

Essays on East Asian Religion and Culture

**Festschrift in honour of Nishiwaki Tsuneki
on the occasion of his 65th birthday**

Edited by Christian Wittern and Shi Lishan

Editorial committee for the Festschrift
in honour of Nishiwaki Tsuneki

Kyoto 2007

Has Xuanzang really been in Mathurā?
Interpretatio Sinica or Interpretatio Occidentalia — How to
Critically Read the Records of the Chinese Pilgrim*

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Due to the scarce textual material for the study of the history of Indian Buddhism the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrims¹ have attracted the attention of scholars working in fields such as archaeology, history of arts, history of religion (esp. Buddhism), history in general, etc. *De facto* there is almost no book written on an Indian historical subject from the first millennium C.E. which does not refer to these pilgrims' reports. The most quoted source is certainly the *magnus opus* of the Tang-period pilgrim Xuanzang, the *Datang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [Record of the Western Regions (compiled in the period) of the Great Tang], submitted to the throne in the year 646, a source which is usually used together with the biography of Xuanzang 玄奘, the *Datang cien si sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐慈恩寺三藏法師傳 [Biography of the Dharma master Tripitaka from the Cien-monastery (compiled in the period) of the Great Tang], written by Xuanzang's disciple Huili 慧立 in 664. Xuanzang has indeed become the hero not only

* This paper is based on a lecture I already gave at the University of Freiburg by the kind invitation of Prof. Oskar von Hinüber in November 1997, but it has been considerably enlarged, revised and again presented as the Kyoto Lecture of the EFEO / ISEAS in October 2005. The author is aware that the title of the paper reflects—to the degree of plagiarism—the title of an article by Barrett 1990; it had, however, already been chosen before Barrett's article was published. I have to thank my colleague James Hegarty, Cardiff University, for having taken the pain of correcting my GermEnglish.

¹ I will not enter here in a discussion of the applicability of the term pilgrim but only want indicate my awareness that this matter depends very much on the understanding and definition of pilgrimage. I refer to my discussion in Deeg 2005: 45ff.

for scholars of positivist 19th and early 20th century but also for all kind of “pilgrims” on their search for the wisdom of Asia² or their own Chinese cultural identity.³ With this popularisation of the historicists’ view that whatever the famous pilgrims reports has to be taken at face value became totally disconnected from the critical discourse of historical scholarship.⁴

The main point of comparison and countercheck for a lot of pieces of information about Buddhist India and India in general found in the *Xiyu ji* is the report of the earlier Chinese pilgrim Faxian 法顯 who travelled in India at the beginning of the 5th century A.D.; he has written a travelogue called *Foguo ji* 佛國記 [Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms], or *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳 [Record of the eminent monk Faxian].⁵

These two texts—beside the travel account of Song Yun 宋雲 and Huichao 慧超 and the bits and pieces on India spread in Chinese Buddhist biographical and historiographical literature—, although undoubtedly very valuable for the study of Indian History and the History of Indian Buddhism, have not been studied in a comparative and critical way by Western scholars. Without using a methodology and hermeneutic framework of contextualizing the pilgrim records with e.g. the narratives and legends found in Buddhist literature preserved in the various “classical” Buddhist languages, comparing their relation to the findings of archaeology

² See, for instance, Wriggins 1996 or, written on a more individual travel report basis, Bernstein 2001.

³ See Sun 2004. A similar case of searching Buddhist identity is the case of Japanese pilgrims to India in the early 20th century: see Jaffe 2004.

⁴ Language is only part of the problem—mastering the certainly not easy Chinese of Xuanzang and at the same time being at least informed about the Central Asian and South Asian cultural environment of the past of which the pilgrim is taken account. It is probably too one-sided but highly illustrative to say that with Watters’ study the critical work on Xuanzang in a Western language has disappeared. The matter is different with Japanese scholarship which has provided a huge and encyclopaedic wealth of commentarial literature and studies on Xuanzang’s text and its historical interpretation: as only two examples cf. Adachi 1942, and Mizutani 1999. In recent years there has been quite a lot of research on the *Xiyu ji* of which the annotated edition of the text by Ji Xianlin 1985 and his research group has been the most impressive outcome.

⁵ Deeg 2005.

and history of arts, etc. it is certainly impossible to draw final conclusions about the credibility of the records—whether their facts and their information are to be taken as witnesses of objective historicity, as regional traditions or as texts moulded after certain patterns of inner-Buddhist or intercultural Chinese *topoi*. If this negligence of a sound philological and contextual research of the pilgrims' accounts is understandable by the fact that classical Chinese is not the first-choice language of scholars working on Buddhist South-Asia, it is, however, not tolerable although again understandable in the light of the lack of more modern scholarship, that scholars still refer to and quote the old translations of these texts like Beal's, Watters',⁶ Julien's, Giles', Legge's, etc.,⁷ without a critical evaluation of the accuracy of these translations. The situation is even worse and more deplorable because of the quantity and quality of these studies, in the case of Chinese and Japanese scholarship widely ignored due to the linguistic barrier on the side of Western scholars.

The lack of critical studies on the pilgrim accounts has not only led to a clear preference of scholars in using Xuanzang's 玄奘 text, the *Xiyu ji* but also to a rather naïve way of using this text, a way which I would call a typical positivistic *interpretatio occidentalia* in the Orientalist style. The underlying stereotypes seem to be that: a) Chinese are in general more rational and interested in hardcore-facts than Indians and Xuanzang in particular, sanctified as a great translator and deep thinker who "founded" a branch of the Yogācāra-school in China,⁸ is reliable as an eye-witness; b) a misconceiving of the genre insofar as the pilgrim records are taken to be pure documentary texts without taking into account the context in which they were written; c) a detailed and longer description contains more objective information than a shorter and fragmentary one.

The reason for such an uncritical and uncontextualised approach is, as I have just indicated, that fact the Xuanzang provides in many cases the

⁶ Watters 1904/1905. The odd situation becomes clear if it is taken in consideration that Watters' book is preferred by the majority of Western scholars to the translation made by Beal 1884. Watters' text is usually taken as a translation while it is, in many parts, a paraphrase of Xuanzang's text.

⁷ For an introduction see my monograph on Faxian: Deeg 2005.

⁸ Cf. Lusthaus 2002.

most extent and reliable version of a certain legend or a certain region in Central Asia and India. It should, however, be emphasized, that in not a few cases and not least because of the fact that Xuanzang did not visit all the places he gives account of by himself, but reported his information achieved by hearsay—as is clear in the case of his extensive account on Siṃhala, modern Śrī Lankā⁹—or even by just collecting and using material from the same kind of texts written by his country-fellowmen, as I will try to show in this paper. In these cases the preference for Xuanzang’s text may lead to wrong conclusions and vain archaeological searches.

Such an uncritical reception and use of Xuanzang’s text up to the present is the more striking, because other historical or geographical texts, e.g. of the Greek antique or of the European middle-ages were already very early on made the subject of strict text-critical study. This happened for instance with Cornelius Publius Tacitus’ *Germania* which is no longer recognised as an objective historical report on Germanic tribes by the Roman author—as was the case up to the middle of the 20th century—but, instead, has been analysed in terms of the text’s use of the common metaphors and topics of Roman xenology and and the “cultural-propagandistic” program of the author who after all did not write as an ethnographer or anthropologist in the modern sense but with a specific agenda as a Roman officer and politician.¹⁰

The same process of reinterpretation has occurred in the recent years with other genres of medieval literature which has—at least concerning the contents—an even closer relation with the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims: the Christian pilgrim reports on Palestine. Illustrative for our subject is one text of this group which has received most attention from readers, the travel diary written by the knight John of Mandeville,

⁹ This stands in some contrast to Faxian how had spent two years in Śrī Lankā’s Abhayagiri-vihāra and whose historical information in his report on the island is probably taken from this monastery’s chronicle (P. *vamsa*) not longer existent, as a detailed comparative study with the Mahāvamsa and the Dīpavamsa, the chronicles of the Mahāvihāra-tradition can show; see Deeg 2005: 156-176. Despite the fact of his sojourn on the island Faxian’s report on it is less extant than Xuanzang’s who, as he himself informs us, got most of his information from Ceylonese monks fleeing the disorder prevailing on the island.

¹⁰ See e.g. Timpe 1989.

which is presented as a report on a real journey undertaken by the author. It is now very well known that Mandeville never traveled beyond the borders of Europe. Another example of a rather positivistic reading of a medieval travelogue is Marco Polo's *Il Millione* which certainly has to be re-contextualized between the "realkundlichen" facts which Paul Pelliot¹¹ has retrieved from it and the questioning of its value as an objective description of at least some of the regions it describes.¹²

All this being said it restricts the value of these texts as historical documents only to a minor degree because it allows us at least to get hold of the knowledge of a certain region at a certain time, and it is this knowledge which itself has to undergo a deeper investigation as to what extent it may represent objective historical fact.

Applied to the question of the historicity and factual credibility of the records of the Chinese pilgrim monks in India this means that the reader of their texts must be aware of the fact that usually the only information that is given is that which fits to the genre, i.e. in Xuanzang's case, the genre of a Buddhist pilgrim-record—whatever that may be in generic terms.¹³ That which is recorded is normally only that which belongs to the thematic and topical inventory of the genre: that is why for example Faxian 法顯 only gives data on the political and social conditions in India related directly to Buddhism. He says almost nothing about the other Indian religions—except about the legendary quarrels between Buddhist and heretics in the past. Xuanzang, at least, gives sometimes hints on the existence of heretic temples, but is also reluctant to speak of the practical and social aspects of e.g. Jainism or Hinduism.

To begin with an example of a schematic, topically intentional report, read by most scholars as a piece of historical information, is Xuanzang's report on his meeting with the North-Indian king Harṣavardhana Śīladitya (*Xiyu ji* 5). This is one of the few passages in the *Xiyu ji* where

¹¹ Pelliot 1959, 1963, 1973.

¹² Wood 1995.

¹³ An attempt to answer this question is Boulton's 1982 dissertation on Xuanzang which is, however, not satisfactory at all as the author lacks a deeper insight in the historical, cultural and topographical dimension of the record in connection with Central and South Asia.

Xuanzang himself is really acting as a protagonist of an event while the bulk of the text is descriptive. For this reason the passage is usually considered to possess more documentary and direct historical value than other parts, although I will argue that this is exactly not the case and that the intention of the text is highly propagandistic and directed towards a Chinese audience rather than documenting events that really happened in the way they are described.¹⁴

The *Xiyu ji* presents this encounter between the Indian king and the Chinese monk as follows:

At that time Śīlāditya was inspecting the kingdom of Khajuṅghira (Jiezhuaqiluo)¹⁵ and issued an order to king Kumāra [of Kumārarūpa / Assam] (saying): “It is appropriate that the guest-*śramaṇa* from afar in Nālanda should immediately come and attend our meeting.” Thereupon king Kumāra went to see (Xuanzang). Śīlāditya, after having taken the trouble, said: “From which kingdom did you come and what is your wish?” (Xuanzang) answered: “I have come from the kingdom of the Great Tang in search of the law of the Buddha.” The king said: “In which direction is the kingdom of the Great Tang situated?” (Xuanzang) answered: “It is several ten thousand *li* to the North-East. It is the kingdom which in India is called Mahācīna.” The king said: “I have already heard that there is the heaven’s son, the king of Qin in Mahācīna. When he was small he had a high spirit, when he had grown up he was a gifted warrior. Before, when the former dynasty was collapsing in disorder and parts of the land were divided, fighting had arisen and the people were tormented, the king of Qin early had conceived a strategy and sensed great compassion, rescued the sentient beings, pacified the region between the oceans, cultivation was far spread, the (imperial) kindness was harmoniously (established) in far (regions), distant regions and foreign countries took refuge and submitted to him, all the people carry along his well balanced instruction, all perform

¹⁴ As so often the case, a slight doubt of the documentary value of this passage is only brought forth by Watters 1904, 1905: I, 350: “... if we can rely on our pilgrim’s statements.”

¹⁵ 竭朱唄祇邏 **kḥiat-tṣyǎ-ʔut-tṣi-la* (Late Middle Chinese reconstruction according to Pulleyblank 1991). On this place name see Mizutani 1999: 3, 206, note-1, and Ji 1985: 789f., note 1; it is the transliteration of a name corresponding to the Pāli Kajaṅghara (Aṅguttaranikāya 5.54 and Majjhimanikāya 3.298), the Chinese transliteration of which is reconstructed by Mizutani as *Kacughira.

the “Music of the king of Qin’s breaking the battle-lines,”¹⁶ his eulogy has been heard here since long—isn’t there really praise of his virtues? Isn’t the Great Tang like this?’ [Xuanzang] answered: “What is called Zhina is the former name of the kingdom, Datang is the name of the kingdom of our ruler. Before he had ascended to the throne he was called king of Qin. Now that he has already ascended to the throne he is called Son of Heaven. When the fortune of the former dynasty came to an end the living beings had no ruler, fighting and turmoil arose and people were cruelly injured. The king of Qin, (endowed with) heaven’s grace, opened his mind with compassion and stimulated by his dignity the calamities of the people were wiped out. The eight directions were pacified and ten-thousand kingdoms paid tribute to him. He loves and cultivates the four kinds of living beings and venerates the three jewels. He levied taxes and issued amnesty on capital punishment. The national expenditure achieved a surplus; the etiquettes of the people is flawless (and) their behaviour has undergone a great change (to an extent) that it is difficult to describe it in detail.” Śīladitya said: “How magnificent! The people of this land are blessed (and should) be grateful to their sacred ruler.”¹⁷

The dialogue seems to represent a fictional utilisation of the Chinese emperor-cult applied by Xuanzang in the framework of Indian culture¹⁸:

¹⁶ On this (Shengong-)Qinwang-pochen-yue (神功秦王破陣樂 see Watters 1904, 1905: I, 349f., and Ji 1985: 438, note 8: it was a dancing performance on occasion of Li Shimin’s 李世民—the later Gaozong—suppression of the rebellion of Liu Wuzhou 劉武周 in the year 619.

¹⁷ T. 2087.894c20ff. 時戒日王巡方在竭朱唄祇邏國，命拘摩羅王曰：「宜與那爛陀遠客沙門速來赴會！」於是遂與拘摩羅王往會見焉。戒日王勞苦已曰：「自何國來？將何所欲？」對曰：「從大唐國來，請求佛法。」王曰：「大唐國在何方？經途所亘，去斯遠近？」對曰：「當此東北數萬餘里，印度所謂摩訶至那國是也。」王曰：“嘗聞摩訶至那國有秦王天子，少而靈鑿，長而神武。昔先代喪亂，率土分崩，兵戈競起，群生荼毒，而秦王天子早懷遠略，興大慈悲，拯濟含識，平定海內，風教遐被，德澤遠洽，殊方異域，慕化稱臣。氓庶荷其亨育，咸歌《秦王破陣樂》。聞其雅頌，于茲久矣。盛德之譽，誠有之乎？大唐國者，豈此是耶？」對曰：「然。至那者，前王之國號；大唐者，我君之國稱。昔未襲位，謂之秦王，今已承統，稱曰天子。前代運終，群生無主，兵戈亂起，殘害生靈。秦王天縱含弘，心發慈愍，威風鼓扇，群凶殄滅，八方靜謐，萬國朝貢。愛育四生，敬崇三寶，薄賦斂，省刑罰，而國用有餘，氓俗無冗，風猷大化，難以備舉。」戒日王曰：「盛矣哉，彼土群生，福感聖主！」 See Ji 1985: 436f. whose readings and punctuation I have adopted.

¹⁸ I have discussed other examples of *interpretationes sinicae* in the report of

It is striking that the Indian ruler initially does not know anything about the Chinese emperor in the beginning of his conversation with the Chinese monk. However, after Xuanzang has explained to him, that the kingdom Mahācīna (Mohezhina 摩訶至那) is situated several thousands of *li* to the northeast of Central India, Harṣa is suddenly able to refer to the great deeds and virtue of the Tang-emperor—Taizong Li Shimin 太宗李世民 (r. 626-649), the second ruler of the dynasty, who indeed, as Xuanzang puts it into Harṣavardhana's mouth, in the period of his father's Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649-683) was called Qinwang 秦王 (e.g. in the *Jiu tangshu* 舊唐書). It is rather unlikely that the Indian ruler could have come up with such detailed knowledge about China and her emperor—especially in the light of the explanation which Xuanzang gives him in the following passage!

The intention in the context of the *Xiyu ji* is clear: before describing the meeting of Xuanzang and the famous Indian ruler the glorious deeds of Harṣa are praised and the parallel with the Buddhist king *kat exochen*, with the Maurya-ruler Aśoka, becomes evident: both rulers are lauded because of their pacification of the realm, the construction of *stūpas* and monasteries (*vihāra*), and the convocation of donation parties.¹⁹ This was certainly meant as a propagandistic and “pedagogical” hint directed to the address of the emperor Taizong to whom the *Xiyu ji* was finally dedicated: a real Buddhist ruler had to act like Harṣa—and, of course, like Aśoka—while the Tang-emperor—beside the accomplishments of having pacified and united the realm and instigated a just rule—still lacks the perfection of the Indian rulers which consists in the official and overall support of Buddhism.²⁰ As a kind of *capitatio benevolentiae* to attenuate this rather harsh criticism the Chinese emperor is then presented with a *laudatio* directly from the Indian king's mouth which is then partly repeated and refined by Xuanzang.

Xuanzang (and other Chinese travel reports) in the following articles: Deeg 1998, and Deeg 1999.

¹⁹ On Aśoka and the development of his role and function in Buddhist traditions see Deeg 2001, and Deeg (forthcoming).

²⁰ It is well known that Taizong's support of Buddhism was restricted on his personal support and admiration of Xuanzang.

The hermeneutical consequence of distilling the propaganda intentions from certain portions of the *Xiyu ji* is to conclude, that the dialogue between Xuanzang and Harṣa cannot be treated as a strictly historical event. The episode finally is moulded in a completely hagiographical treatment in Xuanzang's biography, in which the Indian monarch, after in vain having invited Xuanzang several times, renders a personal visit to the Chinese monk.

The comparison of the different pilgrim records is a crucial method for analyzing their value as historical sources. When we find different descriptions of the same region or the same event we have to find an explanation for this. A legitimate explanation for such differences would be, of course, that situations and narratives have changed in the course of the centuries. This is surely true when Faxian describes a certain region as a prospering Buddhist community, while Xuanzang states for the same place signs of the decline of Buddhism.

Other cases of differences between both pilgrims' reports are not so easily explained, and there the question arises: if historical change is to be excluded how then are the differences between the pilgrims' accounts to be interpreted? In some cases at least—which of course have to be shown case by case—the appropriate answer seems to be that the younger pilgrim, Xuanzang—however great his achievements may be—reports facts which he himself had not seen or that he simply misunderstood information received at second hand.

One of the examples how Xuanzang reflects—as will be shown subsequently—“wrong”²¹ information which is, nevertheless, been taken for granted by modern scholars is his description of the highly important cultural region of Mathurā.²²

Mathurā, the area around the modern city of Muttra, lies on the right bank of the large tributary of the river Gaṅgā, the Yamunā (Jumna). It belongs to the original homelands of Brahmanism,²³ and one of the most

²¹ In the context “wrong” is, of course, not an absolute judgement but a criticism from a virtual positivistic standpoint.

²² Cf. the overview in: Kreisel 1986: 24ff.; see further the comprehensive collection of articles on Mathurā edited by Doris Meth Srinivasan: Srinivasan 1989.

²³ On a brief history of early Mathurā found in literature see Sharma 1984: 17ff.

important holy sites of Hinduism is found about five miles north of the city: Vrindāvana, modern Vrindaban, the grove where the legend of the young god-hero Kṛṣṇa is situated in the Hinduist texts. Mathurā has, however, also been a prominent area for the Buddhists and the Jains.

Under the rule of the Kuṣāna (1st century A.D.–3rd/4th century A.D.), who had invaded and conquered Northern India from their Central Asian homelands, Mathurā had been the capital and centre of a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious kingdom. Mathurā has also been claimed to be the region from which the first Buddha images came and in this respect rivals with the Northwestern region of Gandhāra.

In terms of infrastructure the city of Mathurā had an important and influential position at the crossroad of the trade routes coming from the extreme Northwest in Gandhāra and leading to the great cities in Central India (Madhyadeśa), in the basin of the Gaṅgā like Kauśāmbī, Pāṭaliputra, Vārāṇasī, etc.²⁴ This geographical position is not least responsible for the prosperity of Buddhism in the periods of the Kuṣāna and Gupta, proven by numerous artefacts²⁵ and by the inscriptional material found in the region.²⁶ In sharp contrast to this—Faxian speaks of twenty Buddhist monasteries in Mathurā—stand the facts that architectonical remains are not found in such a high number and that the Buddhist history of the city can not be confirmed in the way as the pilgrims' texts would imply.²⁷

The prominent position of Mathurā in the realms of North Indian rulers, especially of the Kuṣāna, did not fail to attract the attention of the Buddhist *saṅgha* which inserted it into its own *geographia sacra* by the help

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Sharma 1984: 3ff.

²⁵ Kreisel 1986.

²⁶ Cf. Lüders 1961.

²⁷ Cf. Kreisel 1986: 25ff.; it seems that it is easier for an author mainly dealing with Hinduist art like Kreisel than authors fond of the Buddhist tradition of Mathurā to take Xuanzang's statements carefully: see *ibid.*: 25: "Nach dem Zeugnis Hiuen Tsangs sollen in Mathura am Ufer der Yamuna von Asoka buddhistische Stupas errichtet worden sein, von denen er (im 7. Jh. n.Chr.) noch drei gesehen haben will. Die daraus herleitbare Vermutung, daß Steinbauten und Skulpturen aus der Maurya-Epoche in Mathura zu finden seien, hat sich allerdings bisher nicht bestätigen lassen."

of a legend, featuring the visit of the Buddha in the region during which he makes a prophecy concerning the patriarch Upagupta. And it is also by the help of a legend that some doubt is raised, if Xuanzang had really visited Mathurā. It will be argued that he rather reported what he had heard about the city and its surroundings and then even added some of his own knowledge from Buddhist literature known to him through the information gained from his informants.

Xuanzang's misplaced and distorted report has unfortunately led to a wrong estimation and conclusion,²⁸ in which his description is taken at face value and even Faxian's description of Buddhist India in general is taken as to refer to Mathurā (see below). Even an excellent scholar like John Strong became prey of this misinterpretation quoting Xuanzang as a source for Buddhism in Mathurā without even mentioning Faxian's report on Central India,²⁹ and the same is the case in a German study on Xuanzang by Alexander Mayer.³⁰

But let us turn to the textual evidence. After the general description of Buddhist life in Mathurā, which will be discussed in the second part, Xuanzang goes on to give us a description of some specific pilgrim spots connected with Buddhist legends:

To the east of the city, about five or six *li* away, one arrives at a *saṅghārāma* on a mountain. The side of the mountain has been pierced in order to construct cells (for the monks). (The place) is entered through a valley like through a gate. (The monastery) was constructed by the Venerable Upagupta. There is a *stūpa* containing the relics of the nails of the Tathāgata.

To the north of the *saṅghārāma* there is a stone house in a cavern, about twenty feet high and thirty feet wide. It is filled with small wooden tokens, four inches long. It was here that the venerable Upagupta preached when he converted a man and his wife so that they achieved the fruit of arhatship ... Twenty-four or five *li* to the south-east of the stone house there is a dry marsh with a *stūpa* on its side. Before the Tathāgata walked there in meditation and a monkey, holding (a pot) of honey, and offered

²⁸ See e.g. Tarthang Tulku 1994: 202f.

²⁹ Strong 1983: 36f.

³⁰ Mayer 1992: 99: "... Mathurā, wo sich die Gedenk-Stupen [*sic!*] der Hauptschüler Buddhas fanden."

it to the Buddha. The Buddha thereupon ordered him to mingle it with water and to distribute to everybody in the assembly (of monks). The monkey, filled with joy, fell into a deep hole and was killed. By the power of his religious merit he obtained rebirth as a human being.³¹

The striking point in Xuanzang's report is that he localizes the well-known story of the monkey who donates a pot of honey to the Buddha³² with the region of Mathurā which is—to my knowledge—not found anywhere else in the Buddhist tradition (see below).

The connection of the Buddhist patriarch Upagupta with Mathurā is well established. It is, for instance, found in a narrative of the Buddhist legend-anthology *Divyāvadāna*, in the *Aśokāvadāna*, the hagiographical vita of the Maurya-emperor Aśoka: after having converted two *nāgas* in the Indian Northwest—Gandhāra und Swāt³³—the Buddha goes to Mathurā and, seeing the mountain Urumuṇḍa, on which in future times the monastery Naṭabhaṭika of Upagupta will be erected, he addresses Ānanda with a prophecy about the birth of Upagupta.³⁴

This prophecy then is followed by the story of Upagupta's previous existence as a monkey:

The Blessed One said: “Not (only) as now (does Upagupta work for the bliss of many people), o Ānanda, (but) also here in a former existence

³¹ 890b20ff. 城東行五六里至一山伽藍。疎崖為室。因谷為門。尊者鄔波鞠多(唐言近護)之所建也。其中則有如來指爪窠堵波。伽藍北巖間有石室。高二十餘尺。廣三十餘尺。四寸細籌填積其內。尊者近護說法化導夫妻。俱證羅漢果者。乃下一籌。異室別族雖證不記。石室東南二十四五里至大澗池。傍有窠堵波。在昔如來行經此處。時有獼猴持蜜奉佛。佛令水和普遍大眾。獼猴喜躍墮坑而死。乘茲福力得生人中。池北不遠。大林中有過去四佛經行遺迹。其側有舍利子沒特伽羅子等千二百五十大阿羅漢習定之處。並建窠堵波以記遺迹。如來在世屢遊此國。說法之所並有封樹。

³² The antiquity of the legend is shown by a relief on the right post of the northern gate of the big *stūpa* of Sāñchī. For other representations in Buddhist art (Gandhāra) see Kurita 1990: I, 177f.

³³ On the submission of the *nāgas* Apalāla (Swāt) and Gopāla (Nagarahāra, Gandhāra) see Zin 2006 (forthcoming; I have to thank the Dr. Zin for sending me print-outs of the manuscript), p. 54ff and Deeg 2007 (forthcoming).

³⁴ In the *Aśokāvadāna* this legend is a kind of prelude of the career of Upagupta, of his meeting with king Aśoka in Pāṭaliputra and Aśoka's pilgrimage under the guidance of Upagupta.

in a bodily (form which) is (already) decayed: mount Urumuṇḍa has three sides: on one (side) there lived five hundred *pratyekabuddhas*, five hundred *ṛṣis* (...) on the second, and five hundred monkeys on the third. There the leader of the five hundred monkeys left his band and went to the side where the five hundred *pratyekabuddhas* were living. As soon as he saw those *pratyekabuddhas*, his faith was engendered. He made an offering of withered leaves, roots, and fruits to them, and, when they sat down cross-legged in meditation, he prostrated himself in front of the eldest of the group, and then went to where the novices were and sat down cross-legged himself. Before long, the *pratyekabuddhas* attained *parinirvāṇa*. The monkey [again] presented withered leaves, roots, and fruits to them, but, of course, they did not accept them. He pulled at the folds of their robes, and grabbed their feet [but they did not move]. Finally, he thought to himself “Surely they have passed away,” and, full of sorrow, he lamented and went to the other side of the mountain where the five hundred *ṛṣis* were dwelling. Now some of these *ṛṣis* had couches of thorns, and others had beds of ashes; some were standing holding their hands aloft, and others were practicing the penance of the five fires. The monkey began to disrupt their various ascetic performances; he pulled out the thorns of the couches of thorns, he scattered the ashes of the beds of ashes, he caused those whose hands were raised to lower them, and he put out the fires of those sitting between five fires. Then, when he had thus disrupted their ascetic performance, he assumed a cross-legged posture in front of them. In time, the *ṛṣis* reported all of this to their teacher; he told them also to assume a cross-legged position. Accordingly, those five hundred ascetics sat down cross-legged, and, without a preceptor or an instructor, they understood the dharmas that are the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, and experienced *pratyekabodhi*. They then reflected: “This most excellent thing that we have attained is all due to this monkey.” So they provided the monkey with ample roots and fruits, and, when his time came, they cremated his body with fragrant wood. Now what do you think, Ānanda? The one who was the leader of this band of five hundred monkeys, he is this very Upagupta. Even then, in a body that is now no more, he worked for the benefit of many people, right here on Mount Urumuṇḍa. ...³⁵

³⁵ Cowell, Neil 1886: 349f. (my own interpunctuation): *Bhagavān āba: nānanda etarhi yathātīte ‘py adhvani tena viniṣatitaśarīrenāpy atraiva. Urumuṇḍaparvate trayāḥ pārśvāḥ, ekatra pradeśe pañca pratyekabuddhaśatāni prativasanti, dvitīye*

It is remarkable that in this version of the Aśokāvādāna the leader of the monkeys meets the *pratyekabuddhas* only by chance; the motive of his killing the band's cubs and therefore being ousted from the band and as a consequence meeting the *pratyekabuddhas*, as found in the Sanskrit Mūlasarvāstivāda-version of the story, is not included in this version.³⁶ John Strong thinks that this version is a secondary one because it presents “negative moral implications,” this is an interpretation of which I am not convinced.

pañcarīṣātāni, tṛtīye pañcamarkaṭaśatāni. Tatra yo 'sau pañcānām markāṭaśatānām yūthapatiḥ sa tam yūtham apabhāya yatra pārśve pañca pratyakbuddhaśatāni prativasanti tatra gataḥ. Tasya tām pratyekabuddhān dṛṣṭvā prasādo jātaḥ. Sa teṣāṃ pratyekabuddhānām śīrṇaparṇāni mūlaphalāni copanāmayati; yadā ca te paryāṅkenopaviṣṭā bhavanti sa vṛddhānte pranāmaṃ kṛtvā yāvannavāntaṃ gatvā paryāṅkenopaviṣāti yāvat te pratyekabuddhāḥ parinirvṛtāḥ. Sa teṣāṃ śīrṇaparṇāni mūlaphalāni copanāmayati, tena pratigrhṇanti. Sa teṣāṃ cīvarakarṇikāny ākarṣayati, pādaḥ grhṇāti, yāvat sa markāṭaś cintayati: niyatam ete kālagatā bhaviṣyanti. Tataḥ sa markāṭaḥ śocitvā paridevītṛvā ca dvitīyaṃ pārśvaṃ gato, yatra pañca riṣīśatāni prativasanti. Te ca ṛṣayaḥ kecit kaṇṭhakāpāśrayāḥ kecid bhasmāpāśrayāḥ kecid ūrdhvabastāḥ kecit pañcātapāvasthitāḥ. Sa teṣāṃ teṣāṃ tīryāpathān vikopayitum ārabdhāḥ, ye kaṇṭhakāpāśrayās teṣāṃ kaṇṭhakān uddharati, bhasmāpāśrabhānām bhasma vidbunoti, ūrdhvabastānām adho hastam pātayati, pañcātapāvasthitānām agnim avakirati. Yadā ca tair tīryāpatho vikopito bhavati, tadā sa teṣāṃ agrataḥ paryāṅkaṃ badhnāti. Yāvat tai[r] riṣibhir ācāryāya niveditaṃ, tenāpi coktam: paryāṅkena tāvaṃ niṣīdattha, yāvat tāni pañca riṣīśatāni paryāṅkenopaviṣṭāni. Te 'nācāryakā anupadeśakāḥ saptatṛiṃśad bodhipakṣān dharmān āmukhīkṛtya pratyekāṃ bodhiṃ sāksātīkṛtavantaḥ. Atha teṣāṃ pratyekabuddhānām etad abhavad yat kiṃcid asmābhiḥ śreyo 'vāptam tat sarvaṃ imaṃ markāṭam āgamyāt. Tair yāvat sa markāṭaḥ phalamūlāḥ paripālitaḥ, kālagatasya ca tac charīraṃ gandhakāṣṭhair dbmāpitam. Tat kiṃ manyasa Ananda: yo 'sau pañcānām markāṭaśatānām yūthapatiḥ sa eṣa Upaguptaḥ? Tadāpi tena vinipatitaśarīreṇāpy atraivoruṃḍe parvate babujanabitaṃ kṛtam. See similarly the translation by Strong 1983: 173f., and also the French translation of the Chinese version in Przyluski 1923: 309ff. For an English translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya-version (Gilgit-manuscripts) of the story and a discussion of the differences between the versions see Strong 1992: 44f. For a French translation of the Chinese version of the same school's Vinaya see Przyluski 1914: 519ff.

³⁶ The Chinese and Tibetan translations of the same school again have a slightly different plot: see Strong 1992: 47, and Panglung 1981: 29.

It would go too far to discuss here the history of this legend in details. It was, however, quite popular, as it is also found in other Buddhist sources such as Kalpanāmanditikā (no. 54), Avadānakalpalatā of the Kaśmīran poet Kṣemendra (11th century), in the Tibetan “ecclesiastic history” of Tāranātha, Chos-'byuñ [History of the *dharmā*].³⁷

A location of the Upagupta's former existence as a monkey is of considerable value for the theory of the French scholar Jean Przyluski, who thought that the Aśoka legend would point out an early centre of the Sarvāstivādin in Mathurā whose propagandistic efforts would have given birth to the whole complex of legends concerning Mathurā.³⁸ What can be made clear in any case is that the legend gives a *terminus ante quem* for the inclusion of Mathurā into the Buddhist *geographia sacra*: the date of the oldest Chinese translation of the Aśokāvadāna, the *Ayu wang zhuan* 阿育王傳 by An Faqin 安法欽 around 300 A.D.³⁹ This fits perfectly into the historical setting of the Kuṣāna rule in Mathurā. It should, however, also be pointed out that another collection of Buddhist legends, the Avadānaśataka, depicts the *sthavira* Upagupta residing in the Kukkuṭāgāra (Kukkuṭārāma-vihāra) in Pāṭaliputra.⁴⁰

The legend of the patriarch Upagupta and his connection with Aśoka was well embedded in the Buddhist tradition of the region as is shown by the narratives, but the fact that Faxian does not mention anything about him and his former birth seems to indicate that his prominent position in an overall Buddhist Indian context was not well established. The differences in the literary sources—the location and the story of Upagupta's

³⁷ For a description of the stories of monkeys who give donations to the Buddha see Both 1995: 49ff.; Both uses and treats the different stories as sources for his Nepalese text, the Kapiśāvadāna.

³⁸ Strong 1983 and 1992, has collected and discussed the most important sources of this Upagupta-tradition.

³⁹ Cf. T. 2042.102b15ff. where Mathurā is transliterated as Motuluo 未突羅 **mat-dwet-la* (Early Middle Chinese reconstruction according to Pulleyblank 1991); in this text the Buddha, in his prophecy of Upagupta's career, points out to Urumuṇḍa and Nātabhāṭika / Youliumancha-shan 優留慢荼山 **ʔurw-luw-m nb-dr-...* and Naluobali-alanruo-chu 那羅拔利阿蘭若處 **na-la-b t-lib-...* (102b.21).

⁴⁰ Cf. Speyer 1906-1909: 2, 203.1f, and Feer 1891: 434. In the Chinese version (T. 200.256b16ff.) there is no trace of Upagupta (and Aśoka): see Demoto 1998: 14.

former existence—(Avadānaśataka vs. Divyāvadāna and Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya and later sources) seems to indicate a prominence of this figure which developed after the beginning of the 5th century.⁴¹

Xuanzang clearly refers to the Upagupta tradition in his description of Mathurā, but he commits a minor but—for his credibility—suspicious mistake, when he reports the legend of the monkey falling into a hole in the geographical context of the mountain Urumuṇḍa instead of the legend of the Upagupta’s former existence. Another point which raises suspicion that Xuanzang received his information *in situ* is that, against his normal custom, he does not mention the name of the monastery, Nāṭabhāṭika.

Now, how did Xuanzang come to such a level of misinterpretation to the extent of introducing a legend into his report on Mathurā which originally had nothing to do with this region? I would propose that he was influenced to do so by the specific elements in the Chinese Buddhist sources about the legend of the honey-donating monkey.

The oldest extensive Chinese version of the legend of the monkey donating honey to the Buddha is found in *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, the well-known “Sūtra of the wise and the fool,” a text which also contains a version of the Upagupta-legend. In this text the prophecy of Upagupta by the Buddha (T. 202, Nr. 67, *Youbojueti pin* 優波鞠提品, 442b.12ff.) is, however, located in Benares,⁴² while the legend of the honey-donating monkey is situated near Śrāvastī (T. 202, Nr. 54, 429c13ff., 師質子摩頭羅⁴³

⁴¹ This would fit quite well to the Theravāda tradition on the Aśoka legend and the Third Council in Pāṭaliputra where Upagupta plays no role at all (see Deeg 2001): the string of textual and sectarian tradition of the Theravādin was already fixed when Upagupta’s as a narrative “star” started to rise. Another supportive argument could be seen in a short hint in the Abhidharmakośa, referred to and discussed by Strong 1992: 48, where the plot of the legend is given “anonymously”—without mentioning Upagupta’s name.

⁴² T. 202.442b26ff. 波羅奈國，當有居士，字為鞠提。此人子有子，名優波鞠提。（“In Benares there was a householder called Gupta (Gupti?). This man had a son called Upagupta [-gupti?].”) 優波鞠提 **ʔuw-pa-kuwk-dej* (Early Middle Chinese reconstruction according to Pulleyblank 1991).

⁴³ 摩頭羅 **ma-dəw-la* (Early Middle Chinese reconstruction according to Pulleyblank 1991).

世質品)⁴⁴—there is no trace, whatsoever, of Mathurā! So again: where did Xuanzang take his location from which was, with a high probability, not stemming from an Indian source?

The monkey in the Xianyu-jing's story, after having fallen into a pit and having died, is reborn in the family of the childless brahmin Shizhi 世質—this name being, in all probability, a semantic rendering for Vasiṣṭha—and is given the name of Motouluo shizhi 摩頭羅世質.⁴⁵ For an identification of the Indian correspondents of the Chinese names one should compare the version of the legend found in the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin⁴⁶: the monkey reborn as a human is called Madhuvasiṣṭha; the aitiological explanation for this name-giving is, that he has been born in the family of the Vasiṣṭhas (*vasiṣṭhagotra*) and that it rained honey on the day of his conception and birth (*madhuvārṣam patitam*)—the Chinese text has the variant that on the day of his birth all the vessels in the house of his parents were miraculously filled with honey. The Chinese name Motouluo 摩頭羅, which according to an explanation—rather a gloss—in the *Xianyu jing* should be Madhura, in the meaning of “sweet” and then “honey” leads to an underlying name Madhuravasiṣṭha which can be reconstructed as Misheng 蜜勝, “splendid in honey.” This does actually correspond to the name in the Vinaya except for the suffix *-rū*: “The reason that he is given the name—the name Motouluoshezhi in Chinese means ‘splendid in honey’—is that at the time when he was born there were ominous signs of (rain of) honey; therefore he was named so.”⁴⁷ With the help of this parallel the Chinese name can be proved to be a misunderstanding: the transcription *motouluo* 摩頭羅 in most cases, e.g. in Faxian's text, stands for the geographical name Mathurā and not for an

⁴⁴ T. 202.429c13f. 如是我聞：一時佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。爾時，國中有一婆羅門，字曰師質。（“Thus I have heard: once the Buddha dwelled in the kingdom of Śrāvastī at the park of Anāthapiṇḍada. At that time there lived a Brahmin in this kingdom called Shizhi [Vasiṣṭha].”）

⁴⁵ I think that the rendering *shi* 世 of the Korean edition (Koryo 高麗) is correct here, because the second part of the name has to be taken as a translation of *-vasiṣṭha*, in which the 瑟 of the Yuan-/Ming-/Song-editions make no sense.

⁴⁶ Gnoli 1978: 47ff.

⁴⁷ T. 202.430a21f. 因為作字，字摩頭羅瑟質，晉言：蜜勝；以其初生之日蜜為瑞應，故因名焉。

appellativum *madhura*, “honey.” In a middle-Indian language, however, in which both words could occur under the form of *madhura* or *mabhura*, it was difficult to discern both words clearly from each other.⁴⁸

Thus it seems that the name of the monkey in his next existence, Madhura, in a Chinese source—it could well have been the *Xianyu jing*—was the motive either of Xuanzang or of another Chinese source which is no longer extant for bringing together this very legend with Mathurā.

The spot of the legend in the Mūlasarvāstivādin-Vinaya is Nāḍikā in Guṇjikāvasatha,⁴⁹ which probably was a kind of bower; the identity with a place name found in the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra (Skt. and Pāli: Nāḍikā) helps to localise the place in the area of the Vṛjjis in Vaiśālī.⁵⁰ Again: in no Buddhist text, except in Xuanzang’s *Xiyu ji*, a localization in Mathurā is found. The translation of the name of the monkey into Chinese, however, obviously lulled Xuanzang into a kind of surface reading or remembering, and allowed him to take the name in the Chinese legend of the monkey and the honey-pot as “Vasiṣṭha from Mathurā.” That Xuanzang is not very reliable in this regard is shown by the fact that he, in accordance with other Buddhist sources discussed above, correctly locates a similar legend in Vaiśālī (*Xiyu ji* 7)⁵¹—a fact which has, until now, raised only the suspicion of Thomas Watters,⁵² as far as I can see.

⁴⁸ I am not able to decide if the place name *madhuravanaka* (-*varṇaka*) in a Mathurā-inscription (cf. Lüders: 54f.) is connected to our problem. It is not, in any rate, related to Xuanzang’s monkey-legend, because the inscription was found on a pedestal of a seated Bodhisattva-image near Caubara mound, about one mile southwest (*sic!*) of the city’s centre. See also the antique forms of the name which lead us to subscribe to a doublette Mathurā: Madhura (Megasthenes: Methora—Ptolemaios: Modoura). The form Madhura occurs even in early Skt.-literature: Arthaśāstra 2.11.115, Mahābhāṣya on Aṣṭādhyāyī 5.3.55.

⁴⁹ Gnoli 1978: 47. Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra: Kuṇjikāvasatha; on this name and its variants cf. Waldschmidt 1944, 69, note 97.

⁵⁰ Waldschmidt 1950: 160, and Waldschmidt 1944: 69f.

⁵¹ T. 2087.908b16ff. (Ji 1985: 590) 石柱南有池，是群獼猴為佛穿也，在昔如來曾住於此。池西不遠，有窰堵波，諸獼猴持如來鉢上樹取蜜之處。池南不遠，有窰堵波，是諸獼猴奉佛蜜處。池西北隅猶有獼猴形像。（“South of the stone pillar there is a pond which has been dug out for the Buddha by a band of monkeys and the Tathāgata had already stayed there in former times. West to the pond, not far away, there is a *stūpa* (which marks) the spot where the monkeys had taken the almsbowl of the

Another motivating element for Xuanzang to connect the legend of the monkey with Upagupta and Mathurā may have been a dialogue between Aśoka and Upagupta, in which the fact of Aśoka's rough skin is brought together with the well-known legend according to which he had given a handful of earth to the Buddha in his earlier existence. Upagupta points out that his own smooth and bright skin was caused by the fact that he, other than the king, had made a pleasant donation to the Buddha in the past.⁵³ Xuanzang may have had this in mind when he connected the story of the honey-donating monkey with Mathurā and the career of Upagupta.

In the Suttapiṭaka of the Pāli-canon there is one *sutta* dedicated to Mathurā, respectively Pāli Madhura, the Madhura-sutta (AN III.256). On occasion of a visit to the region the Buddha describes Mathurā as a rather unpleasant place: he complains about the miserable, rough soil, about the number of wild dogs, ghosts (*yakkha*) and the difficulties of alms-begging.⁵⁴

Tathāgata, climbed upon a tree and collected honey; south to the pond, not far away, there is a *stūpa* (which marks) the spot where the monkeys offered honey to the Buddha. At the northwestern corner of the pond there are statues of the monkeys.”) On the mentioned Aśoka pillar, the Bakhra or Kolluha pillar—which bears no inscription—see Ji 1985: 590f., note 1, and Mizutani 1999: 2, 366f., note 1. Strangely enough Xuanzang does not mention the single monkey of the legend but only speaks of the monkeys in the plural; he also fails to give the crucial point of the story where the monkey falls into the pitch and is reborn as a brahmin.

⁵² Watters 1904/1905: I, 309f. For the different version of the legend of the monkey see Both 1995; Both does, however, not give any explanation for a possible origin of the legend.

⁵³ Cowell, Neil 1886: 388: *dānaṃ mānaṃ suṣubbaṃ praṇītaṃ dattaṃ mayā by apratipudgalasya; na paṃśudānaṃ hi mayā pradattaṃ yathā tvayādāyī Tathāgatasya*. (“For I have given a pleasant, clean and beautiful gift to the peerless one; I have not given a gift of soil to the Tathāgata as you have given.”); see also the translation by Strong 1983: 243.

⁵⁴ See Aṅguttara-nikāya II.256: *pañc’ ime, bhikkhave, adinava Madhurāyāṃ, katame pañca? visama, bahuraja, candasunakha, valayakkha, dullabbapiṇḍa*. (“These, o monks, are the five unpleasant (things) in Madhura. Which five? Uneven ground, much dust, cruel dogs, horrible *yakkha*, (and) alms-food is difficult to obtain.”) This textual evidence has been interpreted by Przyluski as a reflex of a historical situation of a competition between the Sthaviravādin / Theravādin, to whose canon the text belongs, and the Sarvāstivādin, who probably had one of their centers in Mathurā.

Another reflection of Mathurā as an unpleasant place for the Buddha is found in the Bhaiṣajyavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivādin-Vinaya.⁵⁵

A preliminary analysis of Xuanzang's report on the legends located in Mathurā so far raises suspicion regarding its authenticity as a real description due to the observation of the following points: 1) Xuanzang—against his normal custom—gives no other geographical name other than Mathurā; 2) Xuanzang's legend of the enlightenment of a couple converted by Upagupta in Mathurā has so far not been traced elsewhere in Buddhist literature; 3) Xuanzang localization of the story of the honey-donating monkey in Mathurā is not supported by any other Buddhist source.

If we check the use of the Xuanzang's report in scholarly literature on the art and archaeology of Mathurā we find what I have already described above: the Chinese pilgrim monks are quoted as witnesses of a flourishing Buddhist culture in Mathurā in the early 5th (Faxian) and in the 7th century respectively (Xuanzang). In the cases of both pilgrims, however, the misunderstanding of the texts leads to the serious problem of bringing the assumed facts in the records into line with the archaeological reality⁵⁶; until now the monastery of the elder Upagupta situated on the mountain of Urumuṇḍa⁵⁷ has not been found despite desperate search for it since the days of the British chief-archaeologist General Cunningham—a fact for

⁵⁵ Dutt 1947: 14f. *Pañcame, bhikṣava, ādīnavā mathurāyām. Katame pañca? Utkūlanikūlāḥ, sthāṇukaṇṭakapradhānā, babupāṣāṇasaṅkarakāṭhallā, uccandrabhaktāḥ, pracurmāṭṛgrāmā iti.* (“There are five evil [things] in Mathurā, o monks! Which five? High and low [ground], covered with stumps and thorns, there are a lot of stones, pebbles and gravel, eating during the last watch of the night, villages with many women [Skt. *pracurmāṭṛ*-? Tibetan: *bud-med mañ-ba yin no*].”); see Strong 1983: 28.

⁵⁶ At least Sharma 1984: 20, states: “But some of the narrated by Hiuentang need verification as sometimes he seems confused in giving the facts while describing the places.”

⁵⁷ Already Growse 1910: 11of., and after him Sharma 1984: 60f., thinks that the so-called Kankali mound, some ten meters south of the old fortifications; cf. the sketch in Joshi's article 1989: 166; see also the description by Janert in: Lüders: 39f. Still in the range of the city, was the site of the Upagupta-vihāra. This site, however, has been identified as Jain: Vogel 1910: 11; Folkert 1989; Janert, in: Lüders 1961: 40ff., which is also proved by inscriptional evidence (see Lüders 1961: 44-53).

which the following quotation may be representative: "... in absence of any other eye-witness accounts of Mathurā, these two Chinese records can aid in searches for the exact locations of the Naṭabhaṭavihāra and the cave monastery associated with the name of Upagupta."⁵⁸

But how did Xuanzang come up with a complete and detailed description of Buddhism in Mathurā when he probably had not even been there? The short answer is that Xuanzang extended Faxian's short account on Mathurā to include the following passages in Faxian's text which actually deals with the veneration of the disciples of the Buddha⁵⁹ inserted this report, with a few but significant changes, in his *Xiyu ji*.⁶⁰

If we examine the descriptions of Mathurā the most extensive report is found—as usual—in Xuanzang's *Xiyu ji*. Considering the importance of the region for Buddhist history it is not astonishing that this description has attracted a lot of attention from scholars' side. Among the other pilgrim-monks it is only Faxian who gives a brief description of Mathurā (see below). Unfortunately in the fragmentary account left by Huichao the portion on Mathurā is not included. So the reliability of Xuanzang has to be counter-checked by the help of Faxian only.

Xuanzang's description of Mathurā is found in *Xiyu ji* 4, before the legends we have just discussed:

[In Mathurā] there are about twenty monasteries and about two thousand monks who study Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna as well. There are five temples of the gods and the hereitics live spread (in these temples). There are three *stūpas* built by king Aśoka. There are many traces of the Buddhas of the past. [There are also] *stūpas* of the relics of all the holy disciples of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, such as [of] Śāriputra, ... Maudgalyāyanaputra, ... Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, ... Upāli, Ānanda,

⁵⁸ Jaini 1989: 222. Jaini: 215, expresses hope that the site could still be found: "Briefly it may be noted that the excavation sites have not so far yielded the localities of the Natabhatavihara nor the cave of Upagupta." In the light of the present study it seems fair to propose that the money for excavations could be better spent somewhere else where prospects are at least not dampened by a decontextualized reading of sources.

⁵⁹ Sharma, *op. cit.*, 32f., and 45; Jaini, *op. cit.*, 220.

⁶⁰ Cf. Strong 1992: 143f., whose argument in favour of an early patron-cult of Upagupta becomes weakened by the misreading of the pilgrims' texts.

Rāhula, ... Mañjuśrī und *stūpas* of all the bodhisattvas. ... [The monks] ... according to the school they belong to erect statues: those who study the Abhidharma make donations to Śāriputra, those who practice meditation make donations to Maudgalyāyanaputra, those who recite sutras make donations to Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, those who study the Vinaya make donations to Upālī; all *bbikṣuṇīs* (nuns) make donations to Ānanda, the ones who are not fully ordained (*śrāmaṇera*) make donations to Rāhula, all those who study Mahāyāna make donations to all the Bodhisattvas.⁶¹

Xuanzang's biography (*Cien zhuān* 2, T. 2053.232b) does not give further information as it is here identical even in the wording, a fact that may indicate that there were no further explanations by Xuanzang on Mathurā after he had come back to China and that his disciples who composed the *Cien zhuān* just copied what they found in the *Xiyu ji*.

Having now a look now on Faxian's very short description of Mathurā, we can see that he does not report any legend connected to that place:

From there⁶² they went eighty *yojana* further to the south-east and passed a lot of monasteries containing about ten thousand monks. After having passed these they reached a kingdom called Mathurā (Motouluo 摩頭羅). [There flows] the river Yamunā. On both shores there are about twenty *saṅghārāmas* with about three thousand monks. The Buddhist dharma there is in full blossom.⁶³

⁶¹ 890a28ff. (Ji 1985: 379ff.) (秣菟羅國) ... 伽藍二十餘所，僧徒二千餘人，大小二乘兼功習學。天祠五所，異道雜居。有三窣堵波，並無憂王所建也。過去四佛遺迹甚多。釋迦如來諸聖弟子遺身窣堵波，謂舍利子，(舊曰舍利子，又曰舍利弗，訛略也)。沒特伽羅子，(舊曰目乾連，訛也)。布刺拏梅咀麗衍尼弗咀羅，(唐言滿慈子。舊曰彌多羅尼子，訛略也)。鄔波釐，阿難陀，羅怙羅，(舊曰羅睺，又曰羅云，皆訛略也)。曼殊室利(唐言妙吉祥。舊曰濡首，又曰文殊師利，或言曼殊尸利。譯曰妙德，訛也)。諸菩薩窣堵波等。每歲三長及月六齋，僧徒相競，率其同好，齋持供具，多營奇玩，隨其所宗，而致像設。阿毘達磨眾供養舍利子，習定之徒供養沒特伽羅子，誦持經者供養滿慈子，學毘奈耶眾供養鄔波釐，諸苾芻尼供養阿難，未受具戒者供養羅怙羅，其學大乘者供養諸菩薩。是日也，諸窣堵波競修供養，珠幡布列，寶蓋駢羅，香煙若雲，華散如雨，蔽虧日月，震蕩岩谷。國王大臣，修善為務。

⁶² From Pitu 毘荼, near today's Bhera on the border of the Jhelum-river.

⁶³ 859a. 過是諸處已，到一國。國名摩頭羅。有遙菴那河；河邊左右有二十僧伽藍，可有三千僧；佛法轉盛。

What comes next in the report of Faxian is very often, under the influence of Xuanzang's *Xiyu ji*, taken as a description of the Buddhist religious and ritual life in Mathurā but it has to be emphasized that Faxian here gives a general overview about the state of Buddhism in India (and Central Asia):

In all the kingdoms west of the desert and in India the kings are eager followers of the *dharmā*. When they make donations to the *saṅgha* they take of their crown and personally give the food to the monks together with all their family members and ministers. After having given food to them, they spread carpets in front of the high seat and sit down. The custom of the royal donation has been handed down from the time of the Buddha (unchanged from generation to generation).⁶⁴

After this description there is a kind of caesure and Faxian continues to explain the ideal conditions in Madhyadeśa, in Central-India:

[The region] south from there [from Mathurā] is called the Middle Kingdom (Madhyadeśa). In the Middle Kingdom the weather in summer- and wintertime is modest, without frost and snow. People there are prosperous and happy; there is no registration and no governmental surveillance. Only those who have to cultivate the land of the king have to deliver revenues. If they want to go, they go—if they want to stay, they stay. The king is ruling without punishment through corporal sentence (or even) capital sentence by decapitating. Someone (who is) guilty (of a crime) has only to pay a fiscal sentence according to the extent of his crime. Even if he does enact a malevolent attack a second time, he will only (be) cut off the right hand. The whole royal guard receives an income. All citizens of this country do not kill any living being, do not drink alcohol and do not eat hot food except the *caṇḍālas*. The meaning of *caṇḍāla* is “evil people” (*e'ren* 惡人) and they live separated from the others. When they go to market of a town, they beat a piece of wood, to discern themselves (from the others) in this way and that the others may recognize them (as *caṇḍālas*) and can avoid contact, so that they and the other citizens do not have any contact. In this kingdom pigs and chickens are not domesticated and domesticated animals

⁶⁴ T. 2085.859a26ff. (punctuation following Deeg 2005: 587) 凡沙河已西，天竺諸國，國王皆篤信佛法。供養眾僧時，則脫天冠，共諸宗親，群臣手自行食。行食已，鋪氈於地，對上座前坐，於眾僧前不敢坐床。佛在世時，諸王供養法式，相傳至今。

(in principle) are not sold. In the markets there are no butchers and no inns (selling) alcoholic drinks. In trading they use shells and teeth (of animals as money). Only the *caṇḍālas* are fishermen and hunters and sell meat.⁶⁵

Then Faxian proceeds to the description of the general state of Buddhism:

After the Buddha entered *parinirvāṇa* all the kings, the elder and family fathers have erected monasteries for the *saṅgha* and have donated fields, houses, courtyards, fields, people, cows and calves and (they) have inscribed (these donations) on iron plates; since then (this custom) is transmitted from king to king and nobody dares to abolish it. Thus (this custom) continues until today.

In the dwellings which are inhabited by the monks, there is no lack of beds and blankets, nor of drink, food and clothe, and this is (the situation) everywhere. The monks are often preoccupied with meritorious action such as reciting of *sūtras* (or) sitting in meditation.

When visiting monks arrive, the resident monks receive them, give them water to wash their feet and oil to anoint (their feet) and food which is allowed to be eaten outside of the allowed time. After (the visiting monks) have rested a short time, they are asked for their ordination age and a cell and bed-cloth is given them according (to their hierarchical position). This is all according to the dharma.⁶⁶

After this Faxian describes the *stūpas* honoring the main disciples of the Buddha, thus corresponding to the given passage in Xuanzang's description of Mathurā:

⁶⁵ 859b1ff. (punctuation following Deeg 2005: 587) 從是以南，名為中國。中國寒暑調和，無霜，雪。人民殷樂，無戶籍官法；唯耕王地者乃輸地利，欲去便去，欲住便住。王治不用刑斬；有罪者但罰其錢，隨事輕重；雖復謀為惡逆，不過截右手而已。王之侍衛，左右皆有供祿。舉國人民悉不殺生，不飲酒，不食葱蒜，唯除旃荼羅。旃荼羅名為惡人，與人別居；若入城市，則擊木以自異，人則識而避之，不相唐突。國中不養豬，雞，不賣生口；市無屠酤及沽酒者；貨易則用貝齒。唯旃荼羅，獵師賣肉耳。

⁶⁶ 859b1ff. (punctuation following Deeg 2005: 587) 自佛般泥洹後，諸國王，長者，居士為眾僧起精舍，供給田，宅，園，圃，民戶，牛，犢，鐵券書錄；後王王相傳，無敢廢者，至今不絕。眾僧住止房舍，床蓐，飲食，衣服，都無缺乏，處處皆爾。眾僧常以作功德為業，及誦經，坐禪。客僧往到，舊僧迎逆，代擔衣鉢，給洗足水，塗足油，與非時漿，須臾；息已，復問其臘數，次第得房舍，臥具；種種如法。For a detailed discussion of “guest monks” (Skt. *āgantuka*, Ch. *keseng* 客僧) see Deeg 2005b.

At the places where the monks live, they erect *stūpas* for Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana and Ānanda, (but) also for (the three *piṭakas*) Abhidharma, Vinaya and Sūtra (*Apitan lü jing* 阿毘曇律經).⁶⁷

If we compare both pilgrim records on Mathurā there are inconsistencies in how Faxian and Xuanzang describe the *stūpas*, their veneration and festivals: Faxian states that in Central India the main disciples of the Buddha, Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana und Mahākaśyāpa, and also the three main portions of the canon, the Abhidharma-, the Vinaya- and the Sūtra-piṭaka were erected *stūpas* and given donations. Further he emphasizes that the nuns only venerate the *stūpas* of Ānanda, while novices honor the Buddha's son Rāhula. With some differences Xuanzang reports the same for Mathurā.

Thomas Watters already pointed out these problems of Xuanzang's text: "It [the passage] seems to be faulty both in form and substance ..."⁶⁸ One of the former Japanese commentators of the *Xiyu ji*, Adachi Kiroku, seems to have remarked upon this inconsistency of the text. For the Japanese scholar, however, despite his thorough knowledge of Faxian's text, the overruling text was Xuanzang's. Adachi comes up with the strange explanation that Faxian's description of the *stūpas* and the festivities were not restricted to Central India but included Mathurā—and thus succeeds in 'compatibilising' Faxian's report with Xuanzang's. Strangely enough the excellent Xuanzang-scholar Mizutani Shinjō has only a luke-warm note on Xuanzang's inconsistency: "As to the fact that in India donations are given to the disciples of the Buddha and to the bodhisattva Faxian's report explaining in detail the kindling of the lanterns and the stage performances elucidates the sentences of the *Xiyu ji*."⁶⁹—there is no word about the differences of both reports in content and geographical setting!

Faxian's report continues as follows:

One month after (the monks) have finished their summer retreat, the families produce liquid food for the monks which may be partaken outside the allowed eating-time, and donate it to (the monks in hope) for merit

⁶⁷ 859b18ff. 眾僧住處，作舍利弗塔，目連，阿難塔，並阿毘曇，律，經塔。

⁶⁸ Watters 1904 / 1905: I, 301f.

⁶⁹ Adachi 1942: 146a., note 11.

(*fu* 福: *punya*). The great monk-community (then) expounds the dharma (to them). After they have expounded the *dharmā*, they donate flowers, (fruits) and incense to the *stūpa* of Śāriputra. The lamps are burning the whole night and dancers and musicians are invited (who play the scenes) when Śāriputra was still a brahmin and came to the Buddha to ask for permission to leave the householder's life, and also (the scenes in the cases of) Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Mahākāśyapa.⁷⁰ All the nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*) only donate to the *stūpa* of Ānanda, because it was Ānanda who had asked the Venerable One to allow women to leave the householder's life. All the novices (*śrāmaṇera*) donate to (the *stūpa* of) Rāhula (Luoyun 羅云). The masters of Abhidharma donate to (the *stūpa*) of the Abhidharma, the masters of *Vinaya* (donate to the *stūpa*) of the *Vinaya*. (These festivals) are organized once a year and each one has its fixed day. If (they) are followers of the Māhāyāna they donate to (the *stūpa*) of the Prajñāpāramitā, of Mañjuśrī (and of) Avalokitasvara and other (Mahāyāna deities). When the monks enter their next monastic year after the summer retreat the eldest, the householders, brahmins and others donate clothes and (other) items which *śramaṇas* use to the monks. The monks accept (these donations) and distribute (them) to each other. Since the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha these adequate customs and rules of the holy community (i.e.: the *saṅgha*) were transmitted without interruption (from generation to generation).⁷¹

⁷⁰ The festivals described by Faxian are interesting because they have a historical value and support some passages given in the Vinayas (see below): beside the normal donations of flowers, fruits and incense and the teaching of the *dharmā* to the laypeople there seems to have existed the custom of having night performances of theater pieces organized. These pieces were probably composed in vernacular languages on Buddhist topics which were accompanied by music and dance. The short references by Faxian on the subjects of the conversion of the Buddha's disciples Śāriputra, Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Mahākāśyapa fit quite well the information which we have on early Buddhist drama: see Lüders 1911 and 1940 (on the Central-Asian fragments of the Śāriputraprakaraṇa). There was, evidently, a predilection for topics of conversion which were well fit for dramatic treatment. Faxian here describes a festival which took place after the three-month lasting summer retreat and its terminating *pravaraṇā*-ceremony under the participation of the laypeople: a piece of information which is looked for in vain in the standard Vinaya-literature.

⁷¹ 859b19ff. (punctuation following Deeg 2005: 588) 安居後一月，諸希福之家勸化供養僧，作非時漿；眾僧大會說法。說法已，供養舍利弗塔，種種華香，通夜然燈，使伎樂人作「舍利弗本婆羅門時詣佛求出家」；大目連，大迦葉亦如是。諸比

To be clear on this point: it is not called into question that there may have been festivities in honor of *stūpas* in Mathurā but there is a clear difference between the general statement of such ceremonies in Buddhist India by Faxian and Xuanzang's assertion that these were special characteristic features of Buddhism in Mathurā.

If we do not assume that the festivities in honor of the *stūpas* reported by Faxian became transferred and restricted to the region of Mathurā in two centuries—which is hardly plausible—one has to give Faxian a higher degree of historical credibility than Xuanzang and one has to find another explanation for both the discrepancies and similarities between both pilgrims' reports. Against the supposition that Xuanzang has the correct report and Faxian is wrong—or the assumption that there had been a shift from Central India to Mathurā in the time between Faxian and Xuanzang—we have the *argumentum ex silentio* of the Buddhist inscriptions from Mathurā. Not one of these epigraphic sources, which are definitely Buddhist,⁷² refers to one of the main disciples of the Buddha, although one should expect at least a minor reflection of these names—in place-names of e.g. monasteries or *stūpas*—but this is not the case.⁷³ Although Xuanzang stresses certain traits of Mahāyāna the high number of Buddhist statues from Mathurā does only represent the Buddha, a few Bodhisattvas and not one disciple of the Buddha which should be expected if they had played such an eminent role as Xuanzang describes.

Fortunately there is independent textual evidence to support the conclusion that Xuanzang in the case of the description of Mathurā is the

丘尼多供養阿難塔，以阿難請世尊聽女人出家故。諸沙彌多供養羅云。阿毘曇師者，供養阿毘曇。律師者，供養律。年年一供養，各自有日。摩訶衍人，則供養般若波羅蜜，文殊師利，觀世音等。眾僧受歲竟，長者，居士，婆羅門等各持種種衣物，沙門所須，以布施僧；眾僧受亦自各各布施。佛泥洹已來，聖眾所行威儀法則，相承不絕。

⁷² Cf. Shizutani 1978: 47, and Tsukamoto 1996: 639ff.: thirty eight of the inscriptions collected by Lüders are definitely Buddhist. It is striking to note that in Lüders' Index the names of the disciples—with the exception of Ānanda which is used, however, as a common personal name—occur not at all.

⁷³ Cf. Jaini 1989, especially note on p. 215, where he points out the striking fact (sic!) that some names of *vihāras* are known from the inscriptions but that the name Naṭabhāta-vihāra strangely enough is never found.

less reliable source compared with Faxian: in the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṅghika school, which had been brought to China by Faxian, and then had been translated by him and Buddhahadra into Chinese, the festivities in honor of the *stūpas* of the Buddha's disciples are mentioned several times, and the fact that they are mentioned in the monastic code⁷⁴ clearly indicates that they were not restricted to a certain local community such as the one in Mathurā. Beside the festival on occasion of the birthday, the enlightenment and the first sermon of the Buddha the Vinaya also mentions festivals for Ānanda, Rāhula (Luohouluo 羅侯羅; *-dabui* 大會: *-maha*) and the quinquennial *pañcavārṣika*: T.-1425, 247c16ff.; 249c5ff.; 250a29ff.; 267c2ff.; 357c16ff.; 382b8ff. (there we find Faxian's transcription Luoyun 羅云 for Rāhula); 454b27ff.; 495c1ff.; 546c25ff. Although this gives not the complete list of Buddhist festivities in a canonical text as in Faxian's own report which include the triad Mahākāśyapa—Mahāmaudgalyāyana—Śāriputra, at least the two patrons for the nuns and the novices, Ānanda und Rāhula, are there in the text.

The festivities are also mentioned by the extent Indian version of the monastic rules of the nuns (Bhikṣuṇī-vinaya) of the very same school. The relevant passage (see below) even supports the detail in Faxian's report that the nuns venerate the *stūpas* of Ānanda, while the novices (probably male as well as female) pay reverence to the *stūpas* of Rāhula. As Faxian received his copy of the Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya in Pāṭaliputra one should conclude that the festivals to which he himself and the Vinaya refer were indeed located in Central India in general and not in Mathurā as Xuanzang wants us to believe. The quoted rule even includes the detail of the possession of flower wreaths which are only allowed for nuns on the occasions of the Buddhist cardinal festivals such as the birth of the Buddha, his enlightenment, the first sermon—a triadic structure!—and those in honour of Ānanda and Rāhula and for the *mahāpañcavārṣika*

⁷⁴ For a complete reference of the different Vinaya versions mentioning plays and music see Hirakawa 1963: 100, and Hirakawa 1982: 345, note 163; it should be noted that the Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya's etiological story is singular and that the other Vinayas give different stories. Hirakawa conclusion from the Vinaya-evidence that the monks and nuns were excluded from these events (see below) should be dismissed—it is an argument which he brought forward to support his hypothesis of a connection between *stūpa* veneration by the laypeople and the rise of Mahāyāna.

—again a triadic structure (if we reduce the redundant duplication of a normal and a great *pañcavārṣika* to one item!).⁷⁵ These conspicuous triads will be taken up below.

Plays probably similar to those which Faxian mentions are reflected in the *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya* of the *Mahāsāṅghika* where six nuns visit a festival (*samāja*) and watch a comedy and the rule interdicts the attendance of nuns at certain amusements (plays, dances, wrestling, music: *nāṭa-nartanaka-salla-malla-pāṇi-svarikāḥ kumbha-bbūmirāḥ*).⁷⁶ In the Chinese translation

⁷⁵ Roth, 314, § 281: *atha dāni mālyopahāro bhavati jātimahā vā bodhi-mahā vā dharma-cakra-mahā vā Ananda-mahā vā Rāhula-mahā vā pañcavārṣikā vā; mahā-pañcavārṣikā; jano dāni āha; āryamaśrikābhi śobbhāpayitavyam; kiñcāpi bhikṣuṇī-m-utpala-mālām vā mallikā-mālām vā arāṅgaṇamālām vā graṇṭhbayaty an-āpattiḥ*; (“But [if] there is an offering of garlands [on occasion] of the great [festival of the Buddha’s] birth, the great [festival] of the enlightenment, the great [festival] of [the setting in motion] the wheel of the dharma, the great [festival] of Ānanda, the great [festival] of Rāhula, the quinquennial [festival], the great quinquennial [festival], and people say: ‘The noble nuns should [participate] in the decoration’ it is no offence [if] a [nun] binds a garland of lotus, a garland of jasmine, a garland of *arāṅgaṇa*.”); see also the French translation by Nolot 1991: 356. *Pañcavārṣika* here is certainly not the extensive donation festival which Faxian has described for the kingdom of Jiecha in the Karakorum but a kind of general festivity on the occasion of which the laypeople donated to the *saṅgha* (cf. Roth, *loc.cit.*, note 3, following Lüders: “das grosse, alle fünf Jahre gefeierte Ordensfest”): see Deeg (1997), 88f.

⁷⁶ Roth, 274f., § 238; see the French translation by Nolot 1991: 299f. (*Pācattika* 124) The specific meaning of some of these terms is not clear, and this is not facilitated by the parallel, but somewhat different section in the Chinese version of the *Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya*: 540b20ff. 佛住王舍城。爾時六群比丘尼先到作伎樂處，占顧坐處。伎兒戲時，高聲大笑。眾人效笑。人笑時，便復默然，似如坐禪人。笑適止，還復拍手大笑。於是眾人捨伎兒而觀比丘尼。時伎兒不得雇直，瞋恚，嫌責：「坐是沙門尼令我失雇直。」諸比丘尼語大愛道：乃至答言：「實爾。」佛言：「此是惡事。汝云何觀伎樂？從今已後，不聽觀伎樂，乃至已聞者當重聞。若比丘尼觀伎樂，行波夜提。」比丘尼者，如上說。伎樂者，舞伎，歌伎，饒盤，打鼓，如是一切，下至四人共戲。觀看者，波夜提。波夜提者，如上說：不得觀伎樂。若比丘尼乞食，值王王夫人，若天像出，有伎樂者，遇見，無罪。若下處，就高，作意闚望逐看，波夜提。若檀越欲供養佛，作眾伎樂，研香，結鬘，語比丘尼言：「阿梨耶！佐我安施供養具。」爾時得助作。若於彼間聞樂，有欲著心者，當捨去。 (“[Once] the Buddha stayed at Rājagṛha. At that time a group of six nuns came to a place where dance and music were performed. They looked for seats and when the actors played, they rose their voices and laughed loudly, and caused the people to laugh [as well]. When the people were laughing, they suddenly were silent and sat

of the correspondent Bhikṣuvīnaya the rule is connected with the birthday, the enlightenment, the first sermon of the Buddha and the quinquennial festival (*pañcavārṣika*): “artists and musicians” (*jiyuezhè* 伎樂者) are here mentioned whose presentations to see was however under normal circumstances forbidden for monks and nuns.⁷⁷ The existence of such

as if they were meditating. When accordingly the people stopped [to laugh], they [again] clapped their hands and laughed loudly. Thereupon the people forgot about the actors and watched the nuns [instead]. Then the actors any pay. They looked hatefully and reproached [them]: ‘These *śramaṇikās* caused us lose our pay.’ The other nuns reported this to Mahāprajāpati Gautamī, who went [and asked them and when they] answered: ‘So it is!’, the Buddha said: ‘This is a bad thing. Why did you watch a play and music? From now on, it is not allowed to watch plays and music and even should not listen again if she has heard it. If a nun watches plays and music she commits a *pācattika* offense.’ ‘Nun’ as explained above. ‘Plays and music’ mean: actors and musicians dance and sing, play big cymbals, beat the drum and all [instruments like these], including the common performance of down to four men: to watch these is a *pācattika* offense. ‘Pācattika’ as explained above: it is not allowed to watch plays and music. If a nun, while she is begging, meets a king and his wife, when there is a royal elephant and plays and music and she happens to see this—then this is not an offense. If she leaves her seat and goes to a higher [place] in order to get a better look and watches—then this is a *pācattika* offense. If a *dānapati* wants to venerate the Buddha with plays, music, incense and wreaths says to a nun: ‘O noble one! Could you help me to provide the donation?’ then she may help. She may help them. If she feels attached to the music while listening to it, she should leave. If, while listening to the music, she feels desire then she should leave.” See the slightly different translation of Hirakawa 1982: 344ff.

⁷⁷ T. 1425.494a8ff. 伎樂者:佛住王舍城加蘭陀竹園。時六群比丘先至作樂處,視占如坐禪比丘。伎兒既集,作眾伎樂,眾人悅樂,喜笑。比丘默然。眾人笑已,比丘方更拍手,大笑。眾人競看,伎兒不得履直,嫌言:「坐是比丘令我等不得財物。此敗壞人何道之有?」諸比丘聞已,以是因緣具白世尊。佛言:「呼六群比丘來!」來已,佛問比丘:「汝實爾不?」答言:「實爾,世尊。」佛言:「此是惡事。從今日後,不聽觀看伎兒。」伎兒者,打鼓,歌,舞,彈琵琶,鑊,銅鈸,如是比種種伎,樂下至四人聚戲,不聽,看。若比丘入城,聚落,若天象出,若王出,翼從作種種伎樂,過行觀見,無罪。若作方便看,越比尼罪。若佛生日大會處,菩提大會處,轉法輪大會,五年大會,作種種伎樂供養佛,若檀越言:「諸尊者!與我和合翼從世尊。」爾時得與和合在坐。若坐中有種種伎樂,生染著心者,即應起去。是名伎樂。(“Plays and music’: The Buddha stayed in the city of Rājagṛha in the bamboo-park of Kalanda. At that time a group of six monks came to a place where music was performed, and the monks watched and acted as if they were sitting in meditation. The artists gathered and performed different plays and music

Vinaya-stories and the rules derived for which they form the etiological background certainly presupposes the existence of such presentations.⁷⁸

If we have a look at the Aśokāvadāna—the text which Przylusky considers to be directly linked to Mathurā—there is an indirect reference to the custom of not only venerating the *stūpas* of the Buddha and those of his main disciples; this reference is, however, not occurring in direct connection with Mathurā but with other places: together with his Buddhist “*guru*” Upagupta Aśoka travels to the sacred sites of the life of the Buddha but also to the *stūpas* of Śāriputra, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, Mahākāśyapa, Batkula and Ānanda which were obviously thought to be in the Jetavana monastery in Śrāvastī.⁷⁹

and the crowd, pleased by it, laughed happily, but the monks stayed silent. After the crowd had laughed the monks deliberately clapped their hands and laughed loudly. The crowd watched them instead of the actors and [the actors] did not get their pay. They became angry and said: ‘Those monks sitting [there] caused that we did not receive a pay. What religious path do these corrupt people [follow]?’ After the monks had heard they told this matter to the World Honored One. The Buddha said: ‘Summon this group of six monks!’ After they had come the Buddha asked [them]: ‘O monks! Did you really do this?’ They answered: ‘We really did it, o World Honored One!’ The Buddha said: ‘This is a bad thing! From now on you will not listen and watch artists.’ Artists are [those] who beat the drum, sing, dance, play the lute or the cymbals and copper cymbals as in these different kinds of plays and music including the common performance of down to four men—[you should] not listen and watch [them]. In case that monks enter a city or a village and they meet a royal elephant or a king, these are accompanied by all kind of plays and music and pass by, then seeing these is not an offense. In case that they deliberately watch these—it is a light offense [*vinayātikrama*]. In case that at a great assembly [i.e.: festival] [on occasion] of the Buddha’s birthday, of his turning of the wheel of the *dharmā*, of a *pāñcavārṣika* different plays or music are performed in honor of the Buddha and the donors [*dānapati*] say: ‘O venerable ones! Join us to venerate the World Honored One.’—then they should join [them] seated. If, while they are seated, the various plays and music afflicts their mind, then they should stand up and go away. This is called ‘plays and music.’”

⁷⁸ For other examples of episodes and rules referring to music and plays from the Vinayas of the different schools (*nikāya*) see Hiraikawa 1963: 100, and Bareau 1962: 246; see for example in the Dharmaguptaka-bhikṣuṇī-vinaya / Sifen lü 四分律 (T. 1428) see Heirmann 2002: 2, 609f., or in the Thervāda-bhikkhunī-vinaya (Pācittiya 10, 4,267, 29f.) see Hüsken 1997: 164ff (with rich commentarial material).

⁷⁹ Cowell, Neil 1886: 394ff.; Strong 1983: 253ff.

Furthermore, there are structural reasons for the conclusion that the information of Faxian on Buddhist veneration in India were taken over by Xuanzang in a distorted form⁸⁰ as connected with Mathurā: Faxian's report on the veneration of the *stūpas* is marked, as we have seen, by a clear triadic structure which is totally lost in Xuanzang's list: Śāriputra—Maudgalyāyana—Mahākāśyapa,⁸¹ Abhidharma—Vinaya—Sūtra, Prajñāpāramitā⁸²—Mañjuśrī—Avalokiteśvara, the last triad definitely representing personifications of the typical virtues of Mahāyāna (transcendental) wisdom—knowledge (*jñāna*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). This triad is not a coincidental one as we find in the *bhikṣuṇī*-Vinaya of the Mahāsāṅghika the traditional group of four events: birth—enlightenment—first sermon, *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, which is here reduced to a triad by omitting the *nirvāṇa*. In contrast to this Xuanzang's enumeration does not show any consequent structure except his connecting the special competence of the disciples of the Buddha: Abhidharma—Śāriputra, meditation (*dhyāna*)—Maudgalyāyana, Sūtra—Pūrṇamaitrāyanīputra, Vinaya—Upāli. Even this “systematization,” however, has its weak point because it adds to the sections of the Tripiṭaka an inconsistent element of *dhyāna*. Watters⁸³ correctly pointed out, that Xuanzang's report does not reflect exactly the traditional assignment of special characteristics to certain disciples of the Buddha. Furthermore there is the not very instructive statement by Xuanzang that the followers of the Mahāyāna venerate the Bodhisattvas.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ For another example of restructuring such a sequence from Faxian's report by Xuanzang—the description of the important sites in Kapilavastu—see Deeg 2003: 26–27.

⁸¹ The triad Mahākāśyapa—Mahāmaudgalyāyana—Śāriputra does occur together in the Mahāsāṅghika-Vinaya in the report about beginning of the first council in Rājagṛha: T. 1425.490c10ff.; see also Przyłuski 1926: 204. It is again an interesting detail that this narrative element is only found in the Mahāsāṅghika-Vinaya and not in the other versions of the event.

⁸² This seems to be the first historical reference to a theomorphic Prajñāpāramitā.

⁸³ Watters 1904 / 1905: I, 303ff.

⁸⁴ On the Chinese pilgrims' description of Mahāyāna in India see Deeg 2006: 120f.

An explanation for the inconsistencies and contradicting elements in Xuanzang's report on Mathurā is that he has used the information given by Faxian for Central India and has related it to Mathurā. This mistake then also easily slipped into Western scholars' interpretations because the translations they used were no better in interpreting Faxian's text than Xuanzang. Even if most users of Xuanzang's *Xiyu ji* seem to suppose that he had been to the sites he describes this is not necessarily the case. It is not clear, neither from the *Xiyu ji* nor from Xuanzang's biography (*Cien zhuān*), that he had really visited Mathurā. Having a look on the map one would rather argue that he has travelled from towards sacred places of Buddhism in the Gangetic plain and that he left out the detour to the south to visit Mathurā.

Taking into consideration what has been said about Xuanzang's fiction concerning Mathurā, all the points which Sharma points out can be confirmed and the problems he had to contextualise Xuanzang's report with other data can be dismissed as a bubble of air:

It is not safe to rely fully upon the statements of Hiuen-tsang as he appears to have mixed up the description of Mathurā with some other place. He has nowhere given the name of the town and has also omitted the Yamunā. The narration of monkey may be the creation of his own imagination or a legend prevalent here. It is also not possible to believe that the Buddha made frequent visits to Mathurā. The distances and measurements are also not furnished with accuracy. It is not unlikely that he by-passed Mathurā but recorded the description of the place on the basis of hearsay. Some of his impressions are quite close to those as recorded by Fa-hien and as such these cannot be ignored. We can derive the conclusion that Buddhism was prevalent at Mathurā although its decline had begun.⁸⁵

The goal of this exemplary investigation was beside the discussion of legendary material and its attributed sites on a more programmatic level to show that the reports of the pilgrim monks, though they are of course valuable and indispensable sources, should not be taken for granted as reliable 'historical sources' but need a thorough comparative study case by

⁸⁵ Sharma 1989: 47.

case to separate the fictional chaff from the historical wheat. This kind of research in the West has slumbered for the last hundred years since the publication of Thomas Watters' commentary on the *Xiyu ji* and since the French and English translations of the *Xiyu ji*, but changes in methodology and new discoveries of archaeological and scriptural materials demonstrate the need for critical studies of the Chinese pilgrims' accounts, especially Xuanzang's lengthy descriptions, in order to avoid, among other things, archaeologists looking for sites in India which probably never existed.

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