
Sudhana's Encounter with the Lumbinī-vana Goddess, according to the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*

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Abstract: Two themes are presented in this paper: one concerns the name of the place where, according to tradition, the future Buddha was born, Lumbinī-vana, and the other is devoted to the figure of the forest goddess who assisted at the birth, Lumbinī-vana-devatā. The briefly presented survey of the relevant texts attempts to show the increasing role for the Lumbinī grove deity, culminating in chapter 42 of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*.

Keywords: Buddhist literature, biography of the Buddha, Lumbinī, *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, story of Sudhana

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§ 1¹. The Buddhist tradition is unanimous in placing the birth of the Buddha-to-be in Lumbinī, now situated in Nepal.² As Harry Falk has pointed out, “[n]o other place than Lumbinī has ever claimed to be the site of the Buddha’s birth” (FALK 1998: 1).

In the often-quoted passage from the canonical Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 16, § 5.8), the Buddha addressing Ānanda mentioned four places of pilgrimage that should be visited by monks, nuns and lay followers, though without specifying them:

Ānanda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse emotion in the faithful. Which are they? “Here the Tathāgata was born” is the first. “Here the Tathāgata attained supreme enlightenment” is the second. “Here the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma” is the third. “Here the Tathāgata attained the Nibbana-element without remainder” is the fourth. And, Ānanda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a devout heart will, at the breaking-up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.³

§ 2. After having carried out a detailed study of the texts related to the biography of the Buddha, André Bareau observed that the name Lumbinī does not appear in the canonical *sutta* and *vinaya* texts of the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its Chinese counterparts.

On the one hand, in this immense literature preserved in Sanskrit, in Pali or in Chinese or Tibetan translation, the passages naming Lumbinī are extremely rare and several of them are moreover obvious additions to older texts. On the other hand, the birth of the Blessed One is sometimes mentioned in the *Sūtrapiṭaka* and the *Vinayapiṭaka* without Lumbinī being mentioned, whereas Kapilavastu or the Śākya are referred to. However, these latter passages certainly do not belong to the oldest strata

¹ From 28–29 April 2018 in Lumbini was held *The International Conference on Lumbini: The Birthplace of Buddha and Fountain of Buddhism and World Peace*. It was followed on 30 April by the 2562nd Buddha Jayanti solemn celebrations in the presence of the Prime Minister and President of Nepal. The present paper is a thoroughly revised and extended version of a presentation shown at the conference.

² Over the past few decades, a number of publications have appeared on the Buddha’s birth and birthplace, Lumbinī, based on the textual, art and archaeological researches. See CÜPPERS et al. 2010; DEEG 2003; FALK 1998; FALK 2006; FALK 2012; FALK 2017; CONINGHAM et al. 2013; UNESCO 2013. On the cycle of Ajanta paintings illustrating Buddha’s birth in Lumbinī see SCHLINGLOFF 1988: 18–20, 22. For a brief overview of the relationship between the early Buddhist texts and the art that refers to the birth of the Buddha, see ZIN 2018: 66–69.

³ Trans. WALSH 1995: 263–264. For the Pāli text (§ 5.8) and the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (§ 41.6–14) see WALDSCHMIDT 1951: 388, 390.

of the canonical texts, as they contain characteristic legendary or cultic elements.⁴

2.1. A few references⁵ are found in the texts of the Pāli *Khuddaka Nikāya*, viz. the *Nidānakathā*⁶ and the *Suttanipāta*⁷, and in the *Kathāvatthu* of the *Abhidhammapīṭaka* compiled by Moggaliputta Tissa.⁸ It seems therefore – concludes Bareau – that for the first generations of the Buddha's followers, as well as for some of the monks who lived after Aśoka, the Buddha's birthplace

⁴ BAREAU 1987: 69: “D'une part, dans cette immense littérature conservée en sanskrit, en pâli ou en traduction chinoise ou tibétaine, les passages nommant Lumbinī sont extrêmement rares et plusieurs d'entre eux sont en outre des additions évidentes à des textes plus anciens. De l'autre, il est parfois question de la naissance du Bienheureux dans les *Sūtrapiṭaka* et les *Vinayapiṭaka* sans que Lumbinī soit mentionné, alors qu'on se réfère à Kapilavastu ou aux Śākya. Or, ces derniers passages n'appartiennent certainement pas aux strates les plus anciennes des textes canoniques, car ils contiennent des éléments légendaires ou cultuels caractéristiques.” Cf. FALK 1998: 1: “Bareau recently drew attention to inconsistencies in the source texts, and on the basis of them cast doubt upon Lumbinī's legitimacy.”

⁵ For the references to the Pāli sources, see entry *Lumbinī* in DPPN II: 784. Cf. DPPN I: 1112: Lumbinī-vana was mentioned in the *Papañcasūdanī* commentary on the *Devadahasutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 101): *bhagavā taṃ nigamaṃ nissāya lumbinīvane viharati* / “The Blessed One was dwelling in the Lumbinī grove near that market town [i.e. Devadaha]” (*Papañcasūdanī*, ed. PTS II: 810).

⁶ *Nidānakathā*, ed. PTS I: 52, 53:
Dvinnam pana nagarānam antare ubhayanagaravāsīnampi lumbinīvanam nāma maṅgalasālavanam atthi, [...] Sakalam lumbinīvanam cittalatāvanasadisam, mahānubhāvassa rañño susajjitaṃ āpānamaṅgalaṃ viya ahoṣi.
Trans. JAYAWICKRAMA 2006: 140 (§ 331): “Now, between the two towns there is a pleasure grove of Sāla trees, called the Lumbinī Park, belonging to the citizens of both towns. [...] The entire Lumbinī Grove was like the Citralatā forest or like the well-arranged banqueting hall of a mighty king.” Cf. BAREAU 1987: 70 fn. 5.

⁷ *Suttanipāta*, *Nālakasutta*, v. 683, ed. PTS: 132:
So Bodhisatto ratanavaro atulyo manussaloke hitasukhatāya jāto, Sakyānam game janapade Lumbineyye, ten'amha tuṭṭhā atiriva kalyarūpā.
Trans. NORMAN 1992: 78: “That Bodhisatta, excellent jewel, incomparable, has been born in the world of men for (their) benefit and happiness, in the village of the Sakyans, in the Lumbinī country. Therefore, we are exultant, exceedingly happy.” Cf. BAREAU 1987: 70 fn. 6.

⁸ BAREAU 2005: 241: *Kathāvatthu* (Theravādin Mahāvihāra) XVIII.1, § 173: “173. The Buddha Bhagavant lived (*aṭṭhāsi*) in the world of humans (*manusloka*). There are places of residence of the Buddha (*buddhavuttha*), shrines (*cetiya*), parks (*ārāma*), monasteries (*vihāra*), villages (*gāma*), markets (*nigama*), towns (*nagara*), kingdoms (*raṭṭha*), lands (*janapada*) where he lived. He was born (*jāta*) at Lumbinī, he became fully enlightened (*abhisambuddha*) at the foot (*mūla*) [of the tree] of Enlightenment (*bodhi*), the wheel of the Dhamma (*dhammacakka*) was turned (*pavattita*) by the Bhagavant at Vārāṇasī, his vital element was given up (*ossatṭha*) at the shrine of Pāvāla, he was completely extinguished (*parinibbuta*) at Kusinārā. In the Suttas, the Buddha himself said that he lived in such and such a place.”

was not located in Lumbinī, but was vaguely associated with the country of Śākya and its capital, Kapilavastu.⁹

§ 3. The Sanskrit sources¹⁰ are more explicit about the birthplace of the Buddha. Lumbinī is mentioned in the *Lalitavistara*, *Mahāvastu*, *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, *Aśokāvadāna*, *Gaṇḍavyūha*, etc. It is called a village (*grāma*), a garden (*ārāma*), a park (*udyāna*), or most often a grove (*vana*). The texts explain the origin of the name of the grove, describe it in ornate style, mention the name of the tree whose branch Māyādevī was grasping while giving birth, and also introduce a figure of a female deity who was residing in the Lumbinī grove (*lumbinī-vana-devatā*) and witnessed the birth of the Blessed One.¹¹

§ 3.1. In what follows we shall briefly survey the relevant texts and attempt to show (as far as is possible within the limits of this paper) the increasing role for the Lumbinī grove deity, culminating in chapter 42 of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*.

In the *Lalitavistara* account of the bodhisattva's birth, the gods Śakra and Brahma received the child and wrapped it in the most delicate cloth. According to the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, it was only Śakra who, having assumed the appearance of an old midwife, received the child in a swaddling cloth made of deerskin. The Lumbinī grove deity appears in person in the *Mahāvastu*, but it is only in the *Aśokāvadāna* that she explicitly declares that she was a witness to the bodhisattva's birth. However, the prominent role of the Lumbinī-vana-devatā in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, who in the form of a female bodhisattva gives Sudhana a long lesson on the way to practise the bodhisattva path, is notable.

⁹ BAREAU 1987: 70. Cf. FALK 1998: 3: "Bareau has gone to great lengths to show that authoritative Buddhist texts, in expatiating upon the birthplace of the Buddha, are highly contradictory in the details, as if the authors had never personally been to the scene of the event. [...] If we seek statements that offer a balanced account of the site as it actually was, we are forced to resort to the travel reports of foreigners, namely those written by Chinese and Tibetan." See DEEG 2003 on the Chinese sources (relations of Faxian and Xuanzang).

¹⁰ Edgerton in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* sub *lumbinī* (BHSD p. 463) mentioned three meanings of the word: 1. "name of the grove where Śākyamuni was born", 2. "name of a tree = plakṣa", 3. "name of a class of deities". The second meaning will be discussed and corrected below, see § 6.1.1. In the *Mahāsamājasūtra* § 28 there are mentioned two classes of female spirits: *lumbinī* and *lumbinī-śreṣṭhā*, WALDSCHMIDT 1932: 191(387), however in the parallel passage of the Pāli *Mahāsamayasutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 20, § 18, trans. WALSHE 1995: 319) these are absent.

¹¹ See SCHMITHAUSEN 2009: 77–83: "5.2.1. Tree Deities and Numinous Trees". The *Gilānadassanasutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (ed. PTS IV: 302, § 3) mentions the following kinds of deities (spirits) inhabiting trees and plants: *ārāma-devatā* "park deity", *vana-devatā* "grove (forest) deity", *rukkha-devatā* "tree deity", *osadhītiṇa-vanaspatīsu adhvattā-devatā* "deities dwelling in medicinal herbs and in large forest trees"; cf. SCHMITHAUSEN 2009: 78 fn. 189. Cf. also SHAW 2006: 58–59 on Māyādevī and tree worship.

§ 4. The celebrated *Lalitavistara*, a Sanskrit Mahāyāna sūtra, one of the “nine Dharma jewels” of the Nepal tradition, is extolling the life of the Buddha in prose and verse.¹² Its seventh chapter (*janma-parivarta*) consists of a highly embellished description of the birth of the Buddha. In fact, it is for the most part the Buddha himself who narrates the story of his life to the monks. The Lumbinī grove (Lumbinī-vana) is mentioned several times.

§ 4.1. When ten full months elapsed, the time for the birth of the Bodhisattva had come and in the king Śuddhodana's palace garden (*grhodyāna*) thirty-two omens (*pūrvanimitta*)¹³ appeared.¹⁴ Māyādevī realized that the time of the childbirth is coming near, she addressed the king Śuddhodana with an ardent request to resort to a quiet and pleasant place, the pleasure garden. The king accordingly commanded his servants to duly prepare for her departure and decorate the Lumbinī garden.

Hearing these words of the lady, the king, in delight and joy of mind, thus addressed his courtiers: “Place in array my vehicles harnessed to elephants and horses, and my chariots, and decorate the precious Lumbinī garden. (VII.4). [...]

Decorate the Lumbinī garden which, in its wealth of flowers, is like the Nandana garden of the Sūras, with jewels and gold in profusion; – with precious stuffs of various kinds set off all the trees; and having done so report to me.” (VII.8).

These commands having been heard, the Lumbinī garden was immediately decorated. (VII.9ab).¹⁵

¹² Cf. LAMOTTE 1988: 648–662 (“The successive stages of the legend of the Buddha”); STRONG 2001, esp. pp. 38–40 (“The Buddha's Birth”) and note on p. 157.

¹³ BHS s.v. “advance-sign”.

¹⁴ LV pp. 61.1–62.6. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* lists ten omens (*pūrvanimitta*), ten omens of great light (*mahāvabhāsa*), and ten miracles attending the birth (*janmavikurvita*) of the bodhisattva which appeared in the Lumbinī grove (see below § 8).

¹⁵ Trans. RAJENDRALAL MITRA 1998: 111. LV pp. 62.21–24; 63.11–14:
*vacanam imu śruṇitvā deviye pāṛthivendraḥ tuṣṭo muditacittāḥ pāriṣadyānavocat /
hayagajarathaṃ paṅktiyā vāhanā yojayadhvaṃ pravaraḡuṇasamrddhāṃ lumbinīm
maṇḍayadhvam // (VII.4) [...]*
*maṅikanakaniṣiktām lumbinīm kārayadhvaṃ vividhavasananaratnaiḥ sarvavrkṣāṃ pravethā /
vividhakusumacitraṃ nandanam vā surānām vadatha ca mama śīghraṃ sarvam etaṃ vidhāya
// (VII.8)*

vacanam imu niśamyā pāriṣadyaiḥ kṣaṇena vāhana kṛta sajjā lumbinī maṇḍitā sā /
Cf. Aśvaghōṣa, *Buddhacarita* I.6:

“In her longing for the lonely forest as suited to trance, she asked the king to go and stay in the grove called Lumbinī, which was gay like the garden of Citraratha with trees of every kind.” (Trans. JOHNSTON 1936: 2).

The stanza I.6 was not preserved in the Sanskrit original. Michael HAHN 1975: 82–83 offered

Then, a magnificent procession set out from the palace, with Māyādevī riding in a splendid chariot carried by the four protectors of the world (*jagatipāla*), headed by the gods Indra and Brahmā.

That beautiful chariot was set off, by the king's orders, with a hundred thousand tinkling bells and a thousand chauris; it had a jewelled throne, and around it jewelled trees, rich in foliage and flowers. (VII.15). [...]

This day will the noblest of beings be born in the garden of Lumbinī. The four guardians of the quarters are carrying that chariot. Indra, lord of the gods, is purifying the road, and Brahmā is marching in front to restrain the wicked. (VII.18).

[...] The whole of the Lumbinī garden was redolent with scented waters, and besprinkled with choice flowers. All the trees in that noble park were clad with leaves, flowers and fruits out of season. That park was decorated by Devas, even as the Miśraka Park is adorned by them.¹⁶

The queen entered the Lumbinī park with her human and celestial retinue and strolling around she noticed a magnificent *plakṣa* tree:

Now, Māyādevī, having entered the park and descended from her chariot, sauntered about in the company of human and heavenly damsels. Rambling from tree to tree, strolling from one parterre to another, now looking at this tree, then at another, she came near the waved-leaved fig tree (*Ficus infectoria*, *plakṣa*). [...] Now, that *plakṣa* tree, feeling the glory of the Bodhisattva, lowered its head and saluted her. Now, Māyādevī, extending her right hand, [...] held a branch of the *plakṣa* tree, and, looking playfully towards the sky, stood there yawning. [...] Thus did the Bodhisattva, remain thriving in the womb of his mother. And when ten full months had passed, forth from the right side of his mother, he issued, with full memory, knowing everything, and undefiled by any utterine dirt, such as usually attaches to others. [...] At this time [...] there were present before him Śakra, the lord of the Devas, and Brahmā, lord

an improved edition of the Tibetan translation:

*de ni lum bi zhes bya'i nags mthar gyur pa'i sa /
sna tshogs ljon shing sna tshogs shing rta mngon dga'bar /
bsam gtan la bzod dben pa'i nags kyi mtha' bzhed ma /
'gro ba'i ched dang gnas phyir mi skyong la zhus so /*

“Sie, die Verlangen hegte nach einer zur Versenkung geeigneten Waldgegend in[mitten] der Lumbinī benannten waldigen Örtlichkeit, welche mit ihren verschiedenen Bäumeen [so] lieblich war [wie] der [Garten] Caitraratha, bat den König darum, [dorthin] gehen und [dort] verweilen [zu dürfen].” [She, desirous of a wooded spot suitable for contemplation in [the middle of] the wooded place called Lumbinī, which was lovely with its various trees [like] the Caitraratha garden, requested the king to go and stay [there].]

¹⁶ Trans. RAJENDRALAL MITRA 1998: 112, 113. LV pp. 64.15–18 (= VII.16); 64.26 (=VII.18d): *adya jagati śreṣṭho jāyate lumbinīye*; 65.21–24.

of the earth, and they respectfully and intelligently and in full memory received the Bodhisattva under cover of a beautiful piece of silk cloth [*divya-kāśika-vastrāntaritaṃ*].¹⁷

The birth was accompanied by many miracles and wonders, which were described in detail. Seven days after giving birth to the Bodhisattva, Māyādevī died and was reborn among the thirty-three Gods.¹⁸

Some elements of the narrative contained in this chapter as well as in the following chapters (esp. X and XII) of the *Lalitavistara* have parallels in some parts of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.¹⁹ However, this question of the relationship between the texts requires further study and is beyond the scope of the present paper.

§ 5. The *Sanḥabhedavastu*, the 17th part of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya,²⁰ gives many interesting details concerning Lumbinī, its origin and its name, which were included into the description of two cities, Kapilavastu and Devadṛśa,²¹ and this story in turn constitutes a part of a larger narrative about the origin of the Śākya.²²

§ 5.1. There were two neighbouring cities (*nagara*), Kapilavastu and Devadṛśa.²³ In Kapilavastu, king (*rājā*) Siṃhahanu reigned happily, while king Suprabuddha reigned in Devadṛśa. Suprabuddha's principal queen (*agra-mahiṣī*) was called Lumbinī. She was very beautiful and amiable. In the city of Devadṛśa there was also an opulent householder (*gr̥hapati*) who possessed a lovely garden (*ārāma*). From time to time (*kālānukālam*) the king Suprabuddha used to visit the park together with his female companion(s) (*antaḥpura*) to enjoy pleasures (*rati-krīḍā*). The queen Lumbinī having seen that lovely garden of pleasures felt an eager desire (*spṛha*) for it and asked the king to have it obtained for her. However, since the garden belonged to a householder, the king was unable to fulfil Lumbinī's desire and promised her to arrange a new, even more beautiful (*śobhanatara*) garden. Accordingly, the king Suprabuddha had made a new garden (*ārāma*), even better than that (*tadviśiṣṭatara*), which was named Lumbinī-vana.

¹⁷ Trans. RAJENDRALAL MITRA 1998: 113–114. LV pp. 65.25–27; 66.6–8; 66.10–15. On the swaddling cloth see STOYE 2010.

¹⁸ LV p. 77.1–2: *saptarātrajātasya bodhisattvasya mātā māyādevī kālam akarot / sā kālagatā trāyatrimṣatī deveṣūpapadyata /*.

¹⁹ Cf. Gv chapters (Vaidya ed.): 43. Gopā, 44. Māyā, 46. Viśvamitra, 47. Śilpābhijña.

²⁰ MSV_S I: 33–34; for the Tibetan trans. see ROCKHILL 1884: 14–15. In the following my summary follows the Sanskrit text.

²¹ MSV_S I: 30–31.

²² See SHIRI 2020.

²³ MSV_S I: 30 – on the origin and names of the two cities. Pāli: Devadaha; cf. DPPN I: 1111–1112.

Meanwhile, king Siṃhahanu for a long time (*dīrgha-rātram*) was longing (*āśāsaka*) for a cakravartin in his clan (*aho bata me kule cakravartī utpadyeta*), while king Suprabuddha wanted to make a family relationship (*saṃbandha*) with king Siṃhahanu (*aho bata me siṃhahanunā sārđhaṃ saṃbandhaḥ syād*). And Suprabuddha enjoyed pleasures with his wife. She became pregnant (*āpanna-satvā saṃvrtā*) and gave birth to a beautiful girl (*dārikā*) who was called Māyā, as if she were not a girl but a creation of Viśvakarman (*nāsau dārikā; kiṃ tarhi, viśvakarma-nirmitā sā māyā*).²⁴ After some time the queen gave birth to another girl, equally beautiful, who was called Mahāmāyā. According to a prophecy, Māyā would beget a son endowed with marks (*lakṣaṇa-sampanna*) who would become a powerful monarch (*bala-cakravartin*)²⁵, whereas Mahāmāyā would beget a son endowed with thirty-two marks of a great man (*mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*)²⁶ who would become a great king (*rājā cakravartin*). When both girls became mature enough, king Suprabuddha sent a messenger (*dūta*) to king Siṃhahanu²⁷ with a matrimonial offer for his son, prince Śuddhodana. The offer was gladly accepted and the prince married Mahāmāyā first. After some delay due to unfavourable circumstances, the second daughter Māyā was also given in marriage to Śuddhodana. Thus, the prince Śuddhodana had two wives (*bhāryā*).

Now, the *Saṅghabhedavastu* continues its narrative and tells about Śuddhodana's succession as a king of Kapilavastu after the demise of king Siṃhahanu.²⁸ Under the rule of Śuddhodana, the kingdom was prosperous, secure and rich in food. While the king was amusing himself with the queen Mahāmāyā, the bodhisattva who abided in the Tuṣita heaven was looking down at the Earth, seeking the right caste, place, time, family and woman for his birth.²⁹ Next is described the descent of the bodhisattva from Tuṣita heaven,³⁰ and the miraculous conception. When the bodhisattva was willing to be born in the womb of queen Mahāmāyā, Śakra, the lord of gods, made her endowed with splendour (lustre) (*ojopasaṃhāraṃ kṛtavān*) and her womb purified (*kukṣiṃ śodhitavān*).³¹ The interpreters of dreams (*svapnādhyāyavid*) and brahmin soothsayers (*naimittika*)

²⁴ MSV_S I: 34.

²⁵ BHSD: 398 (“a kind of inferior cakravartin”).

²⁶ BHSD: 458–460.

²⁷ The name of Siṃhahanu's wife and mother of Śuddhodana is not mentioned. In the Pāli chronicle *Mahāvamsa* appears the name Kaccānā, cf. DPPN I: 476.

²⁸ MSV_S I: 36.

²⁹ MSV_S I: 36–39.

³⁰ MSV_S I: 39–40.

³¹ Cf. BHSD sub *upasaṃhāra*. The Tibetan translation is: “Śakra, the lord of the gods, provided the queen Mahāmāyā with brightness and purified her womb.” (Lhasa Kanjur, 'dul ba, GA, fol. 414b2–3: *lha rnam kyī dbang po brgya byin gyis btsun mo sgyu 'phrul chen mo la gzi brjid bsgrubts shing lhumts kyang gtsang bar byas so //*).

were summoned by the king to explain the four auspicious signs in a dream of the queen Mahāmāyā.³² They predicted that a son would be born with the thirty-two marks of a great man (*mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*); if he stayed at home he would be a great cakravartin king, but if he left home and took up the life of an ascetic he would become a tathāgata, a fully awakened buddha. Then follows a description of the bodhisattva's entering the mother's womb (*matuḥ kukṣim avakrāntaḥ*).³³

A strong desire for pregnancy (*dohada*) arose when the queen was about to give birth.³⁴ Going to the Lumbinī garden (*udṃyāna*) of her father, king Suprabuddha, was the last of the five longings of Mahāmāyā.³⁵ Accordingly, the king ordered the park to be cleansed, and then Mahāmāyā set out to Lumbinī. There, while walking she saw a blossoming aśoka-tree (*aśoka-pādapa*) and stopped at it willing to give birth (*prasavitu-kāmā*). Then Śakra, the lord of the gods (*devendra*), assuming for himself the form of an old midwife (*vrddha-dhātṛī-varṇa*)³⁶, stood behind Mahāmāyā, and at the moment of the bodhisattva's birth he received the child in a strip of cloth made of deer-skin (*ajina-sāṭikāyām pratigrhita*).³⁷ When the bodhisattva came forth from the mother's womb (*mātuḥ kukṣer niṣkrānta*), she, a woman of the noble class (*kṣatriyī*), gave birth to a *kṣatriya* child in a standing position (*sthitā*).³⁸

Then follows a description of wonderful events accompanying the birth of the Buddha, his making seven steps and the famous exclamation announcing his last birth and final liberation from the bonds of *saṃsāra*.³⁹

§ 5.2. A feature of the story of the Buddha's birth in the *Sanḅhabhedavastu* is the explanation of the origin of the name Lumbinī from the name of the principal

³² MSV_S I: 40–41. Cf. DURT 2002: 62.

³³ MSV_S I: 41–43.

³⁴ MSV_S I: 43–44. See DURT 2002.

³⁵ DURT 2002: 64.

³⁶ Cf. BHSD sub *dhātṛ/dhātṛī*.

³⁷ MSV_S I: 44.

³⁸ MSV_S I: 45. See *Mahāpadānasutta (Dīgha Nikāya 14)* § 1.24; trans. WALSHE 1995: 204: "It is the rule that whereas other women give birth sitting or lying down, it is not so with the Bodhisatta's mother, who gives birth standing up. That is the rule." In Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* 1.8, "the queen went to a bed covered with a canopy" (*rājapatnī* [...] *śayyām vitānopahitām prapede*), OLIVELLE 2008: 4–5.

³⁹ MSV_S I: 45: *dharmatā khalu sāmpratājāto bodhisatvaḥ saptapadāni prakrāntaḥ parigrhīto na kenacit; caturdiśaṃ ca vyavalokayati; vācaṃ ca bhāṣate, iyaṃ pūrvā dik pūrvamgamo bhaviṣyāmi nirvāṇāya, iyaṃ dakṣiṇā dakṣiṇīyo bhaviṣyāmi kṛtsnasya jagataḥ, iyaṃ paścimā dik, mama paścimaṃ janma bhaviṣyati; iyaṃ uttarā dik, bhavaṣaṃsārād uttariṣyāmi iti* /. Cf. *Mahāpadānasutta (Dīgha Nikāya 14, § 1.29)*, trans. WALSHE 1995: 205: "I am chief in the world, supreme in the world, eldest in the world. This is my last birth, there will be no more re-becoming.' That is the rule."

wife of king Suprabuddha, ruler of the city of Devadṛśa. The king, wishing to fulfil the queen's wish, had a beautiful garden (*ārāma*) laid out for her, which he named Lumbinī-vana (Lumbinī Grove). It was there that Mahāmāyā, daughter of Suprabudha and Lumbinī, wife of king Śuddhodana and ruler of Kapilavastu, gave birth to a son, the future Buddha, under a flowering *aśoka* tree. The forest goddess (*vana-devatā*) does not appear in this story. The birth was attended by Śakra, the lord of the gods, who took the form of an old midwife (nurse) (*vr̥ddha-dhātrī-varṇa*). It is only in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* that the old midwife is identified with the Lumbinī grove goddess (*lumbinī-vana-devatā*). Standing behind Mahāmāyā Śakra received the child in a strip of cloth made of deer-skin (*ajina-śāṭikāyāṃ pratigr̥hita*).⁴⁰ What is remarkable is the role the god Śakra plays in the story, from the moment of conception to the moment of birth.

§ 6. The *Mahāvastu* is a large text belonging to the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṅghika Lokottara-vāda school, which has a very complex and intricate textual structure, composed in mixed Sanskrit. It contains an account of the life of the Buddha in a series of episodes. Lumbinī(-vana) is mentioned several times.

§ 6.1. At the beginning of the Mv is a section of the *Daśabhūmika*⁴¹ describing the stages (*bhūmi*) of bodhisattva spiritual progress. The Venerable Mahākātyāyana, answering the questions of the Venerable Mahākāśyapa, describes the ten *bhūmis* in turn. In the description of the third *bhūmi*, Nāmatideva⁴², a certain deity belonging to the Thirty Three Gods (*trāyastriṃśaka*)⁴³, being a bodhisattva, appears, singing a song in praise of the Exalted One. It contains a brief account of the birth of the Buddha. The most interesting is the passage referring to Māyādevī's visit to the Lumbinī grove.

§ 6.1.1. The text of Senart's edition (Mv_S I: 99.8) reads *lumbodyāna* but certainly is a corrupt reading. Moreover, Senart suggested (Mv_S I: 453) that in this passage the word ***lumba*** is the name of a tree or its fruit from which comes the name of the grove (*vana*) Lumbinī. Accordingly, the passage was mistranslated by Jones (highlighting mine – M.M.):

*sā devī rājānaṃ khinnaṃ vadati vanavaram mahipate vrajeyaṃ yad
icchasi /
lumbodyānaṃ puṣpākīrṇaṃ madhumadhuraparabhṛtarutaṃ manohṛdi-
nandanaṃ //*

⁴⁰ See STOYE 2010, esp. p. 185.

⁴¹ Cf. VON HINÜBER 2023: 72.

⁴² Ms Sa 28a4: *Nāmatināmatidevo nāma trāyastriṃśo bodhisatvo bhūtaḥ*; Ms Sb 27a7: *Nāmatidevo nāma trāyastriṃśo bodhisatvo bhūtaḥ*. According to BHSD s.v. – uncertain reading and meaning.

⁴³ BHSD s.v.

To the anxious king the queen said, “My lord, if you will, I shall withdraw to the forest, to the **Lumba** park, which is carpeted with flowers, and filled with the sweet notes of the cuckoo which give joy to heart and soul.”⁴⁴

The non-existent word **lumba* was introduced into the Sanskrit Buddhist lexicon and has become the basis for interpretation by modern scholars.⁴⁵

Senart based his edition on late Nepalese manuscripts of mediocre quality. Katarzyna Marciniak's new edition of the Mv⁴⁶ is based mainly on the two oldest manuscripts, on palm leaves (ms Sa)⁴⁷ and on paper (ms Na, copied by Jayamuni in 1657 CE)⁴⁸. Marciniak's edition represents a significant advance on Senart's *editio princeps*.⁴⁹

K. Marciniak checked the incriminated passages and found that the correct text reads:⁵⁰

Ms Sa fol. 28v2; ms Na fol. 17r11:

*sā*⁵¹ *rājānaṃ khinnā vadati vanavaram aham ito*⁵² *vrajeyaṃ yadicchasi / ramyodyānaṃ*⁵³ *puṣpāvākīrṇaṃ madhumadhuraparabhṛtarutaṃ mano- hṛdinandanaṃ* /⁵⁴

Accordingly, the corrected translation (after Jones, Mv_J I: 78) would be:

⁴⁴ Trans. Mv_J I: 78.

⁴⁵ BHSD sub *lumba*: “a kind of tree”. See DEEG 2003: 16, fn. 30: “The pseudoetymological style of the *Mahāvastu* (ed. Senart, vol. I, 99), which interprets *lumbinī* as being derived from and belonging to *lumba*, in this text obviously the name of the tree (?) – *lumbodyāna*, ‘the grove of Lumba-(trees)’ (line 6) /... *dadarśatha lumbinīm, tasyāḥ sākḥām...* *grhyāna...*, (‘... she then saw a lumbinī-(tree), grasped its branch...’) (line 8f.) – which Māyā seized when she delivered the child, is an early Indian example of this way of dealing with the name.” Cf. FALK 1998: 3: “The tree under which the Buddha was born is called in the sources either *lumba* (Mvu I 99:6) or *pippala* (*Lalitavistara*, ed. Lefman, p. 79), *śāla* (Ja I 52: 16; Mvu 11 18:9), *plakṣa* (Mvu 11 19: 17) or else, in travel guides, *aśoka* (78).” BAREAU 1987: 78, fn. 44: “...cet arbre, mystérieux *lumba* ou *lumbinī* du Mahāvastu...”.

⁴⁶ Corresponding to volumes II and III of Senart's edition: Mv_M II and Mv_M III, respectively.

⁴⁷ MARCINIAK 2016.

⁴⁸ MARCINIAK 2017.

⁴⁹ Cf. VON HINÜBER 2023.

⁵⁰ I would like to thank Katarzyna Marciniak for her help in establishing the correct reading of the text. The initials K.M. in the footnotes refer to her critical notes (Sen. = Senart's edition, Mv_S); my remarks are signed M.M.

⁵¹ Two long syllables are lacking here, we could read with Sen. *sā devī rājānaṃ*. – K.M.

⁵² Corrected in ms Na; ms Sa *itā*; Sen. emendation *vanavaraṃ mahipate*. – K.M.

⁵³ Sen. *lumbodyānaṃ*. – K.M. Cf. ms Sb 27b4: *ramyodyānaṃ* – M.M.

⁵⁴ The metre is *bhujāṅgaviṣṭambhūta* (-----, ~~~~~~). In *pāda* a the metre demands *vrajeyā* for *vrajeyaṃ*. – K.M.

[The queen,] tired, said to the king: “[My lord,] if you wish, I will retire to the most beautiful forest, a **lovely park**, carpeted with flowers, and filled with the sweet, delightful notes of the cuckoo, which give joy to heart and mind.”

§ 6.1.2. The next two stanzas, however, are a real *crux interpretum*. The text established by Senart (Mv_S I: 99.7–10) reads (highlighting mine – M.M.):

*gatvā tasmim strībhiḥ sārdham pravicarati muditasukhitā vane
vanalolayā /
sā codyānam paryaṅvantī taruṇalatakīśalayadharām dadarśa 'tha
lumbinīm /
tasyāḥ śākhām... grhyāna paramaratisukhamuditā salīla-avasthitā /
sā tatra śākhām rakṣantī janayi jinam ajitamanasaṃ mahāmunim
uttamaṃ //*

Translation by Jones (Mv_J I: 78):

She went, and wandered forth with her women, roaming the forest, glad and happy and eager. While she paced the forest, she espied a ***lumbini*** tree bearing fresh creepers and shoots, and, in the rapture of perfect joy and gladness she grasped a branch of it, and playfully lingered there. As she held the branch she gave birth to the Conqueror of the unconquered mind, the great supreme seer.

It would follow from the text established by Senart that queen Māyādevī gave birth holding a branch of a *lumbinī* tree in the **Lumba* park. It is difficult to believe that the authors/redactors of the text did not know that in the Buddhist tradition *lumbinī* is the name of a park (grove) and not a tree. Especially since throughout the *Mahāvastu* text, *lumbinī* is the actual name of the park/grove, while the tree is called *śāla* or *plakṣa* (see below).

Readings of the oldest manuscripts, ms Sa and ms Na (cf. also ms Sb), do not offer a resolution to the problem. The text is undoubtedly corrupted: the Sa, Na, Sb manuscripts contain problematic, difficult to interpret forms (highlighted in underline – M.M.). According to K. Marciniak’s unpublished edition,⁵⁵ the oldest manuscript Sa 28v2–3 reads:

*gatvā tasmim strībhiḥ sārdham pravicarati muditasukhitā vane
vanalolayā / sā codyāne prajñāyānti⁵⁶ taruṇalatakīśalayadharām
dadarśa (')*tha lumbinīm* //*

⁵⁵ I am indebted to Katarzyna Marciniak for the information from her unpublished edition of Volume I of the Mv.

⁵⁶ Ms Sa *prajñāyānti*; ms Na *pratyāyānti*; Sen. *paryaṅvantī*. – K.M. Cf. ms Sb 27b5: *prabhyāntī* (sic!) – M.M.

*tasyāḥ śākhāṃ gr̥hya*⁵⁷ *paramaratisukhamuditā salīla-(')vasthitā*⁵⁸ /
*sā tatra sālāṃ*⁵⁹ *lajyanī*⁶⁰ *janayā*⁶¹ *jinam ajitamanasaṃ mahāmunim*
*uttamaṃ*⁶² //

The logic of the narrative, which we know from other passages in the Mv (see below) as well as from Buddhist texts, would suggest an interpretation of the stanzas according to which the queen, surrounded by attendant women, strolled through the park, spotted Lumbinī grove, and there, having grasped a branch of the śāla tree, gave birth to a child.

§ 6.2. In another passage of the *Daśabhūmika* section (Mv tenth *bhūmi*) it is the Venerable Mahākātyāyana who in reply to the query of the Venerable Mahākāśyapa explains how the Buddhas become conceived and how they become situated in the womb (Mv_S I: 142.10–145.5; Mv_J I: 113–115). Then follows the passage (Mv_S I: 148.4–150.8; Mv_J I: 117–119) which closely resembles the parallel *Lalitavistara* fragment (see above). Queen Māyā, expecting the time of childbirth to come, asked king Śuddhodana to arrange for her to go to the park. The king gave orders to his servants to prepare the Lumbinī grove (Lumbinī-vana) properly. Māyā, strolling in the grove accompanied by her female attendants, approached a tree (*plakṣa*) and, holding the branch with her arms, gave birth to the child.

Then when the tenth month had run its course, the mother of the Virtuous One went to Śuddhodana and said to him,

“My course is clear to me.

I have had a notion to go out into the park, o King,
 quickly get ready for me a fitting carriage and an escort.”

When he had heard these words, King Śuddhodana, the guardian of earth, graciously and out of tender feeling for his queen, thus addressed his suite: –

“Quickly get ready an army of troops with elephants and horses, and a large host of foot-soldiers, bristling with darts and arrows and swords, and report to me.

Then harness ten-hundred thousand of the best fourhomed chariots, with bells of gold merrily tinkling.” [...] (Mv_J I: 117)

⁵⁷ Sen. *śākhāṃ ... gr̥hyāna*. – K.M.

⁵⁸ Sen. *salīla-avasthitā*. – K.M.

⁵⁹ Ms Na *śākhā*; Sen. *śākhāṃ*. – K.M. – Cf. MW *śāla* “the Śāl tree (*Vatica Robusta*)”; *sāla* “incorrectly for *śāla*” – M.M.

⁶⁰ Sen. *rakṣantī*. – K.M. Cf. ms Sb 27b5: *sā tatra śākhā lakṣyanī* (sic!) – M.M.

⁶¹ Ms Sa, ms Na *janayā*; Sen. *janayī*. – K.M.

⁶² The mss read *uttamaṃ sthito calādhr̥ti*; the words *sthito calādhr̥ti* were probably miswritten here from the next line. Senart rightly omits them. – K.M.

“Quickly make the Lumbini grove like a celestial abode for the queen, clean and pleasant, with the grass, mire, leaves and litter swept away.” [...]

Entering the fair forest, Māyā, the Conqueror’s mother, attended by her friends, roamed about in her dazzling chariot, like the consort of an immortal, knowing the rule of true delight.

Playfully she went up to a wavy-leafed fig-tree and hung with her arms to the branches, and gracefully stretched herself at the moment of giving birth to the Glorious One. (Mv_J I: 118)

Here Lumbinī-vana is explicitly mentioned (Mv_S I: 149.3). However, the name of the tree is not given. The oldest manuscript, Sa, and the manuscripts consulted by Senart all read *lakṣmī-śākhā(m)*⁶³, suggesting that Māyādevī was hanging with her arms on the “branch of fortune” or “branch of beauty” of an unnamed tree. The appearance of the two stanzas later in the Mv allowed Senart to make an emendation, stating that the tree was called *plākṣa*⁶⁴, “a wavy-leafed fig-tree” (see below § 6.3.).

§ 6.3. The *Mahāvastu* contains a longer account⁶⁵ of the descent of the Bodhisattva from the Tuṣita heaven, his incarnation and the birth of the Buddha-to-be in the Lumbinī grove. Here once more is narrated a scene when the king Śuddhodana at the request of Māyādevī gives orders to his servants to prepare the Lumbinī grove for the queen who will deliver there. In this passage the name of the tree is given – it is called *pilakṣa*⁶⁶ (Skt. *plakṣa*).

Marciniak’s new edition reads (Mv_M II: 27.12) (underlining mine – M.M.):

*avaḡāhya taṃ varaṃ vanaṃ Māyā sakhisaṃghatā jinajanetrī /
vicarati Cittarathe viya amaravadhū yathā ratividhijñā //
sā krīḍārtham upagatā pilakṣasākhā bhujāya avalaṃbya /
pravijṛmbhitā salīlā tasya yaśavato jananakālaṃ //*⁶⁷

⁶³ Mv_S I: 149 fn. 15. Interestingly, the mss Sa and Sb which I was able to consult from the facsimile edition of Akira Yuyama (YUYAMA 2001) wrongly deliniate the stanza with interpunction marks (*daṇḍa*), making it incomplete.

Ms Sa 43a2:

*/ māyā sakhisaṃvṛtā jinajanetrī vicarati citrarathe iva amaravaravadhū ratividhijñā
sā krīḍātyarham upagatā lakṣmīśākhā bhujebhir avalaṃbya pravṛjṛmbhitā salīlaṃ //*
Ms Sb 41b1:

*// māyā sakhisaṃvṛtā jinajanetrī vicarati citrarathe iva amaravaravadhū ratividhijñā
sā krīḍārtham upagatā lakṣmīśākhā bhujābhir avalaṃbya pravijṛmbhitā salīlaṃ //*

⁶⁴ Mv_S I: 149.15: *sā krīḍārtham upagatā plākṣāṃ śākhāṃ bhujebhiḥ avalaṃbya /*

⁶⁵ VON HINÜBER 2023: 75 (Subsection ii.3: Last rebirth of the Bodhisattva). Mv_S II: 18.10–20.18; Mv_M II: 25.10–29.9; Mv_J II: 16–18.

⁶⁶ BHSD sub *pilakṣa* = Skt. *plakṣa*; MW s.v. “the waved-leaf fig-tree, *Ficus Infectoria*”.

⁶⁷ Senart reads (Mv_S II: 19.17) (underlining mine – M.M.):
avaḡāhya taṃ vanavaraṃ māyā sakhisaṃvṛtā jinajinetrī /

§ 6.4. After describing the youth in the royal palace of the prince Siddhārtha, the *Mahāvastu* takes up the motif of the “great renunciation” (*abhinīṣkramaṇa*).⁶⁸ Siddhārtha, the bodhisattva, after having realised that the life in the palace stands in the way of his quest of religious ideal resolved on leaving palace: “I shall go forth from home for homeless life” (*pravrajīṣyāmi*). He made his intention known to his father, king Śuddhodana, to his great distress:

The king replied: –

“Pray do not do so, my lotus-eyed and charmingly beautiful son. Great grief would I suffer if I were bereft of you.

Your mother as well as I would go to unwelcome death. What sort of special bliss is this then, that for its sake you would leave me, your people and your kingdom?”⁶⁹

In the following scene we see the prince sitting in a quiet place on the top of the palace and plunged into a state of meditation (*dhyāna*). This fragment is particularly relevant to our theme as it contains an episode in which a forest goddess from Lumbinī appears (for the first time in Buddhist texts?) to explain prince Siddhārtha's state of mind to a worried king. Śuddhodana, having found his beloved son in such a state of mind, became anxious about him thinking that he was overcome by melancholy (*daurmanasya*). He also feared that the prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) of the sage Asita would come true. And then, all of a sudden there appeared a female deity residing in the Lumbinī grove (*lumbinī-vane devatā nivāsikā*⁷⁰) and, hovering in the air (*antarīkṣe sthitvā*), she said to him:

“Your majesty, reflect about your son. For he has no passion for the joys of any of the senses. Ere long he will break all the bonds of craving and leave none remaining.

He will go off to the forest of penance, and will develop his thought which is as yet quite limited. And now, O king, Siddhārtha, though of royal lineage and surrounded in his beautiful palace by a throng of women, reviles what in his body is impermanent, ill, and unsubstantial.”⁷¹

vicarati cittarathe devi amaravadhū yatha ratividhijñā //
sā krīḍārtham upagatā pilakṣasakhām bhujāya avalambya /
pravijrmbhitā saltilā tasya yaśavato jananakāle //

⁶⁸ Von HINÜBER 2023: 78. Mv_S II: 140–166; Mv_M II: 179–208; Mv_J II: 134–161.

⁶⁹ Mv_J II: 135; Mv_S II: 140.4–11; Mv_M II: 179.5–9.

⁷⁰ BHSD *nivāsikā* adj. “dwelling” (with reference to Mv_S II: 145.6); *naivāsika* adj. “resident”.

⁷¹ Mv_J II: 139–140; Mv_S II: 145.

Mv_M II: 185.8–13:

atha khalu yā Lumbinīvane devatā nevāsikā sântarīkṣe sthitvā rājānaṃ Śuddhodanam abravīt: “mahārāja kumāraṃ vitarkayāhi. virakto tava putro sarvakāmaguṇaratīhi nacireṇa

After hearing the words of the divinity, the king went to the prince and urged him to perform his duties, apparently not understanding the warning from the deity and the motives behind his decision to leave home.

However, what is the most important in this passage is precisely the figure of the female deity (*devatā*), which was living in the Lumbinī grove. In this episode, the Lumbinī forest-dwelling goddess appears at the critical moment of Siddhārtha's decision to leave the palace and take up a religious life. The relationship of the goddess to the birth of Buddha is not revealed. But perhaps we are dealing here with a primitive form of the motif that will be developed subsequently in some Buddhist texts. As we shall see in the following, the figure of the forest deity will appear again in the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, in the *Aśokāvadāna*, and in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* where she will play a significant role.

§ 7. The *Aśokāvadāna*, or the cycle of narratives about the king Aśoka which was included into the *Divyāvadāna*, is of special importance since it contains both legendary and historical elements. The story of Kunāla (*Kunālāvadāna*) describes at some length the pilgrimage of the king Aśoka to thirty-two sites connected with the life of the Buddha.⁷²

Aśoka addressed the elder (*sthavira*) Upagupta, his teacher and mentor, with a request:

“Elder, I want to honor the places where the Blessed One lived, and mark them with signs as a favor to posterity.”⁷³

Lumbinī, the birthplace of the Buddha, was the first site visited by Aśoka, with the elder Upagupta acting as his guide. After having shown the king the Lumbinī grove⁷⁴ the elder Upagupta summoned a certain deity who witnessed the birth of the Lord.

Let the divine maiden who resides in this aśoka tree
and who witnessed the birth of the Buddha

cchindiṣyati sarve tṛṣṇābandhanāṃ niravaśeṣāṃ, yāsyati tapovanam, aparītam bhāvayīsyati jñānam. khalu nrpati Siddhārtho rājavamśo prāsādavaragato pramadāgaṇaparivṛto anityaṃ dukkha nairātmyaṃ paribhāṣati śārīraṃ.”

On *nevāsikā* see supra fn. 70.

⁷² STRONG 1989: 244–251: “Aśoka’s Pilgrimage”; for the list of the pilgrimage sites see p. 123 fn. 61.

⁷³ Trans. STRONG 1989: 244. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 81.7–9: *sthaviro ’yaṃ me manoratho ye bhagavatā buddhena pradeśā adhyuṣītās tān arceyaṃ / cihnāni ca kuryāṃ paścimasyāṃ janatāyāṃ anugrahārtham /*.

⁷⁴ Trans. STRONG 1989: 244: “In this place, great king, the Blessed One was born. [...] This is the first of the caityas of the Buddha [...]” *Aśokāvadāna* p. 81.17: *asmīn mahārāja pradeśe bhagavān jātaḥ / [...] idaṃ hi prathamāṃ caityaṃ buddhasya [...]*.

make herself manifest in her own body
so that King Aśoka's faith will grow greater still.⁷⁵

Immediately there appeared a female deity (*deva-kanyā*) residing in that very *aśoka* tree whose branch had grasped Māyādevī while she was delivered of a child. Aśoka, with his hands folded in reverence, asked the deity (*devatā*):

“You witnessed his birth and saw
his body adorned with the marks!
You gazed upon his large lotus-like eyes!
You heard in this wood
the first delightful words
of the leader of mankind!”⁷⁶

The tree spirit replied:

“I did indeed witness the birth of the best of men,
the Teacher who dazzled like gold.
I saw him take the seven steps,
and also heard his words.”⁷⁷

“Tell me, goddess”, said Aśoka, “what was it like – the magnificent moment of the Blessed One's birth?”

“I cannot possibly fully describe it in words”, answered the deity, “but, in brief, listen:

Throughout Indra's three-fold world,
there shone a supernatural light,
dazzling like gold and delighting the eye.
The earth and its mountains,
ringed by the ocean,

shook like a ship being tossed at sea.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Trans. STRONG 1989: 245. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 82.14–15: *naivāsikā yā ihāśokavṛkṣe sambuddhadarśinī yā devakanyā / sāksād asau darśayatu svadeham rājño hy aśokasya prasādavṛddhyai //*.

⁷⁶ Trans. STRONG 1989: 246. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 82.20–21: *drṣṭas tvayā lakṣaṇabhūṣitāṅgaḥ prajāyamānaḥ kamalāyatākṣaḥ / śrutās tvayā tasya nararṣabhasya vāco manojñāḥ prathamā vane śmin //*.

⁷⁷ Trans. STRONG 1989: 246. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 83.2–3: *mayā hi drṣṭaḥ kanakāvadātāḥ prajāyamāno dvipadapradhānaḥ / padāni sapta kramāṇa eva śrutās ca vācā api tasya śāstuḥ //*.

⁷⁸ Trans. STRONG 1989: 246. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 83.4–8: *rājā āha – kathaya devate kīdrśī bhagavato jāyamānasya śrīr babbhūveti / devatā prāha – na śakyam mayā vāgbhiḥ samprakāśayitum / api tu samkṣepataḥ śṛṇu – vinirmitābhā kanakāvadātā saindre triloke nayanābhirāmā / sasāgarāntā ca mahī saśailā mahārṇavasthā iva nauś cacāla //*.

Hearing this, Aśoka made an offering of one hundred thousand pieces of gold to the birthplace of the Buddha, built a *caitya* there, and went on.⁷⁹

§ 7.1. King Aśoka's pilgrimage under the guidance of the venerable Upagupta marks successive moments in the Buddha's biography. It is interesting to note that, as Strong has pointed out (STRONG 1989: 123), "the number of sites visited by Aśoka and Upagupta totals exactly thirty-two, the same as the number of distinguishing marks on the body of a Great Man (Mahāpuruṣa)." At each of these places Aśoka would erect a *caitya* and make a generous donation.⁸⁰

§ 7.2. In his study of the Buddha's youth,⁸¹ André Bareau suggested,

that the birth of the Blessed One in Lumbinī should be traced back to the presence there, before the reign of Aśoka, of a crude statue depicting a Yakṣiṇī in this posture⁸², carrying her child on her hip, in the Indian fashion and also as evoked in certain ancient *sūtras*.⁸³

⁷⁹ Trans. STRONG 1989: 246. *Aśokāvadāna* p. 83. 9–10: *yāvad rājñā jātyāṃ śatasahasraṃ dattam / caityaṃ ca pratiṣṭhāpya rājā prakrāntaḥ /*.

⁸⁰ FALK 2012. On the discovery of Lumbinī, see FALK 1998; FALK 2006: 177–180; on the new interpretation of the inscription, see FALK 2012.

⁸¹ Cf. BAREAU 1974: 205–209 ("La naissance").

⁸² MW *śālabhañjikā* "an image or figure made of Śāl wood"; BHS *śālabhañjaka / -ikā* "breaking of the *sāl*-branch" – M.M.

⁸³ BAREAU 1987: 78–79: "[...] dans un travail antérieur, nous avons proposé de voir, à l'origine de la localisation de la naissance du Bienheureux à Lumbinī, la présence en cet endroit, dès avant le règne d'Aśoka, d'une statue grossière figurant une Yakṣiṇī dans cette attitude et portant son enfant sur la hanche, à la mode indienne et telle aussi que l'évoquent certains sutra anciens." Therefore, in Bareau's opinion (BAREAU 1987: 79): "La liaison spatiale étant ainsi établie entre cette femme et la divinité en question, la venue de la première à Lumbinī étant dès lors admise, il était alors aisé pour les fidèles bouddhistes de supposer, puis bientôt de croire, que la naissance du Bodhisattva avait eu lieu dans ce bosquet, où la Yakṣiṇī pouvait évidemment, par sa présence, utiliser au mieux son pouvoir divin pour faire en sorte que la «descente» du Bienheureux s'effectuât dans les meilleures conditions possibles, les seules qui convinsent à un être aussi merveilleux. En quelque sorte, de déduction en déduction, les dévots bouddhistes avaient fait du *caitya* sylvestre de Lumbinī une sorte de clinique d'accouchement réservée à la mère de leur vénéré Maître. Dans l'un de ses passages, le *Mahāvastu* a conservé le souvenir de cette divinité féminine habitant ce bosquet, mais le souvenir en est déjà très pâli par le temps et par l'évolution de la légende." [This established a spatial link between this woman [i.e. Māyā – M.M.] and the deity in question, and her arrival at Lumbinī was thus accepted. It was then easy for the Buddhist faithful to suppose, and soon to believe, that the birth of the Bodhisattva had taken place in this grove, where the Yakṣiṇī could obviously, by her presence, make the best use of her divine power to ensure that the "descent" of the Blessed One took place in the best possible conditions, the only ones suitable for such a marvellous being. In a way, from deduction to deduction, the Buddhist devotees had turned the sylvan *caitya* of Lumbinī into a kind of birthing clinic reserved for the mother of their venerated Master. In one of its passages, the *Mahāvastu* preserves the memory of this female divinity living in the grove, but the memory has already been faded by the passage of time and the evolution of the legend.]

However, Bareau's speculations are not widely accepted by scholars. Harry Falk (FALK 1998: 2) summarised aptly Bareau's argument, adding his critical remarks:

The arguments Bareau advances to explain why tradition has linked Lumbinī of all places to this far-reaching event are most speculative. From the Aśokan inscription he reads, following Bloch, that the king once had a stone wall (*silāvigaḍabhīcā*) constructed. This wall, Bareau assumes, supposedly marked the site of a former temple dedicated to a yakṣiṇī who was able to assure births free of complications. This yakṣiṇī is said to have had a statue representing her in the śālabañjika pose. There was, of course, no child at the side of this female being. But since the Buddha was never portrayed at the time in human form, such an absence proved no obstacle for believers of later periods to transfer thither the birth of Siddhārtha.

The first premise of this hypothesis is already unacceptable. Up to now we still have not the least idea whether *silāvigaḍabhīcā* or *silāvigaḍabhīcā* (= *ca*) is the proper reading, and what the expression *vigaḍabhī(?cā/ca)* in the inscription at hand means. [...] Thus the most one may infer from Aśoka's inscription is that, alongside the massive (i.e. not rubble) stone columns (*silāthabhe*), he had a massive (*silā*) *vigaḍabhī(cā)* erected.

§ 7.3. The site was in fact visited by the king Aśoka around 236 BCE and marked by a special stone pillar with an inscription which reads:

*devānapiyena piyadasina lājina vīsativasābhisitena
atana āgāca mahīyite hida budhe jāte sakyamunī ti
silāvigaḍabhīcā kālāpita silāthabhe ca usapāpīte
hida bhagavaṃ jāte⁸⁴ ti lumminigāme ubalike kaṭe
aṭhabhāgiye ca.⁸⁵*

In Harry Falk's translation, the content of the inscription reads:

When king Priyadarśin, dear to the gods, had been anointed for twenty years, he came in person and paid reverence. Being aware that the Buddha was born here, he had a *vigaḍabhī* of stone constructed on the site and a stone pillar erected. Being aware that the Lord was born here, he made the village of Lumbinī taxfree and *aṭhabhāgiya*.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Cf. *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* § 41.6: *iha bhagavañ jātaḥ /*; *Mahāparinibbānasutta* § 5.8: *idha tathāgato jāto ti pi /*, ed. WALDSCHMIDT 1951: 388.

⁸⁵ FALK 1998: 15 (on the following pages an attempt is made to interpret both expressions).

⁸⁶ FALK 2012: 204.

Two expressions deliberately left untranslated have long been debated by scholars.⁸⁷

Max Deeg, after a critical analysis of available sources in Sanskrit, Pāli, Prakrit and Chinese, proposed interpreting the phrase *silāvigadabhī(cā)* as a “stone bathing pond” (reconstructed Sanskrit: **śilā-vigāḍha-abdhī*) (DEEG 2003: 20–21). He provided the text of the inscription with his translation (DEEG 2003: 45):

King Priyadarśin, who is dear to the gods, came here in the twentieth year following his consecration and paid reverence. Thinking (*iti*), “Here the Buddha was born – the muni of the Śākya clan”, I caused a bathing pond of stone to be made and a pillar of stone to be erected. Thinking, “Here the Lord was born”, I exempted the village of Lumbinī from imposts and had it receive the “eight rights”.

Harry Falk disagreed with Deeg’s interpretation of the phrase *silāvigadabhī(cā)* as a “stone bathing pond” (*śilā-vigāḍha-abdhī*) and proposed translating it as a “stone railing” (FALK 2006: 180; FALK 2012: 216, fn. 1):

When king Priyadarśin, dear to the gods, was consecrated for this 20th regnal year he came in person and paid reverence. Because the Buddha, the Śākyamuni, was born at this place, he had a stone railing made and a stone pillar erected. Because the Lord (of the world) was born at this place, he exempted the village of Lumbinī from taxes and granted it the eight shares.

In his article “The Fate of Aśoka’s Donations at Lumbinī”, Falk reinterpreted the word *aṭhabhāgiya* as referring to the division of the Buddha’s relics into eight parts, according to the canonical text in the *Dīgha Nikāya* 16. Lumbinī is not one of the places endowed with relics. According to Falk, “Lumbinī initially had nothing at all until Aśoka provided the site with relics and a pillar and thereby made it a powerful site for a pilgrimage” (FALK 2012: 207). He also pointed out that the term *aṭhabhāgiya* “also seems to have a legal and/or fiscal connotation, exempting the village from royal jurisdiction and placing it directly under the rule of those clerics looking after it” (FALK 2012: 207). As for the expression *vigadabhī*, it would mean “a construction ‘holding bars’” (FALK 2012: 211). Falk concluded his discussion by proposing a new translation of the inscription on the Lumbinī pillar (FALK 2012: 215–216):

When king Priyadarśin, dear to the gods, had been anointed for twenty years, he came in person and paid reverence. Being aware that the Buddha was born here, he had a stone fencing constructed on the site [of the birth] and a stone pillar erected. Being aware that the Lord was born here, he

⁸⁷ FALK 1998; DEEG 2003; FALK 2006; FALK 2012 – all with references to earlier works.

made the village of Lumbinī tax-free and provided it with a share in the eight parts [the ashes of the Buddha had originally been divided].

§ 8. The *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, a Sanskrit Buddhist Mahāyāna scripture, forms the last chapter of the voluminous *Avataṃsakasūtra*, “The Flower Garland Sūtra”. The complete text of the *Avataṃsakasūtra* has survived in Chinese⁸⁸ and Tibetan⁸⁹ translations. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* has been fully preserved in the original Sanskrit.⁹⁰

In the opinion of A. K. Warder,

The *Gaṇḍa-vyūha* is a literary masterpiece, the most readable of all the Mahāyāna sūtras and almost the only one organised as a balanced work of art on an effective plan. [...] In fact it is a highly imaginative religious novel, though it opens in the manner of a sūtra. The title *Gaṇḍa-vyūha* is obscure, being generally interpreted as “array of flowers”, “bouquet”.⁹¹

§ 8.1. The *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*⁹² tells the story of Sudhana's miraculous journey in a quest for enlightenment (*bodhi*). Sudhana, a merchant's son (*śreṣṭhi-dāraka*), on bodhisattva Mañjuśrī's advice, sets out on a spiritual journey and on his way across India visits fifty-two “good friends” (*kalyāṇa-mitra*) who teach him

⁸⁸ In the Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō there are two translations of the *Avataṃsaka* (*Huayan jing* 華嚴經): by Buddhahadra (359–429 CE) from 420 CE, in 60 scrolls and 34 chapters (Taishō 278), and by Śikṣānanda (652–710 CE) from 695–699 CE, in 80 scrolls and 39 chapters (Taishō 279). In addition, there are three separate translations of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*: by Prajñā (744–ca. 810 CE) from 798 CE (Taishō 293); by Shōken (ca. 388–408 CE) (Taishō 294); by Divākara (613–688 CE) (Taishō 295). The complete *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, including the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, was translated into English from the Chinese version of Śikṣānanda (T 279) by Thomas Cleary as: *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (CLEARY 1993).

⁸⁹ The text has a long title: *sangs rgyas phal po che zhe bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo* (*Buddhāvataṃsaka-nāma mahā vaipulya sūtra*). The *Gaṇḍavyūha* (Tib. *sdong po bkod pa*) occupies two final volumes of the section *Avataṃsaka* (*phal chen*) in the Kanjur (Derge, Tohoku 44): Ga. fol. 274b–396a, and A. fol. 1b–363a. The Tibetan version of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* has been translated into English by Peter Alan Roberts as “The Stem Array” (ROBERTS 2023).

⁹⁰ There are two editions of the Sanskrit text: D.T. Suzuki–H. Idzumi, Kyoto 1934–1936 (rev. ed. Tokyo 1949); P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1960. In translating the Sanskrit passages of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, I have used Vaidya's edition and for some dubious passages consulted two manuscripts: palm-leaf ms HODGSON 2 (Royal Asiatic Society, London) dated 1166 CE, and paper ms ASK 6681 (Asha Archive, Kathmandu) dated 1811. In the following I have consulted also the two existing translations, by Roberts (from Tibetan) and by Cleary (from Chinese). The Tibetan translation broadly agrees with the Sanskrit text preserved in Nepalese manuscripts.

⁹¹ WARDER 2000: 402. The title of the work is difficult to interpret: CLEARY (1993: 1547) suggested in short “Garland Scripture” or following the title of the Chinese translation “The Book on Entry into the Realm of Reality” (*Ru fajie pin* 入法界品). ROBERTS 2023 proposed “The Stem Array”. A new interpretation of the title was offered by OSTO 2009: “The Supreme Array Scripture”. Cf. BHSD sub *gaṇḍa* “stalk of a plant”, “piece, part, portion”.

⁹² See FONTEIN 1967: 5–14 (“Summary of the text”).

about the bodhisattva path. However, none of them is able to explain it in full and directs Sudhana to another good friend. On his journey Sudhana visited different places in South India and in the North. He encountered successively fifty-two *kalyāṇa-mitras*, among them eight female *kalyāṇa-mitras*,⁹³ night goddesses (*rātri-devatā*), viz. Vāsantī (32), Samantha-gambhīra-śrī-vimala-prabhā (33), Pramudita-nayana-jagad-virocanā (34), Samanta-sattva-trāṇoja-śrī (35), Praśānta-ruta-sāgaravatī (36), Sarva-nagara-rakṣā-saṃbhava-śrī (37), Sarva-vṛkṣa-praphullana-sukha-saṃvāsā (38), and Sarva-jagad-rakṣā-praṇidhāna-vīrya-prabhā (39). He then, at the advice of the last named, visited Sutejo-maṇḍala-rati-śrī⁹⁴ (40), the Lumbinī-vana-devatā.⁹⁵

§ 8.1.1. After visiting Kapilavastu he is directed by Sarvajagad-rakṣā-praṇidhāna-vīrya-prabhā, a night-goddess (*rātri-devatā*), to Sutejo-maṇḍala-rati-śrī,⁹⁶ the goddess of the Lumbinī grove, who unfolds to him the ten kinds of birth of bodhisattvas, ten omens, ten omens of great light, ten miracles attending the birth of enlightened beings. Next Sudhana goes again to Kapilavastu to encounter Gopā, a girl from the Śākya clan, who in turn sends him to see Māyā,⁹⁷ the mother of all buddhas. Finally, Sudhana encounters in a vision the bodhisattva Samantabhadra. The story of Sudhana's encounter with the Lumbinī forest goddess is written in prose and verse (chapter 42. *Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrīh*, Gv pp. 285–299; ROBERTS 2023: §§ 42.1–132; CLEARY 1993: 1383–1397).⁹⁸

§ 8.2. On the advice of Sarvajagad-rakṣā-praṇidhāna-vīrya-prabhā, the night-goddess residing in Kapilavastu, Sudhana went to the Lumbinī grove. There lived a goddess of Lumbinī grove (*lumbinī-vana-devatā*) named Sutejo-maṇḍala-rati-śrī⁹⁹. The goddess was seated on a lion's throne in the calyx of a jewel lotus, at the top of a circular arrangement of branches of all the precious trees. She was surrounded by a host of millions of wood goddesses (*vana-devatā*), to whom she expounded a scripture called *Sarvabodhisattva-janma-samudra-nirdeśa* ("Elucidation of the Ocean of Births of All Bodhisattvas"). After Sudhana had paid his obeisance and stood with joined hands in reverence, he asked her:

⁹³ Cf. SHAW 2006: 156: "The *Gaṇḍavyūha*, a classical source on Mahāyāna thought and practice, also serves as a cosmological atlas, revealing that Sudhana inhabited a religious world replete with divine females."

⁹⁴ BHSD: 598.

⁹⁵ Cf. THAKUR 2006, Appendix I, Nos. 32–39.

⁹⁶ Cf. SHAW 2006: 160–162: "Teachings on Birth by the Goddess of Lumbini Grove".

⁹⁷ Cf. SHAW 2006, chapter 2: Māyādevī.

⁹⁸ Ms HODGSON 2, foll. 192a6–203a4; ms ASK 6681, foll. 243a5–257a1. Tib. Dege Kanjur (Tohoku 44), A., fol. 201b4–219a6.

⁹⁹ "Glory of Delight in the Excellent Circle of Light"; Tib. *gzi brjid kyi dkyil 'khor bzang pos dga' ba'i dpal* (ROBERTS 2023 does not translate the name of the goddess); CLEARY 1993: "Glory of the Sphere of Good Power".

O Goddess, I have raised a thought of the highest complete enlightenment, but I don't know how bodhisattvas are born in the family of Tathāgatas, and how they are practicing their course leading to enlightenment and provide illumination for the living beings.¹⁰⁰

§ 8.2.1. In response to these words, the goddess gave a long answer, made up of several parts, in both prose and verse. She said that there are ten kinds of birth (*daśa bodhisattva-janmāni*) by which bodhisattvas are born in the family of Tathāgatas (*bodhisattvā jātā bhavanti tathāgatakule*). This is the longest section of the whole chapter.

The goddess began by listing the characteristics of bodhisattvas who have been born in the family of Tathāgatas; those issued bodhisattvas increase successfully by means of bodhisattvas' meritorious actions (Gv p. 285.15–21. Cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.5; CLEARY 1993: 1384.). They are –

1. not standing still (*na vitiṣṭhante*)
2. not desponding (*na viṣṭdanti*)
3. not regressing (*na vivartante*)
4. not abandoning (*na pratiprasrabhyante*)
5. not afflicted (*na parikhidyante*)
6. not distressed (*na saṃsīdanti*)
7. not bewildered (*na muhyanti*)
8. not dispirited (*nāvalīyante*)
9. not disturbed (*na paritrasyanti*)
10. not disappearing (*na praṇaśyanti*).¹⁰¹

Moreover, they –

1. follow the path in the direction of omniscience (*anugacchanti sarvajñatā-dig-anugamam*)
2. remember the principle of the realm of Dharma (*anusmaranti dharmadhātu-nayam*)

¹⁰⁰ Gv p. 285.11–13: *mayā devate anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau cittam utpāditam / na ca jānāmi kathaṃ bodhisattvā jātā bhavanti tathāgatakule, kathaṃ bodhisattvacārikāṃ carantaḥ sattvānām ālokarāḥ bhavanti* // . Cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.4; CLEARY 1993: 1384.

¹⁰¹ Tibetan (Derge 44, A., fol. 202a6–7) reads: *thogs pa med [xyl. myed] pa dang zhum pa med pa dang / phyir ldog pa med pa dang / rgyun gcod pa med [xyl. myed] pa dang / yongs su skyo ba med pa dang / sgyid lug par 'gyur ba med pa dang / nyams par 'gyur ba med pa dang / nyams dma' bar 'gyur ba med pa dang / yongs su yi 'chad par 'gyur ba med pa dang / chud za bar 'gyur ba med [xyl. myed] pa dang /*, which Roberts (§ 42.5) translates: “are unimpeded, are not disheartened, do not regress, are not interrupted, are not dismayed, are not discouraged, do not deteriorate, do not become confused, do not become downcast, and do not come to ruin.”

3. attain the maturity for the enlightenment of the buddhas (*paripāka-prāptā bhavanti buddha-bodhau*)
4. extend the resolution of enlightenment (*vipulīkurvanti bodhicittotpādam*)
5. increase by means of all perfections (*vivardhante sarva-pāramitābhiḥ*)
6. withdraw from all worldly states (*vivartante sarva-loka-gatibhyaḥ*)
7. go towards the stage of Tathāgatas (*saṃvartante tathāgata-bhūmau*)
8. purify renowned (distinguished) [kinds of] knowledge (*uttāpayanti jñānābhijñatā*)¹⁰²
9. become manifest in the qualities of enlightened ones (*āmukhībhavanti buddha-dharmeṣu*)
10. possess meanings in accordance with the sphere of omniscience (*anugatārthā bhavanti sarvajñatā-viṣaye*).

§ 8.2.2. Next the goddess listed the ten kinds of birth of a bodhisattva (*daśa bodhisattva-janmāni*) (Gv p. 285.21–28; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.6–10; CLEARY 1993: 1384):

1. The first birth of a bodhisattva is called the womb of the application of the vow to serve all buddhas (*sarvabuddhopasthāna-praṇidhi-prayoga-garbhaṃ*¹⁰³ *nāma prathamam bodhisattva-janma*).
2. The second birth is called the womb of the origin of the perfect development of the characteristic of the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicittāṅga-pariṇiṣṭi-saṃbhava-garbhaṃ nāma dvitīyam bodhisattva-janma*).
3. The third birth is called the womb of the origin intending on application of deep meditation on the course of dharma (*dharmānaya-nidhyāpti-prayogābhimukha-saṃbhava-garbhaṃ nāma tṛtīyam bodhisattva-janma*).
4. The fourth birth is called the womb of the purification of determination to illuminate the three times (*tryadhvālokādhyāśaya-viśuddhi-garbhaṃ nāma caturtham bodhisattva-janma*).¹⁰⁴
5. The fifth birth is called the womb of all-illuminating light (*samantāvabhāsa-prabhā-garbhaṃ nāma pañcamam bodhisattva-janma*).
6. The sixth birth is called the womb of the origin of the lineage of family of all buddhas (*sarvatathāgata-kula-gotra-saṃbhava-garbhaṃ nāma ṣaṣṭham bodhisattva-janma*).

¹⁰² Gv p. 285.21: *-abhijñatāḥ / āmukhī-*; ms HODGSON 2, fol. 193a6 and ms ASK 6681, fol. 243b7: *-abhijñatā āmukhī-*. Cf. BHSD sub *abhijñata*.

¹⁰³ Tib. *snying po* “essence; heart”.

¹⁰⁴ Gv p. 285.24: *tryadhvalokā*; read: *-ālokā-*, after ms HODGSON 2, fol. 193b1, and ms ASK 6681, fol. 244a2.

7. The seventh birth is called the womb of the ornament of light that illuminates the powers of buddhas (*buddha-balāvabhāsālokālaṅkāra-garbhaṃ nāma saptamaṃ bodhisattva-jaṅma*).
8. The eighth birth is called the womb produced from the perfect development of intellectual mastery of the entrance to omniscience (*samantajñāna-mukha-vyavacāraṇa-pariniṣpatti-saṃbhava-garbhaṃ nāmāṣṭamaṃ bodhisattva-jaṅma*).
9. The ninth birth is called the womb of the array of a magical creation of the realm of dharma (*dharmadhātu-nirmāṇa-vyūha-garbhaṃ nāma navamaṃ bodhisattva-jaṅma*).
10. The tenth birth is called the womb of the impulse to ascend the stage of the enlightened ones (*tathāgata-bhūmyākramaṇa-vega-garbhaṃ nāma daśamaṃ bodhisattva-jaṅma*).

§ 8.2.3. A detailed explanation by the goddess of each of the ten types of bodhisattva birth follows the list (Gv pp. 285.29–288.21; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.11–40; CLEARY 1993: 1384–1387).

§ 8.2.4. A summary of the ten births then follows (Gv pp. 288.22–289.2; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.41; CLEARY 1993: 1387–1388).

§ 8.2.5. The summary is followed by the concluding ten stanzas (*gāthā*), which explain the meaning of the ten kinds of birth of bodhisattvas (Gv pp. 289.6–290.14; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.43–52; CLEARY 1993: 1388–1389).

§ 8.2.6. The goddess declared that she has attained a “bodhisattva salvation” of vision of the miracle of the birth of bodhisattvas in all objects for countless eons. The goddess explained that she has perfected the earnest wish (vow) to see and approach the births of all bodhisattvas, and that she comprehends the extensive ocean of births of Bhagavat Vairocana.

Comprehending the birth of a bodhisattva in this world system consisting of three thousand great thousand [worlds], I have accomplished [my] previous solemn vow to see the birth of the bodhisattva here, in Lumbinī Grove, in Jambudvīpa, one of the four continents, in Bhāgavatī [world]. So, I dwell contemplating recollection of the births of bodhisattvas, that after I have resided here for a hundred years, the Bhavavat will come from the abode of Tuṣita.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ [...] *aham aprameyakalpa-sarvāramaṇa-bodhisattvajanma-vikurvita-saṃdarśanasya bodhisattva-vimokṣasya lābhinī / [...] ahaṃ kulaputra sarvabodhisattvajanma-saṃdarśanopasaṃkramaṇa-praṇidhāna-pariniṣpannā / sā khalv ahaṃ kulaputra bhagavato vairocanasya vipulaṃ jaṅma-samudram avataramī / yaduta asyāṃ trisāhasramahāsāhasrāyāṃ lokadhātā bodhisattvajanma avataramāṇā bhāgavatyaṃ cāturdvīpikāyāṃ iha jambudvīpe lumbinīvane bodhisattvajanma-saṃdarśane pūrvapraṇidhānopapannā / sā ahaṃ iha*

§ 8.2.7. The goddess then described ten omens (*daśa pūrva-nimittāni*) that had appeared in the Lumbinī grove before the birth of the Blessed One¹⁰⁶ (Gv pp. 290.24–291.16; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.56–57; CLEARY 1993: 1389–1390):

1. The whole of the Lumbinī Grove became level, without low and high or rough [ground], without pits or cliffs (*sarvam idaṃ lumbinīvanam samam samsthitam apagata-nimnonnata-viśamam apagata-śvabhra-prapātam*);
2. The entire Lumbinī Grove was free of protruding pebbles and gravel, free of stumps and thorns, with the surface of the ground [of diamonds], covered with many jewels (*sarvam idaṃ lumbinīvanam utsanna-śarkara-kaṭhallam apagata-sthāṇu-kaṇṭakam vajra-prṛthivī-tala-samsthānam aneka-ratnābhikīrṇam samavasthitam*);
3. The whole Lumbinī Grove became [a place] adorned with well-proportioned rows of trees, śāla, and palmyra, having all the jewels (*sarvam idaṃ lumbinīvanam sarva-ratna-druma-śāla-tāla-pañkti-suvibhaktālaṃkāraṃ samavāsthīṣata*);
4. The whole Lumbinī Grove became [a place] overgrown with fragrant sprouts surpassing those of the heavens, where stores of all aromatic powders arose and where a circle of the multitude of clouds like all banners was born, and which was adorned with the roots of trees arranged in fixed order, having separate fragrances and gems (*sarvam idaṃ lumbinīvanam divya-samatikrānta-gandhāṅkura-prarūḍham sarva-cūrṇa-kośa-sambhūtam sarva-dhvaja-megha-paṭala-maṇḍala-jātam gandha-maṇi-vigraha-vṛkṣa-mūla-parisamsthāpitālaṃkāraṃ samavāsthīṣata*);
5. The entire Lumbinī Grove was completely filled with all [kinds of] ornaments that sprang from the treasury of ornaments of various divine flowers and garlands (*sarvam idaṃ lumbinīvanam vividha-divya-puspa-mālyābharaṇa-kośa-nirvṛtta-sarvālaṃkāra-paripūrṇam samavāsthīṣata*);
6. Throughout this Lumbinī Grove, great treasures of precious jewels manifested on all the trees (*sarvasminn iha lumbinīvane sarva-vṛkṣeṣu mahāmaṇi-ratna-kośā abhinirvṛttāḥ*);
7. Throughout this Lumbinī Grove, in all the lotus ponds, all [kinds of] water-

bodhisattvajanmānusmr̥tiṃ bhāvayamānā viharāmi / tasyā mameha viharantya varṣāsatena bhagavāms tuṣitabhavanāc cyaviṣyatīti // (Gv p. 290.16–23; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42. 54–56; CLEARY 1993: 1389).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Lalitavistara* for the different lists of omens and miracles:

LV pp. 30.24–31.25 (*śuddhodanasya gṛhāvare aṣṭau pūrva-nimittāni*) – eight omens at king Śuddhodana’s palace;

LV p. 42.9–27 (*śaḍvikāram aṣṭādaśa mahānimittam*) – eighteen supernatural occurrences of six kinds in Trisāhasra-mahāsāhasra Lokadhātu;

LV pp. 61.2–62.6 (*rājñāḥ śuddhodanasya gṛhodyāne dvātriṃśat pūrva-nimittāni*) – thirty-two signs in king Śuddhodana’s garden;

LV pp. 67.24–68.17 (*ṛddhi-prātihāryāni*) – miracles at the time of the birth.

- born jewel flowers, which were in bud after rising to the surface of the earth, appeared in the water (*sarvasmīn iha lumbinīvane sarva-nalinīṣu sarvāṇi jalaja-ratna-puṣpāṇi śuṅgī-bhūtāni dharāṇi-talād abhyudgamyā vāri-samudgatāni samavāsthīṣanta*);
8. All the male gods of the Realm of Desire and the Realm of Form of the world system, as well as nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, lords of the world, as many as they were, remained in this Lumbinī Grove with their hands joined in salutation (*yāvanta iha lokadhātau kāmāvacarā rūpāvacarās ca deva-putrā nāga-yakṣa-gandharvāsura-garuḍa-kinnara-mahoragā lokendrajagadindrā vā, te 'py asmin lumbinīvane sarve kṛtāñjali-putāḥ sthitā abhūvan*);
 9. All the goddesses of the world system consisting of the four continents, as well as female nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, as many as they were, with delighted minds, holding in their hands all kinds of offerings, and facing the branches of the plakṣa tree, remained [in this Lumbinī grove] with their bodies bowed [in worship] (*yāvanta iha cāturdvīpikāyāṃ lokadhātau deva-kanyā vā nāga-kanyā vā yakṣa-gandharvāsura-garuḍa-kinnara-mahoraga-kanyā vā, tāḥ sarvāḥ pramudita-mānasāḥ sarvapūjāvidhi-parigrhīta-hastāḥ plakṣa-śākhābhīmukhāḥ praṇata-kāyāḥ sthitā abhūvan*);
 10. The rays called “the lamps of the miracle of the birth of bodhisattva(s)”, emanating from the navel circles of all the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, when they came forth, became manifest in the entire Lumbinī Grove; and in the circular tips of all the rays were seen manifestations of the miraculous births of all the Tathāgatas; and all the qualities of bodhisattvas and miraculous births endowed with the voice of buddhas were heard coming forth from these circular tips of the rays (*daśabhyo digbhyaḥ sarvatathāgatānāṃ nābhimaṇḍalebhyo niścaramāṇā bodhisattvajanma-vikurvita-pradīpā nāma rāsmayo niścāritvā sarvam idaṃ lumbinī-vanam avabhāsyā tiṣṭhanti sma / teṣu ca sarvaraśmi-mukha-maṇḍaleṣu teṣāṃ sarvatathāgatānāṃ janma-vikurvītāni pratibhāsa-prāptāni saṃdr̥śyante sma / saṃprasava-vikurvītāḥ sarvabodhisattva-guṇās ca buddhasvara-saṃprayuktās tebhyo rāsmi-mukha-maṇḍalebhyo niścaramāṇāḥ śrūyante sma*).

§ 8.2.8. The goddess then described ten omens of great light (*mahāvabhāsa-pūrvanimittāni*) which appeared in the Lumbinī grove when Māyādevī left the city of Kapilavastu (Gv p. 291.17–31; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.58–59; CLEARY 1993: 1390):

1. The light became manifest in all the chambers of the storied mansions set with jewels that came to the surface of the earth (*dharāṇī-talagateṣu*

sarvaratna-kūṭāgāra-garbheṣv avabhāsaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ).

2. The light became manifest in the buds of all fragrant flowers (*sarvagandha-kusuma-mukuleṣv avabhāsaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ).*
3. The light manifested in the petals of all the blossoming buds of the precious lotuses, from which a sweet and delicate sound came forth (*aśeṣa-ratna-padma-mukuleṣu vikaśamāneṣu sarvapatrebhyo 'vabhāsaḥ prādurbhūtaḥ, madhuraś ca sujātajāta-śabda ebhyo niścarati sma).*
4. This Lumbinī Grove was illuminated by the light of the first resolution (arousal of the thought of enlightenment) of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu bodhisattvānāṃ prathamacittotpādāvabhāsaḥ, sa idaṃ lumbinī-vanam avabhāsyā abhyuditaḥ).*
5. The miraculous appearance of the light ascending to all the bodhisattva stages of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yac ca daśasu dikṣu bodhisattvānāṃ sarvabodhisattva-bhūmyākramaṇāvabhāsa-vikurvitaṃ, tad iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūt).*
6. The appearance of the light of the attainment of the knowledge of the full development of all the perfections of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu bodhisattvānāṃ sarvapāramitā-pariniṣpatti-jñānādhigamālokāvabhāsaḥ, sa iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūva).*
7. The appearance of the light of knowledge of the supremacy of all the vows of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu bodhisattvānāṃ sarvapraṇidhāna-vaśitājñānālokāvabhāsaḥ, sa iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūva).*
8. The appearance of the light of knowledge of the maturity of discipline of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu sarvabodhisattvānāṃ paripāka-vinaya-jñānālokāvabhāsaḥ, sa iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūva).*
9. The appearance of the light of the attainment of knowledge leading to the realm of reality of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu sarvabodhisattvānāṃ dharmadhātu-naya-jñānādhigamālokāvabhāsaḥ, sa iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūva).*
10. The appearance of the light of the attainment of knowledge of the miraculous birth of the Buddha, the abandonment of worldly life and the realisation of enlightenment of all the bodhisattvas of the ten directions manifested here, in this Lumbinī Grove (*yaś ca daśasu dikṣu sarva-bodhisattvānāṃ buddhāvikurvita-janmābhiniṣkramaṇa-bodhi-vibudhyana-jñānādhigamālokāvabhāsaḥ, sa iha lumbinī-vane prādurabhūva).*

These ten omens of the great light manifested in the Lumbinī Grove, which illuminated the darkness of the deep foundation of the mind of countless bodhisattvas (*imāni daśa mahāvabhāsa-nimittāni prādurabhūvuḥ, yair ananta-madhyānām bodhisattvānām cittāsaya-gahanāndhakārāny avabhāsītāni*). (Gv p. 291.30–31).

§ 8.2.9. The goddess then went on to describe in detail the ten miracles of the birth of the bodhisattva in the Lumbinī Grove (*lumbinīvane bodhisattvasya daśa janma-vikurvitāni*) (Gv pp. 292.1–294.17;¹⁰⁷ cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.60–81; CLEARY 1993: 1390–1392):

Son of a good family, these ten miracles of the bodhisattva's birth were manifested in the Lumbinī Grove. Thereupon the bodhisattva, seeing the outpouring of unimaginable immeasurable light, emerged from Māyā's womb like the disc of the sun from the firmament, like a bundle of thunderbolts from a cluster of clouds, like a great cloud at dawn from the top of a mountain, like a great lamp from the deepest darkness. This is how the bodhisattva appeared, emerging from the womb of Māyā, by the way¹⁰⁸ of the vision of the intimation of form in relation to Māyā, by the way of not coming, by the way of the vision of the intimation of the world without origin or cessation.¹⁰⁹

§ 8.2.10. The goddess then made a longer statement, saying –

Thus, son of a good family, I perceive the oceans of miraculous births of Blessed Vairocana while I am dwelling here in the Lumbinī Grove.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Vaidya in his edition (Gv p. 293.21–22 and fn. 1) reads incorrectly: *idaṃ kulaputra lumbinīvane bodhisattvasya śaṣṭhaṃ janmavikurvitam // punar aparaṃ kulaputra ----- -- lumbinīvanaśaṇḍe samavasṛtā abhijātajagadvijñānā prādurabhavat / idaṃ kulaputra...*, contrary to the reading in Suzuki-Idzumi's edition (p. 378.9–12) where the lacuna is put in brackets and which follows the reading in ms HODGSON 2, fol. 199ba6–199b1: *idaṃ kulaputra lumbinīvane bodhisattvasya [śaṣṭhaṃ janmavikurvitam // punar aparaṃ kulaputra -----] lumbinīvanaśaṇḍe samavasṛtā abhijātajagadvijñānā prādurabhavad idaṃ kulaputra...;* so also ms ASK 6681, fol. 252a1.

¹⁰⁸ BHSD sub *dharmā*: *dharmatayā* (instr.) “by the method (means) of, by the way of”.

¹⁰⁹ *imāni kulaputra lumbinīvane bodhisattvasya daśa janma-vikurvitāni prādurabhūvan / tataḥ paścād bodhisattvo 'cintyā-pramāṇa-prabhāsecanaka-darśano māyāyā devyāḥ kukṣer abhyudgataḥ sūrya-maṇḍalam iva gagana-talāt, vidyut-kalāpa iva megha-saṃghātāt, sām̐dhya iva mahāghanaḥ śaila-śikharāntarāt, mahāpradīpa iva tamo 'ndhakārāt / ity evaṃ bodhisattvo māyāyā devyāḥ kukṣer abhiniṣkramaṇaṃ saṃdarśayāmāsa māyā-gata-rūpa-vijñapti-saṃdarśana-dharmatayā anāgata-dharmatayā anutpādānirodha-loka-vijñapti-saṃdarśana-dharmatayā //* (Gv p. 294.17–22).

¹¹⁰ *ity evaṃ ahaṃ kulaputra bhagavato vairocanasya janma-vikurvita-samudrān avatarāmi iha lumbinīvane viharamānā /* (Gv p. 294.23–24; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.85; CLEARY 1993: 1393).

Sudhana asked her:

How long ago did you attain the liberation of bodhisattva-birth, revealing the miracle of the birth of a bodhisattva which has all [objects] as a basis for countless eons?¹¹¹

§ 8.2.11. In her reply, the goddess tells the story of the past, stylized as a jāataka (Gv p. 295.9–27; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.92–96; CLEARY 1993: 1393–1394).

Long ago, before millions of eons equal to the dust of ultimate atoms in the buddha fields, a buddha named Īśvara-guṇāparājita-dhvaja (“Emblem of the Lord’s Unsurpassed Virtue”) appeared in the world system called Samantarātṇā (“Ubiquitous Jewel”). At the centre of this world system was a world made up of four continents. In the middle of the continent of Jambudvīpa was the royal capital where king Ratnārci-netra-prabha and his wife, queen Suharṣita-prabheśvarā, resided. And just as Māyādevī was the mother of Blessed Vairocana, so at that time, in the four-continent world called Vicitra-vyūha-prabhā, queen Suharṣita-prabheśvarā became the mother of the tathagāta Īśvara-guṇāparājita-dhvaja. She was the mother of the first of all the previous eighty quadrillion buddhas. And when it was time to give birth, queen Suharṣita-prabheśvarā went to Suvarṇa-puṣpābha-maṇḍala park, where there was a storied mansion (*kūṭāgāra*) called Subha-ratna-vicitra-kūṭa in the centre. It was there, inside the storied mansion, that queen Suharṣita-prabheśvarā gave birth to the tathāgata Īśvara-guṇāparājita-dhvaja, holding with her hands the branches of the wish-fulfilling tree.

§ 8.2.12. At the moment of the bodhisattva’s birth (*janma-kāle*) there was present a nurse (*dhātrī*) named Vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhā (“Light of Pure Origin”) (Gv pp. 295.27–296.2; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.97; CLEARY 1993: 1393–1394):

As soon as the bodhisattva was born, the lords of the world, having bathed him with a pot of the most excellent fragrant water, pouring down a multitude of various fragrant and charming celestial flowers, and having worshipped him with inconceivable and incalculable most excellent offerings, placed [the child] on the lap of the nurse, Vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhā. At the same moment as she grasped the bodhisattva with both hands and embraced him, the nurse, overwhelmed with great joy and excitement, experienced the bodhisattva’s concentration under the name “range of universal vision”. With the experience of this concentration, innumerable tathāgatas in the ten directions, residing in different systems of the world, came into the range of vision.¹¹²

¹¹¹ *kiyac cira-pratilabdhas tvayāyaṃ devate aprameya-kalpa-sarvārambaṇa-bodhisattva-janma-vikurvitaṃ saṃdarśayamāno bodhisattva-janma-vimokṣaḥ* / (Gv p. 295.8–9; cf. ROBERTS 2023: 42.91; CLEARY 1993: 1393).

¹¹² *tena khalu samayena tasya bhagavato janmakāle vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhā nāma dhātrī*

§ 8.2.13. After saying these words, the goddess made an identification of the characters of the story as follows (Gv p. 296.5–14; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.98–101; CLEARY 1993: 1394):

At that time Vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhā, the bodhisattva's nurse (*dhātrī*), was herself the goddess of Lumbinī Grove (*ahaṃ sā tena kālena tena samayena vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhā nāma bodhisattva-dhātrī abhūvam*);

Queen Supraharsita-prabheśvarā, the mother of Prince (*kumārasya janetrī*), i.e. the Tathāgata Īśvara-guṇāparājita-dhvaja, was herself Queen Māyā (*iyam sā māyādevī tena kālena tena samayena supraharsita-prabheśvarā nāma devy abhūt*);

King Ratnārci-netra-prabha, the father, was himself King Śuddhodana (*ayam sa rājā śuddhodanaḥ tena kālena tena samayena ratnārci-netra-prabho nāma rājā abhūt*).

She said to Sudhana:

Son of a good family, since then I have not been separated from Blessed Vairocana even for a moment of consciousness, by penetrating the oceans of miraculous births of bodhisattvas and by penetrating the oceans of miraculous majesty of guiding sentient beings.¹¹³

§ 8.2.14. This jātaka-like story is followed by twenty closing verses spoken by the goddess of the Lumbinī Grove (Gv pp. 296.31–299.16; cf. ROBERTS 2023: § 42.107–129; CLEARY 1993: 1394–1397).

§ 8.3. Finally, the goddess advised Sudhana to go to Kapilavastu, to encounter Gopā, a girl of the Śākya clan, and ask her how a bodhisattva should undergo transmigration in the world in order to bring to maturity (perfection) the sentient beings.¹¹⁴

pratyupasthitābhūt / jāta-mātram ca bodhisattvaṃ lokendrā vicitra-surabhi-manojña-divya-puṣpotkarodgāribhiḥ parama-surabhi-gandhodaka-kalaśair visnāpya tadarhābhiḥ ca acintyāsaṃkhyeyābhir uttamābhiḥ pūjābhir abhipūjya tasyā vimāla-saṃbhava-prabhāyā dhātrīyā anke prāyacchan / pariḡrhitamātre ca tasmin bodhisattve tayā dhātrīyā ubhābhyāṃ pāṇibhyāṃ aṃse ca, tatkṣaṇam eva sā dhātrī mahāprīti-prāmodya-vega-pratilabdā samanta-caḥṣur-viṣayaṃ nāma bodhisattva-samādhiṃ praṭyalabhata, yasya samādheḥ sahapratilābhāt tasmād daśasu dikṣu nānāloka-dhātu-sthitā aprameyās tathāgatās caḥṣu ābhāsam agaman / (Gv p. 295.31–32).

¹¹³ *sā khalv ahaṃ kulaputra tata upādāya sarva-citta-kṣaṇeṣv avirahitā abhūvaṃ bhagavato vairocanasya bodhisattva-janma-vikurvita-sāgarāvataranāyā sattva-naya-vṛṣabhītāvikurvita-sāgarāvataranāyā // (Gv p. 296.14–16; cf. ROBERTS 2023: 42.102; CLEARY 1993: 1394).*

¹¹⁴ *gaccha kulaputra, iyam ihaiva kapilavastuni mahānagare gopā nāma śākya-kanyā prativasati / tām upasaṃkrāmya paripṛccha – katham bodhisattvena satva-paripākāya* saṃsāre saṃsaritavyam // (Gv p. 299.24–26). *I read after ms HODGSON 2, fol. 203a3: satva-paripākāya, against Gv and ms ASK 6681, fol. 256b7: bodhisattva-paripākāya. Cf. ROBERTS 2023: 42.131; CLEARY 1993: 1397.*

§ 8.4. The *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* is one of the Buddhist texts that have been represented in art.¹¹⁵ The story of Sudhana's journey was illustrated in such remote places as a monastery in the Western Himālayas and a stūpa on the island of Java, namely in a series of paintings in the Tabo (Ta pho)¹¹⁶ monastery at Spiti, and in a cycle of reliefs covering parts of the monumental Borobudur (Barabuḍur) stūpa¹¹⁷. As research has shown, the scene depicting Sudhana's visit to the Lumbinī-vana goddess cannot be identified at either Tabo or Borobudur.

§ 8.4.1. The detailed description of the Tabo mural depicting Sudhana's visit to the goddess of the Lumbinī Grove was given by Steinkellner (STEINKELLNER 1995: 75–76, Panel XXVII):

The inscription would contain the visit to the goddess of the Lumbinī grove Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī¹¹⁸. [...] The remains of the inscription may be legible, but are illegible on the available slide.¹¹⁹

In Thakur's description of the panels, which he called Panels XXVIII–XXIX (THAKUR 2006: 65),

The scene seems to depict the Lumbinī grove where Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī was surrounded by twenty million billion good goddesses. She was expounding there a scripture called *sarvabodhisattva-janmasamudranirdeśa* (exposition of the ocean of lives of all enlightening beings). Neither Sudhana nor the night goddess¹²⁰ is visible. The inscriptional panel too is totally defaced. Immediately below it is another partially visible panel showing Sudhana in the company of the Śākya girl named Gopā.

§ 8.4.2. Borobudur.

Jan Fontein after a detailed analysis of the Borobudur reliefs illustrating the episodes from the *Gaṇḍavyūha* relating to Sudhana's visits to the eight night goddesses (the Lumbinī-vana-devatā was not mentioned by him)¹²¹ wrote that it is not possible to identify these figures on the reliefs since “none of the reliefs appears to yield any specific clue to the identity of these female Good Friends” (FONTEIN 2012: 62).

¹¹⁵ Cf. ALLINGER 2008.

¹¹⁶ STEINKELLNER 1995; STEINKELLNER 1996; KLIMBURG-SALTER 1997; THAKUR 2006.

¹¹⁷ FONTEIN 2012; FONTEIN 1967: 116–146 (IV. Sudhana's Pilgrimage on the Barabuḍur).

¹¹⁸ Recte: Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī – M.M.

¹¹⁹ STEINKELLNER 1995, Appendix: Concordance of text, inscriptions, and paintings, no. 42: Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī; cf. STEINKELLNER 1996: 36, 59.

¹²⁰ Recte: the grove goddess (*vana-devatā*) – M.M.

¹²¹ FONTEIN 1967: 139 (II 60). Cf. SHASHIBALA, 2015: 262–264.

§ 9. Concluding remarks

Two themes are presented in this paper: one concerns the name of the place where, according to tradition, the future Buddha was born, Lumbinī-vana, and the other is devoted to the figure of the forest goddess who assisted at the birth, Lumbinī-vana-devatā.

A. Barea has shown that the name Lumbinī hardly appears in the canonical Pāli texts. It was only in the Sanskrit tradition that Lumbinī became established as the birthplace of the Buddha. The *Saṅghabhedavastu* contains an argument about the origin of the name Lumbinī. In the Senart edition of the *Mahāvastu*, the mysterious word **lumbodyāna* (“*lumba* park”) appears, where *lumba* is supposed to mean the name of a tree or the fruit of that tree. With the help of K. Marciniak, who prepared a new edition of the *Mahāvastu* based on the oldest manuscripts, we were able to show that Senart had misread the expression on the basis of late Nepalese manuscripts. The correct wording of the expression is *ramyodyāna* “lovely/beautiful park”.

The figure of the forest goddess (*vana-devatā*) appears (for the first time?) in an episode in the *Mahāvastu*, but here she has no connection with the Buddha's birth. In the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, the figure of the forest goddess does not appear, but in the birth episode it is the god Śakra himself who takes the form of an old midwife and delivers the baby. In the *Aśokāvadāna*, the forest goddess appears in person to king Aśoka and tells him that she witnessed the birth and heard the words of the newborn bodhisattva.

The *Gaṇḍavyūha*, on the other hand, describes the wandering of Sudhana, the son of a merchant, who, in search of answers to the question of how to attain enlightenment, visits fifty-two “good friends” (*kalyāṇa-mitra*). These spiritual guides, many of whom are female characters, give him partial explanations and then direct him to another “good friend”. Sudhana arrives at Lumbinī, where a forest goddess who has achieved “bodhisattva salvation” resides. She assisted in the birth of Buddha and, in the guise of an old midwife, accepted the delivery of the child. Here we have the culmination of the role played by the figure of the forest goddess of Lumbinī in the legend of Buddha's birth. This issue, however, would require further in-depth research, explaining the gradual rise in importance of this figure, its symbolism, its connection with tree worship, and with the mother figure, Māyādevī.

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Abbreviations

ASK	Asha Archive, Kathmandu
ms	manuscript
<i>Mv</i>	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
PTS	Pāli Text Society
Sen.	Senart's edition of the <i>Mahāvastu</i> (<i>Mv_S</i>)
s.v.	sub voce, under the specified word

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