan where the production of illustrated *Ingakyō* from the Nara period until the Kamakura period attests the standing popularity of this *sūtra*.

*The Māyā, legend and the Fobenxingji jing*

Let us review the new informations on Māyā furnished by the *Fobenxingji jing*, and eventually confront them with other traditions.

1. No *dohada*<sup>20</sup> is reported about the pregnancy of Māyā.

2. In two passages the healing character of Māyā is emphasized (in conformity with the *Lalitavistara*). The pregnancy, or better the presence of the future Buddha in the womb of his mother, is described under twelve aspects. This description occurs in the chapter 5.<sup>21</sup> In the 12th aspect, one learns of the healing power of Māyā: through her *darśana* for people coming to see her, through an imposition of her right hand on the head of the patient, and through different herbal

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“The Life of the Buddha: New Directions in Research.”

<sup>20</sup> *Dohada* fanciful stories are not absent from this extended biography of the Buddha which includes many *jātakas*. See, e. g. the story of the female crocodile’s craving to eat the heart of a monkey (T. 190, j. 31, p. 798b-799a = *Sumsumāra Jātaka*, no 208) or the story of the queen crow’s craving for a meal prepared for a human king (*Ibid.*, j. 52, p. 895c-896b = *Supatta Jātaka*, no 292). Cf. the first article on the pregnancy of Māyā, *JICABS* 5 (2002), notes 36 and 39.

<sup>21</sup> T. 190, j. 7, p. 684b10-685b22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 685b8-22

remedies made available to people not able to see her.<sup>22</sup> A new evocation of ten aspects of the prodigies of the pregnancy of Māyā is made by the hermit Asita in chapter 9.<sup>23</sup> A short allusion to the healing power of Māyā's hand and of her herbal remedies is the object of the tenth and last aspect.<sup>24</sup>

3. Māyā is depicted as very active during the seven days of life left to her after having given birth to the bodhisattva: she asks questions of her husband, King Śuddhodana, about the destiny of king-turning-the-wheel promised to her son, in chapter 7;<sup>25</sup> she weeps with Asita when he announces that the bodhisattva will reach illumination at the age of 35, in chapter 8.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, with her servants and nurses, she is concerned with the thorny problem of the obeisances that her baby deserves to give or to receive himself. Concerned by this problem are King Śuddhodana and the Brahmin at his court,<sup>27</sup> the clan gods<sup>28</sup> and Asita.<sup>29</sup>

4. The following mentions of Māyā are all related with her premature death. Chapter 10 lists three reasons<sup>30</sup> making this death unavoidable: the bliss of her ten months of pregnancy could not be repeated, the shock of the great departure would have destroyed her, the happiness caused by the successes of her son would have been unbearable. We are then told that after becoming a deity in the Trāyastriṃśadeva heaven, Māyā still visited Śuddhodana to tell him that the bliss of the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 10, p. 698b11-c7

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 698c3-6

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 8, 690b20-691 a22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 10, p. 697a16-17.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 8, p. 690b1-10. On the question on the greetings of king Śuddhodana to his son, see *Hōbōgirin*, V (1979), pp. 375-376, s. v. Chōrai 頂禮.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 8, p. 692a2-11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 9, p. 694b22-23

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 11, p. 701a27-b10.

heaven was not different of the bliss of her pregnancy and that he need not suffer for her. On that occasion, she expressed a few *gāthās* of veneration for her son.<sup>31</sup>

5. The almost complete absence<sup>32</sup> of mention of Māyā in the episodes between the great departure and the reaching of the *bodhi* contrasts with the abundant references to the anguish of Śuddhodana. Just after the *bodhi*, in the chapter 34, appears a singular, although very short, Māyā-related episode. Mention is made of the visit of Māyā, under the guise of a jade woman, to Kapilavastu to be the first to announce to King Śuddhodana and to “Yaśodharā, Mother of Rāhula” that during the previous night, Prince Siddhārtha conquered the *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*.<sup>33</sup> We are here confronted with an interesting contrast with the apparition of Māyā in the chapter XVII: *Duṣkaracaryā-parivarta* of the *Lalita vistara* (existing only in the Sanskrit version).<sup>34</sup>

*Apparition of Māyā in the context of the bodhi in the Lalitavistara and in the Fobenxingji jing*

In the *Lalitavistara*, there is a versified dialogue between Māyā, having left her heaven, and her son reaching the crucial limit of his six years of extreme penance. He seems to be dying. In a moving lamentation, Māyā recalls to the bodhisattva that it was to no avail that he

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 701b11-28.

<sup>32</sup> In chapter 28, meeting King Bimbisāra, the bodhisattva presents himself as Siddhārtha, son of the Śākya king Śuddhodana and of Māyā. A gloss appearing only in this passage points out that Māyā means “Illusion” 幻 and Siddhārtha “Realization of advantages” 成利 in the language of Sui (*Ibid.*, j. 24, p. 764a 1-2).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, j. 31, p. 796c12-23.

<sup>34</sup> Ed. Lefman 1902, pp. 252. 15-253. 22. Transl. Foucaux, p. 218-219.

made his own victorious proclamation after his birth in Lumbinī and that the prophecies of Asita were made about his future as a Buddha or as a king-turning-the-wheel. At first, the bodhisattva does not recognize his mother in the condition of *dolorosa* (*suduḥkhitā*), but soon he consoles her and assures her that he will triumph.

In the *Fobenxingji jing*, Māyā, does not have the same motivation to leave her heaven. There is no mention of her compassion for the trials of her son; she rather wishes to dissipate the doubts of her husband. Prince Siddhārtha has realized the supreme *bodhi* and defeated Māra. There is no more reason to suffer: Māyā, appears as a jade woman not as a *mater dolorosa*.

These two scenes, both the *lamento* of the *Lalitavistara* and the short *allegro* of the *Fobenxingji jing* seem to be exceptional, without correspondences in the earlier biographical literature about the Buddha. In later literature in Tibet and in Mongolia, the meeting of Māyā with her dying son will become important among the “Twelve Deeds of the Buddha.”<sup>35</sup>

The only passage in earlier literature which could be compared (on a very modest scale) to the *Lalitavistara* scene is the *gāthā*, pronounced by Māyā, in the concert of lamentations by the bhikṣus and divinities surrounding the body of the Buddha after his passing in

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<sup>35</sup> See Nicholas Poppe, *The twelve Deeds of Buddha, A Mongolian Version of the Lalitavistara, Mongolian Text, notes, and English Translation in Asiatische Forschungen*, Bonn, vol. 23, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967, pp. 16-17, 138-139; Louis Ligeti, *Les douze actes du Buddha: Arban Qoyar Johiyangui üiles de Clios-Kyi 'Od-Zer, traduction [du Tibétain en Mongol] de Ses-Rab señge* in *Monumenta Linguae Mongolicae Collecta*, vol. 5, Budapest: Akemiai Kiado 1974, p. 37. The Chinese work to which Ligeti refers, p. 24, could be an adaptation from the Tibetan made in the Ming period.

*nirvāṇa*. It is centered on the reference to Lumbinī.<sup>36</sup> Māyā, declares that the Buddha is back in Lumbinī where he was born and where he is now leaving his body of impermanence. This tradition is also isolated in the literature of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. It is attested only in the Chinese version of the *Āgama*.<sup>37</sup>

*The grief of parents at their child's critical moment*

As observed before, the *Lalitavistara* and *Fobenxingji jing* are rather closely related texts, but such a relation does not exist between these two texts and the *Āgama*. Their common references to dramatic meetings of the Buddha with his mother should not to be rejected as sentimental additions. The family link is a leitmotif of the lives of the Buddha. Quite a few events in the biography of the Buddha, even after his great departure, deal with Māyā, not only the three episodes mentioned here, but also the predication to Māyā in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and the story, popular only in the Far East, of the nirvaned Buddha surging from his coffin to bid a last farewell to his mother.<sup>38</sup> A similar remark could be made about the link of the Buddha with Śuddhodana, his father; Mahāprajāpati, his foster mother; Yaśodharā, his spouse, and Rāhula, his son.

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<sup>36</sup> See the commentary on this scene by André Bareau, *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapīṭaka et les Vinayapīṭaka anciens: II. Les derniers mois, le Parinirvāṇa et les funérailles*, tome 2, Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, pp. 166-168.

<sup>37</sup> T.1, j. 2, p. 27a2-14.

<sup>38</sup> See "L'apparition du Buddha à sa mère après son nirvāṇa dans le *Sūtra de Mahāmāyā* (T. 383) et dans le *Sūtra de la Mère du Buddha* (T. 2919)" in J. P. Drège, ed., *De Dunhuang au Japon, Etudes chinoises et bouddhiques offertes à Michel Soyumié*, Paris-Genève: Droz, pp. 1-24.

There is no wonder that family links take a special importance at the moment of the death of one of the protagonists. The *Lalitavistara* shows Māyā, present at the culminating moment in the fasting of her son. Describing the same “ascetical” period in the career of the future Buddha, *Lalitavistara*, *Buddhacarita* and *Fobenxingji jing* are filled with details about the anxiety of Śuddhodana. These references to the family nexus are not surprising in a mythological or hagiographical context. They could even be considered as a requirement in such accounts.

The Indian roots of these accounts are very clear, but it is also possible to see how the family links were emphasized in China in systematic compilations of the events of the life of the Buddha.<sup>39</sup> Some light could be thrown on this aspect of the Buddha legend through a comparison with the tale about the paramount example of filial piety in Indian Buddhism, the *Śyāmaka-jātaka*.

#### *Comparison with the Sāma/Śyāmaka Jātaka*

In the Indian Buddhist literary tradition, the *jātaka* of the bodhisattva called Sāma in Pāli<sup>40</sup> and Śyāmaka in the Sanskrit *Mahāvastu*<sup>41</sup> can be considered as the paramount example not only of filial piety but also of parental devotion toward a son. The *Mahāvastu* story is told in reference to the ordeal of the father of the Buddha, anxious for his son after his great departure. The Pāli *Jātaka*

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *supra* note 19.

<sup>40</sup> V. Fausböll ed. *The Jātaka* no 540, PTS Repr. (1964) vol. VI, pp. 69-95 ; Transl. E. B. Cowell and W. H. B. Rouse, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Delhi Repr. vol. VI, pp. 38-52.

<sup>41</sup> E. Sénart ed. vol. II, Paris: Société Asiatique, 1890, pp. 209. 8-219. 16; English Translation by J. J. Jones, Vol. II, London: Luzac and co., 1952, pp. 199-209.

story introduces a goddess whose role is rather similar to the role of Māyā although no specific reference to Māyā is made.

In Chinese<sup>42</sup>, the story of Śyamaka (or Śyāma), generally called Chan 談, has been popular, but it is the element of filial piety that has been emphasized. This tale became the only Buddhist story introduced among the twenty-four Confucian examples of filial piety 二十四孝.<sup>43</sup>

Let us first consider the versified appendix<sup>44</sup> of this *jātaka* in the *Mahāvastu*. In these verses, the Buddha explains that the parental solicitude, which has to be repaid by filial piety, was manifest in the case of King Śuddhodana constantly enquiring about the health of his son during the years of asceticism that followed his great departure. In the text,<sup>45</sup> this solicitude is paralleled by the zeal shown by the the parents of Śyāmaka who attempted to revive their dead son. In all the versions of the popular Sāma / Śyāmaka story, his blind parents are led to the body of the boy by the king of Kāśī (Benares) who had mistakenly killed him. The performance of a “proclamation of verity” (*satyavacana*) will restore his life. In the Indian stories, the act of ver-

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<sup>42</sup> See T. 152, j. 5, no 43, p. 24b-25a ; French Translation: Edouard Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitaka chinois*, vol. I, Paris: [repr.] Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962, no 43, pp. 156-160; T. 194, j. 1, pp. 116c27-117a10 T. 203, j. 1, no 2, pp. 448b6-449a2; Translation: Charles Willemen, *The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables*, Tokyo: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994, no 2, pp. 11 - 13 ; T. 174 and T. 175.

<sup>43</sup> The bibliography about the Confucian examples of filial piety is abundant. In the popular editions the story of Chan whose name has been transformed in Tan is normally the 4th example. See Kuroda Akira 黒田彰, *Kōshiden no kenkyū, 考子伝之研究*, Bukkyō Daigaku Yōryōbunkasōsho 5, Kyōto; Shibunkaku, 2001.

<sup>44</sup> *Mahāvastu* II, p. 219-231, Transl. II, p. 209-218.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219. 11-16, Transl. II, p. 209.

ity is performed by the parents. In the Chinese versions, it is performed by the dying son.

If we consider the Pāli version of the tale, the *Sāma-jātaka*, the act of verity (*saccakiriya*) of the parents is supported (and perhaps made effective) by a goddess named Bahusodarī / Bahusundarī, residing in the Gandhamādana of the Himavat. She is herself a former mother (*mātubhūtapubbā*) of Sāma in his seventh existence before this one (*sattame attabhāve*). She constantly pours affection on this bodhisattva son (*putta-sinehena bodhisattaṃ niccam āvajjati*).<sup>46</sup> She plans to make an act of verity when the old and blind parents of Sāma are led by the hunting king to the dead body of their son. Thereafter,<sup>47</sup> the act of verity extolling the virtues of Sāma will be pronounced in succession by his mother and his father; then the protecting goddess will claim that nobody is dearer (*piyattara*) to her than Sāma. Without mention of the god Sakka (Indra), who intervenes in other versions, these three acts of verity result in the resurrection of the boy.

After the parallel drawn by the *Mahāvastu* between the father of Śyāmaka and Śuddhodana, we may infer from the Pāli *Jātaka* a second parallel between the goddess Bahusodarī and Māyā, who became herself a deity after her premature death. Both mothers, although they have entered into other existences, are taking care of a beloved son .

## CONCLUSION

The very short allusion in the *Fobenxingji jing* to a manifestation of Māyā as a messenger long after her death could be judged a rather

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<sup>46</sup> The introduction of the goddess in the tale is made *ibid*, p. 83, 1. 22 - p. 84, 1. 14 (vv. 328-330).

<sup>47</sup> The triple *saccakiriya* is told *ibid*, p. 92, 1. 3 - 25.

slight support for considerations about her role in the legend of the *bodhi*. In the same context, the *Lalitavistara's* account of the presence of Māyā at the worst moment of the quest of the *bodhi* seems to be a more relevant piece of information on how Buddhism has developed the legend of Māyā in Indian ambience. A complementary fugitive piece of information is the presence of Māyā at the moment of the entry of the Buddha into Nirvāṇa, attested in one version of the *Āgamic Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* but perhaps also in some figurative representations from Gandhāra. An invitation to comparison is the tale appearing in the Pāli version of the *Sāma-jātaka* about the intervention of a former mother of a bodhisattva, who had become a goddess and who helped her former son to recover from a mortal wound. These are all elements that may contribute to a better understanding of the “return” of Māyā, in two important legends concerning the end of the Buddha's career: his preaching to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and his rising from his coffin to greet his mother for the last time. These two episodes are known in some *sūtras* and have been integrated in the comparatively ancient Chinese compilation of Sengyou, the *Shijia pu*; they received a wide diffusion in late Chinese hagiography and iconography of the Buddha, as will be shown in a later article.

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