

*Richard S. Cohen*

KINSMEN OF THE SON:  
ŚĀKYABHIKṢUS  
AND THE  
INSTITUTIONALIZATION  
OF THE BODHISATTVA  
IDEAL

The Mahāyāna's early history has been a favorite problem for scholars of Indian Buddhism, not least because its multidimensional complexity does not allow for a definitive solution. The Mahāyāna differentiated itself from the so-called Hīnayāna in relation to a broad spectrum of environmental, social, and doctrinal pressures. I have argued elsewhere that scholars go awry when they attempt to fuse all aspects of this heterogeneous and discontinuous history into a coherent and unified narrative.<sup>1</sup> More to the point, these diverse vectors within the Mahāyāna's development did not progress at a uniform pace. The early history of the Mahāyāna as an intellectual movement does not accord with that of the Mahāyāna as a broad-scale regulator of social practice. Self-identified Mahāyāna sūtras were being written by the first century of the common era and translated into Chinese by the second. This literature is our principal source for reconstructing early Mahāyāna ideas and ideals. But few material artifacts contemporaneous with these sūtras' composition display influence from the texts' avant-garde doctrines. Without corroborative archaeological data, we cannot be certain whether Mahāyāna beliefs or mythologies had any direct effect on monastic life, patronage, ritual, or even education during the first or second century. In fact, the archaeological record suggests that the Mahāyāna did not receive

<sup>1</sup> Richard S. Cohen, "Discontented Categories: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in Indian Buddhist History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (Spring 1995): 1–25.

anything approaching popular and public support in India until the fifth century.<sup>2</sup>

This temporal gap between the conceptual genesis of a self-consciously Mahāyānist identity and the apparent social debut of that identity demands further research. In more general terms, I am calling for an investigation of the play of ideology in Mahāyāna history, using *ideology* in the sense suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith: “A tribe as observed need not correspond in fact to their own systematic statements about themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Early sūtras make systematic statements about what it means to ride on the great vehicle; they dictate how a bodhisattva should think, feel, speak, and act. But bodhisattvas “as observed” in the archaeological record do not appear to think, feel, speak, or act in line with these sūtras’ regulations until centuries after the texts’ authors had died. We reconstruct Indian bodhisattvas’ social

<sup>2</sup> This argument is most closely associated with the early work of Gregory Schopen. See esp. his articles “Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21 (1979): 1–19, “Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit,” *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984): 9–47, and “The Inscription on the Kuṣāṇ Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10, no. 2 (1987): 99–137.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 40. A somewhat more complicated, albeit probably more precise, explanation of this point can be made through appeal to Roy A. Rappaport’s distinction between “acceptance” and “belief.” In his brilliant monograph *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Rappaport strives to explain the mechanisms that make ritual meaningful and effective. He proposes that ritual is a form of communication, carrying with it two distinct types of information: acceptance and belief. The difference between these two types is equivalent to the difference between the public and the private, the objectively physical and the subjectively mental. According to Rappaport, when an individual performs a liturgical order, she “accepts” the canon encoded in that order. That is to say, merely by engaging in a ritual performance, the performer signals to both herself and others that she considers the ritual meaningful and effective. “To accept a [liturgical] order is to ascribe legitimacy to its terms” (Rappaport, p. 131). This form of information is digital and binary: either one does accept a liturgical order, as signaled through participation, or one does not accept a liturgical order, as signaled through a lack of participation. “Belief” differs from “acceptance,” for the bare act of ritual performance does not, in itself, contain information about the discursive significance of that liturgical order, i.e., what its “terms” actually mean to the performer. The performer’s belief is, in Rappaport’s words, “an inward state, knowable subjectively if at all” (p. 120). Indeed, a performer might doubt, or even intellectually reject, the canons of a liturgical order that she accepts through her actions. “Liturgical orders even those performed in solitude, are public orders and participation in them constitutes an acceptance of a public order regardless of the private state of belief of the performer” (p. 121). The important point here is that “‘belief’ is a second-order process” (p. 119). Acceptance and belief are both forms of information, equally intrinsic to the ritual act. But we cannot know that an act of private belief may even have transpired until we see an act of public acceptance. Thus, as Rappaport puts it, although “belief may follow new theological argument, acceptance is not its ineluctable entailment as it is in formal ritual performance” (p. 313). We cannot imagine that the canonical messages encoded in early Mahāyāna literature were considered meaningful and effective, let alone true, until we have some indication that they were at least accepted in ritual performance by ancient Indian Buddhists.

behavior through inscriptions, architecture, sculptures, and paintings created in their performance of rituals. These material artifacts evidence how Indian Buddhists realized Mahāyāna ideals in practice and thus, presumably, enable us to understand why they did so. This article seeks to discover whether bodhisattvas' material self-representations encode distinct canons, whose decoding would enable us to learn how *bodhisattva*—a spiritual status and soteriological goal—became a social category. I am also interested in how the public expression of such canons might have fostered the emergence of the Mahāyāna as a public institution. There are two explicit questions here: How did “early” bodhisattvas represent themselves socially as bodhisattvas? And how did this self-representation lend momentum to the institutional development of the Mahāyāna within Indian society? And there is one question that is implicit: What is the correlation between bodhisattvahood and membership in the Mahāyāna?

Although each of these questions deserves due consideration, this article can only bring us part of the way toward any answer. Thus I will treat bodhisattvas' social self-representation in particular, through a consideration of the term *Śākyabhikṣu*, an epithet found almost exclusively in dedicatory inscriptions. *Śākyabhikṣu* is first attested in the late fourth century, inscribed on a relic casket buried in the stūpa at Devnī Morī.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-fifth century, *Śākyabhikṣu* had gained currency throughout the Deccan Plateau and Gangetic Basin; indeed, it was used continuously until Buddhism died in India. I will argue that *Śākyabhikṣu* (as well as the lay equivalents, *Śākya-upāsaka* and *Śākya-upāsikā*) was a layered, complex synonym for *bodhisattva*. This epithet is a critical datum for reconstructing the Mahāyāna's social history because it indexes a fledgling attempt on the part of Indian bodhisattvas to present themselves publicly as bodhisattvas. Why *Śākyabhikṣu*? What was at stake in the adoption of this epithet? What ideologies were actualized in the *Śākyabhikṣus*' ritual practice?

Let me foreshadow my conclusions. Mahāyāna literature often works its magic through statements that play on a social imagination steeped in the idioms of kinship and royalty. The following passage from the “Maitreya” chapter of the Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra (GV) exemplifies one ideological chrysalis out of which metamorphosed a fully social, fully public Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: “It is like this: A newborn prince surpasses all senior ministers at the pinnacle [of their careers] through the power of [his] birth into the [royal] family. Similarly, a novice bodhisattva, who

<sup>4</sup> The text of this inscription can be found in R. N. Mehta and S. N. Chowdhary, *Excavation at Devnimori (A Report on the Excavation Conducted from 1960 to 1963)* (Baroda, India: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 1966), p. 121. See Schopen, “Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions,” p. 19, n. 35, for a discussion of this inscription's dating and the debate that has surrounded it.

has just conceived the aspiration for awakening, is reborn into the family of the *tathāgata*, the Dharma king. Through the power [of his] aspiration for awakening and great compassion, this [bodhisattva] surpasses advanced *śrāvakas* who have followed the religious life for a long time.”<sup>5</sup> This simile crafts a conventional cultural conception of royal genealogy, familial prerogative, and social ascendancy into a polemic for bodhisattva-hood. The GV likens *bodhicitta*, the aspiration for awakening, to a second birth wherein an individual is transformed into a member of the buddha’s family, with all the rights, privileges, and obligations that may entail. The bodhisattva is a Buddhist *dvija* (twice born), who combines within himself the spiritual majesty of the Brahman and the worldly majesty of the *ṣātriya*. As Śākyamuni’s kin, the bodhisattva is a textbook member of polite Indian society. Playing on the trope that individuals become sage-princes by taking a bodhisattva’s vows, India’s Śākyabhikṣus took the royal name for themselves as princes in a lineage of Dharma kings.

#### A FIFTH-CENTURY COMMUNITY OF SĀKYABHIKṢUS: THE SOURCES

I have found only two instances of the term *Śākyabhikṣu* in Sanskrit Buddhist literature.<sup>6</sup> Most of what we know about India’s Śākyabhikṣus comes from their inscriptions, painted and incised. The Śākyabhikṣus are like a community of golem, born of and bound to the stone bearing their names, haunting. All scholars love a good ghost story, and the Śākyabhikṣus have not been left at peace. This epithet has inspired two rather different interpretations. Masao Shizutani and Gregory Schopen hold that it was a title Mahāyānist monks adopted for themselves.<sup>7</sup> H. Sarkar, by contrast, suggests that the Śākyabhikṣus were an organization of peripatetic monks concerned with the dissemination of buddha images, and the exaltation of Śākyamuni Buddha.<sup>8</sup> My own interpretation coincides to a degree with

<sup>5</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Hokēi Idzumi, eds., *The Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Kyoto: Sanskrit Buddhist Texts Publishing Society, 1936), p. 506. Candrakīrti knew this section of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* as a separate text, the *Maitreyavimokṣa*, which he cites in *Madhyamakāvātāra*, ed. Louis de la Vallée-Poussin (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1970), pp. 17–18.

<sup>6</sup> The term *Śākyabhikṣu* is found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (MSV) and in the introductory verses to Vasumitra’s *Samayabhedoparacakra*, a doxographic text devoted to the origins and tenets of the eighteen *nikāyas* (Raniero Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the Seventeenth and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, 2 vols. [Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977], 1:186; Vasumitra, *Samayabhedoparacakra*, ed. Enga Teramoto and Tomotsugu Hiramatsu [Kyoto, 1935], p. 1). I make no claim that this is the final word on the matter, just the product of my own meager search.

<sup>7</sup> Schopen, “Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions,” and “Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism”; Masao Shizutani, “On the Śākyabhikṣu as Found in Indian Buddhist Inscriptions,” *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū* 2 (1952): 104–5, and “Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period,” *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū* 19 (1962): 355–58.

<sup>8</sup> H. Sarkar, *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966), pp. 106–8.

both. Like Shizutani and Schopen, I see the Śākyabhikṣus as somehow allied with the Mahāyāna, albeit I would rather bracket the equation of entry onto the bodhisattva path with membership in the Mahāyāna. Like Sarkar, I see the Śākyabhikṣus as vitally concerned with expressing their relationship with Śākyamuni Buddha.

Although I agree with Shizutani, Schopen, and Sarkar around the edges, my interpretation differs from theirs, in large part because I bring additional evidence to bear on the meaning of the epithet. These three scholars reached their conclusions by collating inscriptions from numerous geographical areas and time periods. In true deductive fashion, they isolated particular epigraphic specimens containing *Śākyabhikṣu*, compared morphological structures and developmental variations, and then synthesized their analyses into generalized interpretations. All three concluded that the Śākyabhikṣus formed a distinct community within the broader world of Indian Buddhism. Sarkar puts the point most forcefully: "It may be argued that *Śākya-bhikṣus* need not be distinguished as a distinct group of monks. But the *Śākya-bhikṣus* have always been differentiated from other monks or *bhikṣus*."<sup>9</sup> Given this general conclusion, the next logical step would have been for Sarkar et al. to investigate distinct local communities of Śākyabhikṣus, for the significance of their group's name can be best known through a comprehensive analysis of communities that adopted it.

The fact that Schopen, Shizutani, and Sarkar did not take this next analytic step is not surprising. One of the most intractable problems confronting every scholar of Indian Buddhism is the lack of adequate sources through which to recover the religious lives of Buddhists as members of an actual, historical community. However, I have chanced on a choice community. Not only do rich epigraphic data enable me to identify this particular community as one comprising Śākyabhikṣus, but a vast treasury of collateral evidence—pictorial and literary—provides insight into the community's values, aspirations, beliefs, and practices.

This article will seek to unpack the term *Śākyabhikṣu* as it may have been understood by the community of fifth-century Buddhists associated with the Ajanta caves, a series of monastic residences, worship halls, and shrinelets hewn out of a sheer mountain scarp on a bend of the Waghora River in western India, approximately 200 miles east by northeast from Bombay. Ajanta is a rich source for archaeological evidence, including epigraphs, architectural programs, paintings, and sculptures. But Ajanta's true wealth does not lie in its material artifacts. Rather, this site is unparalleled as a source for Indian Buddhist social history because we can contextualize it with remarkable precision.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

First, Ajanta can be dated to a span of only twenty years, circa 462 to 480 C.E.<sup>10</sup> The brevity of this time frame keeps it to a manageable scale. This is one factor that has inspired art historian Walter Spink to call Ajanta, “by all counts, the most minutely, as well as the most totally, analyzable site . . . in the world.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, using motival analysis, Spink has set the site’s artifacts within a relative chronology on a year-by-year basis; and he has demonstrated that Ajanta was not put together in slapdash fashion over those twenty years but was coordinated through a central authority. This level of administrative control was possible because all Ajanta’s major donors belonged to the court of Hariṣeṇa, an overlord of the Vākāṭaka dynasty (reigned circa 460–78). Work at the site commenced near the start of Hariṣeṇa’s reign and stopped soon after his death; many of those patronizing the site at its efflorescence were also present at its abandonment.

Second, epigraphic evidence clearly indicates that Ajanta’s resident community was a community of Śākyaabhiṣus, whatever that might mean. Ajanta boasts a total of ninety-seven inscriptions, painted and incised.<sup>12</sup> Of these, sixty record information on late fifth-century Buddhist donors; unfortunately, twenty-one of the donative inscriptions are damaged beyond use, leaving thirty-nine as a basis for reconstructing the local community. If we describe a “ratio” of epigraphic material to elapsed time within which that material was created as a measure of “social density,” then Ajanta is among the socially densest Buddhist sites in India; it is a site at which a statistical sampling can yield meaningful data. Though one-third of the original set is disqualified, the remainder still represents a particularly “dense” sampling. Of the thirty-nine usable donative inscriptions, twenty-eight name their donor as a “Śākyaabhiṣu,” “Śākya-upāsaka,” or “Śākya-upāsikā” (twenty-five, two, and one, respectively). In short, if we know anything distinctive about the people making donations at Ajanta, we know that nearly three of every four considered himself (or herself) a Śākya.

A third reason that Ajanta is extraordinary is our ability to identify a corpus of literary works known and used by its community. Verses from Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā* were painted on the walls. But more crucially for the present study, the details of narrative paintings in several monasteries

<sup>10</sup> In point of fact, Ajanta’s artifacts were created in two phases, the first of which dates to the Śātavāhana period, approximately 100 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. After a several century hiatus, work resumed in the late fifth century. The best recent analysis of fifth-century Ajanta is Walter Spink’s “The Archaeology of Ajanta,” *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1992): 67–94. For a critical review of Spink’s historical project, see my “Problems in the Writing of Ajanta’s History: The Epigraphic Evidence,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 40 (April 1997): 125–48.

<sup>11</sup> Spink, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> I reviewed, revised, and retranslated all Ajanta’s inscriptions in my “Setting the Three Jewels: The Complex Culture of Buddhism at the Ajanta Caves” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995). See figures 47 and 53 of that work for tabular analyses of the inscriptions around the parameters of lay/monastic identity and the use of epithets.

suggest that the community was familiar with the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* (*MSV*), a patchwork of monastic regulations, jātaka tales, sūtras, and retellings of the buddha's life. Given that the *MSV* is one of the two Indian Buddhist literary sources in which I have found Śākyabhikṣu,<sup>13</sup> this text is the ideal point of entree into the paired questions of how Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus understood themselves as such, and why *bodhisattva* was transformed into a kinship category when the doctrinal statements of Mahāyāna literature became socially meaningful. Perhaps Ajanta is unique in that it provides probative evidence for analyzing this crucial moment in Indian Buddhist history. But Ajanta was not uniquely Mahāyānist. This study will, I hope, provoke fresh inquiry into the social emergence of the Mahāyāna elsewhere on the subcontinent.

#### “ŚĀKYA” IN THE *MSV*

To identify Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus, we might begin with the epithet itself. On the face of it there seems to be no cause for confusion. *Bhikṣu* unremarkably identifies a mendicant or monk; *Śākya* names the historical

<sup>13</sup> See n. 6 above. I will treat the *MSV* in the body of my article, but I wish to take the present opportunity to discuss the reference to Vasumitra as a Śākyabhikṣu. The *Samayabhedoparacakra* does not survive in Sanskrit; it was preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. In fact, it was translated into Chinese three times: in the Cin (385–431), putatively by Kumārajīva; between the years 557 and 569 by Paramārtha; and in 662 by Xuanzang (André Bareau, “Trois traités sur les sectes bouddhiques attribués à Vasumitra, Bhavya et Vinīta-deva,” pt. 1, *Journal Asiatique* 242 [1954]: 231). The Tibetan translation was made in the ninth century by Dharmākara. I recount these details of the text's transmission, for the verse in which one finds *Śākyabhikṣu* was not part of the Cin period translation (Bareau, p. 235). Thus, one can surmise that this verse's characterization of Vasumitra as a Śākyabhikṣu was a later addition and does not represent Vasumitra's own self-identification. According to this verse, “Vasumitra, possessed of wisdom, [was] an enlightened Śākyabhikṣu, a bodhisattva of great knowledge.” This characterization is particularly interesting because Vasumitra, far from being a Mahāyāna luminary, is named a coauthor of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, a Sarvāstivādin text, the title of which came to be eponymous with Hīnayānist doctrine (Jiryo Masuda, “Origin and Doctrines of the Early Indian Buddhist Schools,” *Asia Major* 2 [1925]: 7–9). According to Xuanzang, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* was compiled at a council convened by King Kaniṣka for the purpose of reconciling differences between the *nikāyas* and making the saṅgha whole. At first, the arhats present in Kaniṣka's realm prevented Vasumitra from joining the assembly because Vasumitra had not yet attained arhatship. Little did they know that Vasumitra was a bodhisattva. Disinterested in such attainments, he sought “only the fruit of Buddha.” To prove his merit to the arhat elite, Vasumitra cast a ball in the air, declaring that by the time it hit the earth he too would be an arhat. The ball was stopped by the gods, however, who queried why Vasumitra sought such a meager fruit, given that he was destined to be the next buddha following Maitreya. In consequence of this miracle, Kaśmīr's arhats made Vasumitra the present of their convocation (Xuanzang, *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang [A.D. 629]*, 2 vols., trans. Samuel Beal [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981], 1:151–56). Although Xuanzang's tale affords the fullest account of this convocation, Paul Demiéville records that Vasumitra's status as the sixth buddha of our age was accepted at least as early as the year 384 C.E. (“La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharākṣa,” *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 44 [1954]: 366–68). With this background, one can well understand the verses interpolated into the introduction to Vasumitra's *Samayabhedoparacakra*: he is wise, enlightened, a bodhisattva. The burden of this article, in a sense, is to show why, therefore, he also is properly a Śākyabhikṣu.

buddha's family. Thus, Devadatta, the buddha's cousin, is called "one paṇḍit of the Śākya" by the rival teacher Pūraṇa Kāśyapa. Similarly, just before the nun Utpalavarṇā is struck and killed by Devadatta, she states that he should not harm her for he is a renunciant from the Śākya family (*śākya-kulād pravrajitaḥ*).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, although *Śākya* and *bhikṣu* are clear-cut as discrete terms, their compounded form remains open to question. What does *Śākya* signify as the first element in this compound? Does the *MSV* evince a pattern for such a usage? A reading of parallel examples is notable for its lack of surprises: *Śākya*, when compounded, does not change its value. *Śākya*muni—Śākya sage—is certainly the most common instance. But the *MSV*'s formula for ordination into the saṅgha is rather free in its compounding of *Śākya*, providing additional instances. The entrant recites, "I follow in renunciation the Blessed One, Tathāgata, Arhat, Complete and Perfect Buddha Śākya muni, the *Śākya*siṃha [Śākya lion], the *Śākya*ādhiraḥ [Śākya overlord]."<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, as part of a series of verses wherein monks recount past acts that resulted in their rebirth at the time of Śākya muni Buddha, one named Śaivala notes his good fortune for being born in the *Śākya*kula, the Śākya family; a second is glad for his birth in the *Śākya*rājakula, the family of the Śākya kings. Other productive uses of *Śākya* include *Śākya*stri, *Śākya*kumārī, and *Śākya*kumāra—Śākya woman, Śākya girl, and Śākya boy, respectively.<sup>16</sup>

Although these examples could be multiplied, the aforementioned encounter between Utpalavarṇā and Devadatta—where Devadatta is called "a renunciant from the Śākya family"—is particularly noteworthy. One finds a similar phrase in the *MSV*'s "Chapter on Beds and Seats" (*Śayanāsanavastu*). This chapter begins by recounting a discussion at Anāthapiṇḍada's monastery in Śrāvastī, in which the monks dispute who among them is the most worthy, who ought to receive offerings of seats, water, and alms before the others. Enumerating the subgroups vying for institutional supremacy, the *MSV* speaks of the Śākya renunciant (*śākyaḥ pravrajitaḥ*), the brāhmaṇa renunciant, the kṣatriya renunciant, the vaiśya renunciant, and śūdra renunciant, the renunciant from a noble family, the renunciant from a wealthy family, the monk who is handsome, comely, pleasing, the renunciant who speaks well, the one who is famous, the mer-

<sup>14</sup> Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, 2:256, 2:254.

<sup>15</sup> Anukul Chandra Banerjee, ed., *Two Buddhist Vinaya Texts in Sanskrit: Prātimokṣa Sūtra and Bhikṣukarmavākya* (Calcutta: World Press, 1977), p. 60; translations are mine unless otherwise stated. The Gilgit manuscript of the *Bhikṣukarmavākya* (Script for monastic ordination) corresponds to the *MSV*'s *Pravrajyāvastu*, Derge Ka 47B7–63B7. For the Tibetan *MSV*, I am working with the Derge text as reproduced by the Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP), catalog number KD0001B; ACIP's materials can be found at <http://www.asianclassics.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Nalinaksha Dutt, ed., *Gilgit Manuscripts*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Sri Sat Guru, 1984), 3, pt. 1:191, and 3, pt. 1:208; Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* (n. 6 above), 1:203.

itorious monk, the preservers of the sūtras, vinaya, or *māṭṛkās*; it also enumerates those monks who undertake each of the ascetic *dhūtaguṇas*, and finally the list ends with the arhat, a meditator on the eight deliverances.<sup>17</sup> Note that the *MSV* reveals Buddhist monks to have been as cognizant of mundane social hierarchies—caste, wealth, political power—as they were of characteristically spiritual accomplishments. More crucial for this analysis, however, is the fact that the Śākya renunciant is singled out at the head of the list; as a social group, the Śākyas are categorized with, but distinguished from, members of the four varṇas. Here we see that certain monks were identified as Śākyas, members of the Śākya family or lineage, and those monks may have considered themselves deserving of special recognition for that reason.<sup>18</sup>

So far I have noted two passages from the *MSV* in which *Śākya + pravrajita* designates a renunciant belonging to Śākyamuni's family. *Pravrajita* and *bhikṣu* are synonyms: there is no reason to believe that, within the *MSV*, *Śākya + bhikṣu* does not refer similarly to blood Śākyas. Let us now turn to the text's use of *Śākyabhikṣu*, which I propose is a *karmadhārya* compound, grammatically parallel with *Śākyastrī* or *Śākyakumāra*. This instance of *Śākyabhikṣu* is contained within a story whose scene is set six years after the buddha's awakening. At this time, Śuddhodana, longing to see his son, sends a Śākya messenger to Śākyamuni in Śrāvastī. The buddha converts this countryman, who remains in Śrāvastī within the saṅgha. This happens several times until, finally, Śuddhodana sends Udāyin, Siddhārtha's childhood companion. Śuddhodana commits Udāyin to promise that, even if converted, he will return to Kapilavastu. Udāyin finds the buddha,

<sup>17</sup> Raniero Gnoli, ed., *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> According to the *MSV*, Śākyas had a significant presence in the saṅgha in Śākyamuni's day. When Śākyamuni returned to Kapilavastu at his father's behest, Śuddhodana was disgusted to see that his son's followers were predominantly fire-worshipping *jaṭilas* (a type of ascetic, named for their long, twisted dreadlocks), whose bodies had been racked by the penances of their former practices. In this father's opinion, these *ex-jaṭilas* did not appear fit companions for his boy. Accordingly, Śuddhodana convened a meeting of the Śākyas. He observed that had Sarvārthasiddha not become a buddha, he would have been a cakravartin, and the Śākyas his followers. Hence, now that Sarvārthasiddha has become the supreme Dharmarāja, should not the Śākyas still be his followers? Accordingly, one son from every Śākya family was enrolled as a Buddhist monk, for a total of five hundred (Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, 1:200). The vinaya makes further provisions for Śākyas to join the saṅgha. While the buddha was dwelling in Śrāvastī an ascetic who converted to Buddhism and joined the saṅgha later forsook the buddha for his former order. As a result of this, Śākyamuni made the following rule: only non-Buddhists who are fire-worshipping *jaṭilas* or Śākyas can be ordained as monks immediately upon application; all other converts must have a probationary period of four months (Derge Ka 72A5–6). With this rule, the vinaya institutionalizes a privileged place for Śākyas merely because they are the buddha's blood kin; the *jaṭilas* receive this privilege because their own doctrines include those of karma, right action, causality, and vigor (Derge Ka 73B4–5).

becomes a monk, and keeping his word, returns to Kapilavastu. Before Udāyin leaves, however, Śākyamuni tells him how to act on his return: “The Blessed One said: ‘Go Udāyin. But do not enter the royal palace immediately. Standing at the door, you should announce: “A Śākyabhikṣu has come.” If they tell you to enter, you should enter. If they ask you whether there are any other Śākyabhikṣus, answer that there are.’”<sup>19</sup> Here, *Śākyabhikṣu* is used specifically to refer to a monk who is a member of the *Śākya* clan, not simply a follower of its favorite son but a blood member of the lineage. Udāyin is a *Śākya* who is also a *bhikṣu*.

In sum, within the *MSV*, the term *Śākyabhikṣu* reflects the two spheres of meaning from which its elements derive. This term brings together an index of broad social standing (*bhikṣu*) with a declaration of personal, familial membership (*Śākya*). Just as the *MSV* matter-of-factly specifies girls belonging to the *Śākya* family with the term *Śākyakumārī*, so I propose that *Śākyabhikṣu* functioned as a kinship term. This determination guides the remainder of my article. The following analysis of *Śākyabhikṣu* as a kinship term has three stages. First, I consider the epithet on a literal level. Are Ajanta’s *Śākyabhikṣus* literally related to Śākyamuni by blood? There is no satisfactory historical answer for this question, and so I quickly pass to the second stage: a consideration of generalized kinship patterns in ancient India. Normatively, kinship in India is a network of sociospiritual relationships. What patterned relationships did *Śākyabhikṣus* play on in their self-representations? What would it have meant for buddha to be a monk’s father, or a *Śākyabhikṣu* his son? The third stage analyzes art-historical evidence from Ajanta to demonstrate how that site’s community in particular imagined kinship with the buddha. At Ajanta, we will find, *Śākyabhikṣu* was a synonym for *bodhisattva*; membership in a superior blood lineage betokened membership in a superior spiritual one.

#### FATHERS, SONS, AND THE NORMATIVE PATTERNS OF KINSHIP

The previous section began with the conceit that the *MSV*’s use of *Śākyabhikṣu* could explain this term’s significance for donors at Ajanta. But the conclusion—that is, three-quarters of Ajanta’s donors were members of the *Śākya* family, kin to Śuddhodana, Ānanda, and Rāhula, Śākyamuni’s own son—seems untenable. Do I really want to propose this? Must grammar and parallel examples compel the conclusion that most of Ajanta’s monastic residents claimed direct blood relation to the buddha? And what if I seek to generalize my thesis for all India? Must I then argue that every *Śākyabhikṣu* in the fifth century and after was supposed to be Śākyamuni’s cousin, many times removed?

<sup>19</sup> Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, 1:186.

Ultimately, these questions may be set aside. We lack adequate evidence to answer them and an alternate interpretation is available. For the moment, however, it is worth noting that people thought to be true Śākya, kin to the buddha, did live in the millennium after Śākyamuni's nirvāṇa. The renowned fourth-century translator Buddhahadra meets our criteria, for instance. The *Kao seng chuan*, a Chinese collection of the biographies of prominent Buddhists, memorializes Buddhahadra as a Śākya, descended from Śuddhodana's brother's son.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Vimokṣaprajña, a missionary in Lo-yang China from 516 to 541, was a kṣatriya from the Śākya-descended ruling family of Uḍḍiyāna.<sup>21</sup> Here we have *bhikṣus* believed to be of Śākya stock, one in the fourth century, one in the fifth. These two Śākyabhikṣus may not have been alone. As late as the seventh century, Xuanzang knew of four kingdoms in India's northwest that were reputedly founded by Śākyas from Kapilavastu more than one millennium earlier.<sup>22</sup> Monks from these kingdoms' Śākya families may well have been deemed Śākyabhikṣus. More tantalizingly still, the term *Śākyabhikṣu* is used even in modern Nepal to refer to men who are "monks and kinsmen of the Buddha simultaneously."<sup>23</sup> Based on this and other evidence, including some from Ajanta itself, one could build a circumstantial case for the proposition that three-quarters of Ajanta's donors considered themselves related to Śākyamuni by blood. Nevertheless, I have chosen to leave the bulk of this evidence aside. For although the data are provocative, one cannot independently confirm the familial background of Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus.<sup>24</sup>

Fortunately, we do not require that evidence to unpack *Śākyabhikṣu* as a kinship term. Kinship need not be a matter of blood and bones. Kinship is a system of meaning, communicating the existential embeddedness of social relations joining individuals, communities, and divinities. This embeddedness can be viewed through the lens of biological affiliation, but that is only one possible perspective. Broadly speaking, the role of "family member" brings a publicly defined social status into direct correlation with a publicly defined model for behavior appropriate to that status. Kinship is a matter of behavior, and the family in which one acts the part need not be strictly biological. This factor of publicity is particularly crucial in the present instance, for I am concerned to explore how *Śākyabhikṣu* was

<sup>20</sup> Demiéville (n. 13 above), p. 377. An important donor at Ajanta, responsible for cave 26, was also named Buddhahadra. These two Buddhahadras have no known connection.

<sup>21</sup> Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1988), p. 682.

<sup>22</sup> Xuanzang (n. 13 above), 2:10–21.

<sup>23</sup> David N. Gellner, "Buddhist Monks or Kinsmen of the Buddha? Reflections on the Titles Traditionally Used by Śākyas in the Kathmandu Valley," *Kailash* 15 (1989): 16.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the historical and art-historical evidence suggestive of the continuing importance of the Śākya family, see my "Setting the Three Jewels" (n. 12 above), pp. 221–34.

meaningful as an open, public representation of religious identity. Methodologically, this interest in publicity requires that I now look beyond Buddhism's canonical literature, to wider-ranging expressions of Indian kinship norms. Only after we comprehend how kin behaviors work in India in general can we determine how *Śākyabhikṣu*, in particular, might have functioned as a kinship term. Accordingly, I will now turn to the *dharmaśāstras*, especially the *Laws of Manu*. And I will begin with a discussion of adoption, for adoption is the form of kinship in which the interchangeability of blood and behavior is most critical. If the *Śākyabhikṣu*s cannot be established as the blood relations of *Śākyamuni*, their shared cognomen suggests an adoptive relationship at least.

Why would a man in fifth-century India adopt a son? According to the *dharmaśāstras*, the answer is as simple as the question: because he does not have a son of his own but wants or needs one. Not having a son, therein lies a rub. Within Indo-Āryan lore, every twice-born man comes into this world with three debts laid on his head. He owes one debt to the Vedic seers, one to the gods, and one to his own ancestors. These debts are discharged, respectively, by study, by the performance of sacrifices, and, most important for us, by the birth of a male heir. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*'s telling (6.3.10.5): "He is, indeed, free from debt, who has a son, is a sacrificer, and who has lived as a student."<sup>25</sup> In short, every twice-born male is required to have a son because if he does not do so, he leaves his natal debt to his ancestors unfulfilled. These three debts are not direct equivalents of Christianity's "original sin," but several parallels help to clarify their import. Like original sin, these debts are an inevitable concomitant of birth and thus cannot be avoided; like original sin, the three debts can be eliminated through specific socioreligious acts; like original sin, failure to pay off one's debts carries substantial penalties bearing upon the afterlife.<sup>26</sup> The *Laws of Manu* (6.94) tells us, for example, that a man may not enter the life of a renunciant or seek ultimate release until he has paid his three natal debts. More direly, lack of a son results in untold suffering. The following fanciful etymology of *putra*, son, also from the *Laws of Manu*, speaks for itself (9.138): "Because a son saves [*trāyate*] his father from the hell named *Put*, he is called *putra*."<sup>27</sup>

A man does not meet calamity alone if he fails in this duty. The ancestors to whom the debt is owed suffer as well. The father-son relationship is not complete in itself; this dyadic interaction takes place within a broad social context that necessarily includes the ancestral forefathers (*pitṛ*).

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50, discusses how the Hindu doctrine of three debts differs from Christian original sin.

<sup>27</sup> My translations of *Laws of Manu* are based on the electronic edition of M. Yano and Y. Ikari, available at <ftp://t.ms.uky.edu/outgoing/sohum/jaguar/manu.itx>.

Indeed, these forebears are crucial participants in the ritual economy that informs Indian familial roles, for the family is not a static unity but a dynamic process. A man receives a son from his ancestors as a reward for remembering them through offerings of food (*piṇḍa*) in a memorial ritual known as *śrāddha*. This son—a father himself one day—will perpetuate the process, by performing the rites that transform his father into a *pitr*, and subsequently performing *śrāddha* in his name. In short, a son is so valued not because he is a bundle of joy in a boy's body but, rather, because his behaviors as a son are crucial to the well being of father and forefathers and, ultimately, himself as well. According to the *Laws of Manu*, "A man secures the [higher] worlds through a son, he obtains permanence [in those worlds] through a grandson, through the son of a grandson he wins the world of the Sun."<sup>28</sup> The alternative is called *Put*.

To restate my earlier point, kinship need not be a matter of blood and bones. An adopted son is as capable as a biological son of meeting a father's embedded obligations to his ancestors. Both fulfill their religious role as sons insofar as they perform the requisite *śrāddha* by offering *piṇḍa*. The actual words used in the transfer of a boy from birth father to adoptive father are matter-of-fact. The new father takes hold of the boy saying, "I accept you for the continuity [of my family]."<sup>29</sup> That continuity is simultaneously social, economic, and religious. The *Laws of Manu*'s pragmatic description of changing loyalties in adoption is terse but to the point: "In no case should a given-son take the family-name [*gotra*] or wealth of [his] biological father. The *piṇḍa* follows after *gotra* and wealth. Funereal rites cease for one who gives away [his biological son]."<sup>30</sup> In other words, when a man gives a son up for adoption, this boy relinquishes his birth father's family name (*gotra*) and any claim to that family's wealth. These social changes have far-ranging implications, as all bonds of mutual obligation are severed. Having lost his rights to name and wealth from the biological family, the boy is no longer obliged to perform funereal obsequies for his biological father or other members of that lineage. Having transferred families, the adopted son takes on the *gotra* of his adoptive father and receives a share in this family's wealth; in turn, the boy bears an obligation to act as a son, by performing *śrāddha* for, and offering *piṇḍa* to, his new father and forefathers as appropriate.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Pandurang V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1993), 3:642.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:689.

<sup>30</sup> *Manusmṛiti* 9.142.

<sup>31</sup> Although I follow *Laws of Manu* in my interpretation, *dharmaśāstras* were far from unanimous on the relationship between *śrāddha* and inheritance (Kane, 3:543–74, 3:734–43). Though the complications are legion, one principal point of disagreement is whether the reception of inheritance compels the performance of *śrāddha* or whether the performance of *śrāddha* creates an entitlement to inheritance.

The sociologist R. S. Khare sums up the underlying logic in a simple formula: “‘Kinship’ . . . is the codified duties performed and obligations undertaken, with an eye towards ultimate ‘release.’”<sup>32</sup> Although the significance of Khare’s “ultimate ‘release’” must shift, depending on whether one is describing a Hindu or Buddhist, a Vedic Brahman or a *bhakta* of Kṛṣṇa, his point is clear. Kinship in India is defined by soteriological behaviors circumscribed by ritual. Again, although the “codified duties” demanded of a son will vary depending on social positioning, this model of kinship provides a pattern on which to model Śākyabhikṣus as Śākyamuni’s relations. Kinship is known through behavior, and a monk who presents himself as a Śākya suggests his role as a participant within an ongoing lineage. He is not just any monk; he is a self-declared Śākya monk, whose acceptability as a Buddhist is indexed by his appropriateness as a family member within the buddha’s lineage(s). This reading of India’s *dharmaśāstras* supports the following stipulative definition, one that may have been meaningful in fifth-century India. A Śākyabhikṣu is (1) a Buddhist monk, (2) who acts the part of a proper son to Śākyamuni (3) because he behaves in a way that actualizes his father’s religious aspirations (4) by performing his duties within the ancestral lineage of which his father is a part, (5) entitling him to proudly carry the family name and (6) share the family wealth. Here, embedded in the term *Śākyabhikṣu*, we find a broader context through which to unpack the imaginative transformation I invoked at this article’s beginning, when citing the GV: “A novice bodhisattva, having just conceived the aspiration for awakening, is reborn into the family of the *tathāgata*, the Dharma king.” For the GV, identity as a son within a privileged lineage is the social expression of bodhisattvahood. Within the GV’s textual universe, *Śākyabhikṣu* could be taken as a layered, complex synonym for *bodhisattva*.

#### FATHER BUDDHA

So far I have established that *Śākyabhikṣu* should be treated as a kinship term and have stipulatively defined it as such according to a “logic” derived from India’s *dharmaśāstras*. These findings now provide a ground from which to move toward my broader questions: How did Indian bodhisattvas present themselves publicly as bodhisattvas when the Mahāyāna began to emerge as a public institution? What canons does *Śākyabhikṣu* encode such that it was an early index of this development in the bodhisattva ideal? Although the path from the *dharmaśāstras* to the bodhisattva ideal is not an obvious one, this definition of *Śākyabhikṣu* marks the way. The next two sections of this article will fill in crucial details, by reading this

<sup>32</sup> R. S. Khare, *Normative Culture and Kinship: Essays on Hindu Categories, Processes and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983), p. 146.

definition back into the appropriate Buddhist literature and then, finally, back into artifacts from the Ajanta caves themselves. The discussion that now follows will look at how the *MSV* represents Śākyamuni as a family member and how this text represents monks as Śākyamuni's kin. After that I will look at an alternate model of Buddhist religious kinship, as described by the *Aggañña sutta* from the *Dīgha nikāya*. Then I will turn to the Lotus sūtra whose model of religious kinship closely satisfies the predicates of the definition of *Śākyabhikṣu* just articulated.

Before we turn to the buddha, however, let us look briefly at one relationship within the saṅgha that is explicitly modeled on the biological family and, *mutatis mutandis*, parallels the father-son unit described in the *dharmaśāstras*: the bond between preceptor (*upādhyāya*) and novice. A monk newly entered into the saṅgha is enjoined always to call his preceptor "father," while the preceptor calls the novice "son."<sup>33</sup> For the new monk, this means that he must serve his new father as long as he lives. The *upādhyāya*, in turn, provides medicine to his son, when sick, until he recovers or dies; the *upādhyāya* also takes responsibility for his son's education, making him "accomplished in the religion of the most wise."<sup>34</sup> Though one may be inclined to dismiss such verbiage as mere metaphor, Guṇaprabha's sixth-century commentary on these rules suggests otherwise. According to Guṇaprabha, a *bhikṣu* addresses his *upādhyāya* as a parent because he substitutes (*pratibimbaya*) the preceptor for the kin he left at home.<sup>35</sup> The language is not that of the *dharmaśāstras* regarding adoption, but when considered within the context of Buddhist usage, Guṇaprabha's terminology is equally significant. A *pratibimba* is a "reflection," and in Buddhist usage it is a synonym for *pratimā* or *bimba*, terms that translate into English as *image*, *icon*, *painting*, or *statue*, depending on context. The secular imagination may read these words as suggestive of lifeless matter shaped by human hands into representative form, a mere simulacrum. In Buddhist India, however, a *pratibimba* was treated as flesh and blood; the image possessed full existential efficacy. The Gilgit "Sūtra on the Commission of Buddha Images [*bimba*]" speaks eloquently to this point: "Although the buddha, the blessed one, has entered into parinirvāṇa, when one takes *darśan* of a buddha-image [*pratimā*] it is as if he has not entered parinirvāṇa."<sup>36</sup> The equivalence is not merely emotional; this sūtra declares that a *pratimā* produces sufficient merit to propel a devotee toward buddhahood itself. In the same vein, a Khotanese text pays homage

<sup>33</sup> Banerjee, ed. (n. 15 above), p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>35</sup> Guṇaprabha, *Vinaya-Sūtra*, ed. P. V. Bapat and V. V. Gokhale (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982), p. 12, verse 64.

<sup>36</sup> Adelheid Mette, "Zwei kleine Fragmente aus Gilgit—1: Tathāgatabimbakārāpaṇasūtra (Gilgit-Ms. No. 18), 2: Devatāsūtra und Alpadevatāsūtra (aus Gilgit-Ms. No. 13)," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 7 (1981): 137.

to “Buddhas having the bodies of images [*pratibimba*] of Buddhas.”<sup>37</sup> When it comes to *pratibimbas*, the body may change, but the “essence” remains the same. In light of these semantic possibilities, Guṇaprabha’s use of *pratibimba* suggests that the relationship between a novice and his *upādhyāya*-father may be no less existentially absolute than that between a boy and his dad. According to Khare, “The Hindu system will not let one easily argue that the reality of the genetic father-son relationship is somehow more than that of the guru-disciple (spiritual) and deity-devotee (‘fictive’) relationships.”<sup>38</sup> Khare’s point is true here for Buddhism as well with one minor emendation: biological, father-son language is the conventional medium within which Buddhism expresses spiritual, guru-disciple relationships.

Given this example, one might imagine that the act of a Śākyabhikṣu calling himself “Śākya” is symbolically akin to that of a novice calling his preceptor “father.” In both cases, conventional relationships are homologized to biological ones, with naming as a ritual mode through which the transformation of filial bonds is effected. Indeed, the *Laws of Manu* explicitly stipulates a change of name as one irrevocable consequence of adoption. This seems obvious enough. Based on the preceding example, we might expect that every monk could claim to be a Śākyabhikṣu. However, one presupposition of this article is that Śākyabhikṣu is not a straight synonym for *bhikṣu*. And this lack of equivalence is highlighted by the fact that the *MSV* does not set the buddha in relationship to his saṅgha on the same model as the *upādhyāya*; Śākyamuni is not the *pratibimba* of a parent. In fact, my reading of the *MSV* has turned up few instances in which a monk refers to himself directly as Śākyamuni’s son. Nor does one find an abundance of passages in which the buddha is characterized as the saṅgha’s father, as a spiritual father to particular monks, or as a father in general.

These caveats notwithstanding, the definition of Śākyabhikṣu requires us to see how the *MSV* does characterize Śākyamuni positively as a father. The following two instances demonstrate that this identity is not without problems. The first illustrative anecdote finds Devadatta struck by a disease that can only be cured through Śākyamuni’s power, by the performance of a truth-act. Śākyamuni articulates his truth: “My feelings [*citta*] for Rāhulabhadra, my beloved only child, are neither lesser nor greater than [my feelings] for Devadatta.”<sup>39</sup> Biological fatherhood places Śākyamuni in an awkward position. Rāhula is his only biological child, his beloved. Yet as a perfect buddha, Śākyamuni can have no favorites. Thus Śākyamuni cures

<sup>37</sup> H. W. Bailey, “Hvatanica IV,” *Bulletin of the London School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1940–42): 895. For a study of “living images” in Hindu traditions, see Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 15–50.

<sup>38</sup> Khare, p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* (n. 6 above), 2:94.

Devadatta by emphasizing how singularly dear Rāhula is in one breath and undermining Rāhula's uniqueness in the next.

This ambivalence is especially evident in a second example from the *MSV*. Here Śākyamuni allows all monks to behave toward him as a father and elaborates an abridged set of paternal/filial rights and obligations akin to those stipulated in the *dharmasāstras*. This set is so abbreviated, in fact, that the buddha permits this paternal/filial relationship on one occasion only: as a last resort for a monk on his deathbed. In fact, as we shall see, the behavior that transforms monks into buddha's "sons" thoroughly disrupts the saṅgha's daily operations, transgressing normal Buddhist economic and institutional codes.

The tale begins with a faithless monk on his deathbed who requests that a pūjā be performed for his benefit. That monk, unfortunately, has neither personal wealth nor a lay sponsor. The pūjā is not performed. The monk dies and falls to hell. This situation forces the *MSV*'s authors to tinker with Buddhist economic structures. Typically, according to the *MSV*, when someone makes a gift of money or material goods to a Buddhist establishment it must be assigned to one of the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, or Saṅgha. Moreover, wealth assigned to one Jewel must not be transferred to another. Thus, monks may not normally use the buddha's goods to perform a pūjā for their own benefit.<sup>40</sup> The present story frames a regulation permitting the violation of this general principle. When a monk is on his deathbed, and after every other source of funding has been exhausted, then and only then may a monk transfer wealth from the buddha to himself. Śākyamuni permits this, for had the sickly monk witnessed a pūjā, his mind would have been filled with piety, and at the moment of death he would have won a better birth. Here we see the buddha setting aside a general rule of the vinaya when it directly threatens a monk's future birth. Still more significant is the legal principle the *MSV*'s authors use to supersede the vinaya's common code. On his deathbed, a monk may use the buddha's property, because "a son has a claim to his father's property."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> A clear statement of this accounting system can be found in the Ratnarāśi sūtra from the *Ratnakūṭa* collection. Śākyamuni tells Kāśyapa: "As regards the articles used, namely the resident monks' possessions, the Buddha's possessions, and the visiting monks' possessions, the administrative monk should differentiate them. . . . The resident and visiting monks' things should not be mixed up with the Buddha's things" (Garma Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983], p. 298). In the next set of passages, this sūtra allows monks to spend their own resources to repair the buddha's stūpas as required but forbids monks from ever spending the buddha's wealth on their own behalf, even if the buddha is rich and they are poor. In short, "a good, pure administrative monk should not mix up the belongings of the Three Jewels" (Chang, ed.). For further discussion of the *Ratnarāśi* and the division of belongings, see Jonathan A. Silk, "The Origins and Early History of the *Maharatnakūṭa* Tradition of Mahayana Buddhism with a Study of the *Ratnarāśisūtra* and Related Materials" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994), pp. 215–54.

<sup>41</sup> Dutt, ed. (n. 16 above), 3, pt. 2:125.

In short, this story frames an economic dilemma with clear emotional significance for a community of renunciants. Possessions assigned to each of the Three Jewels are supposed to be kept separate. But why spend money on a crumbling old buddha shrine when a poor dying monk might avoid a grim rebirth if his faith is reawakened through a pūjā? That the *MSV* decides in favor of flesh and blood is not surprising. The language used to record this decision is pivotal. The *MSV*'s authors reject economic conventions specific to Buddhism in favor of a general code of Indian property law, the language of which brings us back to the *dharmaśāstras*. Compare *Laws of Manu* (9.141) on adoption and inheritance—"an adopted son should take his [new] father's wealth"—with the *MSV*—"a son has a claim to his father's property."

Perhaps we should not find it so odd that buddha is cast as father so infrequently in the *MSV*. His behavior is unusual. When he steps into a town, bells ring and the earth shakes; when he smiles, five-colored lights shoot out from his mouth, circle the universe, and then return to his body. My father never does those things. Śākyamuni is superhuman, a blessed one, the tathāgata. Śākyamuni's social transcendence is marked economically by the fact that his possessions are segregated from those belonging to the saṅgha. At the liminal moment, however, when rebirth is decided for better or worse, the buddha then acquiesces to act the part of magnanimous father, making his things available to the monks for their use. In this example we see the subordination of Buddhist economic principles to those that are broadly Indian. But this subordination does not apply to the economic sphere alone; it also pertains to the social. By acting as he does, by taking the burden of his sons' liberation upon himself, Śākyamuni participates in the normative structures of Indian kinship. Let us recall Khare's pithy definition: "The codified duties performed and obligations undertaken, with an eye towards ultimate 'release.'" Here the line between buddha as specifically Buddhist supreme being and buddha as generally Indian father disappears. The resulting ambivalence is clear: the buddha cannot simultaneously play the role of buddha according to the vinaya's norms and the role of father according to the *dharmaśāstras*' norms. The *MSV* resolves this dilemma by displacing buddha out of his standard vinayaic context, conforming him to worldly ways.

Based upon the *dharmaśāstras*, I stipulated a working definition for Śākyabhikṣu: a Buddhist monk who acts as a proper son to Śākyamuni. But the precise nature of the relationship between Śākyamuni and his "sons" remains unclear. We have seen one moment in which the *MSV* brings together the buddha-as-father and social norms specified in the *dharmaśāstras*. But this is an ambivalent moment. For the buddha, in order to become a father, must set the social transcendence associated with buddhahood aside. More problematically, the conventional father-son relationship is

embedded within the dynamic processes of an ongoing lineage. But this *MSV* capitulation to fatherhood is static, exclusive, and occasional. The brief discussion of *pratibimba* kinship between an *upādhyāya* and his novice demonstrated that Buddhists did possess an institutionalized notion of adoption (or substitution) parallel to that found in the *dharmasāstras*. But the buddha is not an *upādhyāya*. To understand the Śākyabhikṣus, in short, we must find another way to butt up against the image of buddha as father. Mātṛceṭa's popular paean to the buddha points us in this new direction: "If father and mother are acknowledged to be venerable because they are benefactors, what dignity should then be yours whose beneficence has no limit?"<sup>42</sup> Might the buddha be a father by his transcendence of mere fatherhood?

Though the *MSV* generally avoids using familial metaphors to characterize the relationship between Śākyamuni and his saṅgha, one notable exception comes from the mouth of Mahākāśyapa, who, standing on the shore of Lake Anavatapta, declares: "I am the Dharma King's legitimate [*aurasa*] son."<sup>43</sup> A second exception is found in the *Divyāvadāna*, a text intimately related to the *MSV*. Here Upagupta claims filiation from the buddha as a taunt, in the course of a magic contest with Māra. In a very loose translation, Upagupta shouts, "Give me your best shot, for today you're gonna get your ass whipped by a son of buddha."<sup>44</sup> At first blush, these two declarations are less notable for what is said than for who is speaking. Both Mahākāśyapa and Upagupta are members of the Sarvāstivāda lineage of Dharma masters (*Dharmācārya*). Śākyamuni, of course, named no successor for himself as chief monk or head teacher. But later Buddhist schools retrospectively fashioned lineages of successive masters. Zen has its patriarchs; Theravāda has its Vinaya chiefs; and the Sanskrit Sarvāstivāda tradition names a line of Dharma masters, legitimated by Śākyamuni's pronouncement that the Dharma would replace him as teacher and refuge after his final nirvāṇa. Mahākāśyapa was the first Sarvāstivāda *Dharmācārya*, followed by Ānanda, Madhyāntika, Śāṅkavāsīn, and Upagupta, who is remembered as Aśoka's contemporary.<sup>45</sup>

This association of sonship with mastery of Dharma provides a powerful counterexample to the confused image of father-buddha presented above. Indeed, Mahākāśyapa's use of the term *aurasa* is particularly telling. *Aurasa* is a *dharmasāstric* term for a legitimate son "procreated by a man

<sup>42</sup> D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ed., *The Śatapathaśrauta of Mātṛceṭa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 172, verse 106.

<sup>43</sup> Dutt, ed., 3, pt. 1:174.

<sup>44</sup> E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil, eds., *The Divyāvadāna* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987), p. 358.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the Sarvāstivāda Dharma Masters and additional references, see John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 60–61.

himself from his wife married according to sacramental forms prescribed by the [*dharmasāstras*].”<sup>46</sup> An adopted son is the conventional substitute for an *aurasa* son. In family law, the *aurasa* son is his father’s first and most important heir; he is the purest embodiment of his father’s lineage for, in a sense, he is his father reborn. To cite the *Laws of Manu* again: “The husband enters the wife, becoming an embryo he enters the mother. Becoming a new man again, he is born in the tenth month.” Or, per the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, “The father is the same as the son, and the son is the same as the father.”<sup>47</sup> *Aurasa*, in the *dharmasāstras*, connotes social legitimacy, ritual legitimacy, and spiritual legitimacy. Mahākāśyapa shares no blood with Śākyamuni. By calling himself an *aurasa* son, Mahākāśyapa displaces this common marker of social status outside the bounds of its conventional social meaning. *Aurasa* is used here to naturalize a chain of equivalences that link mastery of Dharma with status as a son with legitimacy as an heir.

In fact, Mahākāśyapa’s statement draws on a cliché used by various traditions that speaks of the *aurasa* son of buddha who is heir to the Dharma. The most elaborated expression of this cliché (and its ideology) is located in the *Aggañña sutta* (AS) from the Pāli *Dīgha nikāya*: “He whose faith in the Tathāgata is settled, rooted, established, solid, unshakable . . . can truly say: ‘I am a true son [*orasa*] of Blessed Lord, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir of Dhamma.’ Why is that? Because, Vāseṭṭha, this designates the Tathāgata: ‘The Body of Dharma.’”<sup>48</sup> *Dharmaśāstras* stipulate that *aurasa* status is conferred on those sons whose relationships to their fathers are properly established through blood, ritually consecrated. The AS, by contrast, disregards both ritual and blood in its definition of an *aurasa* relation to the buddha. The AS sets *aurasa* kinship with the buddha on a wholly spiritual level. Faith alone is a valid basis for a legitimate filial relationship. Nor does that faith reach out to Śākyamuni the man; rather it abides in the abstract, universal Dharma he embodies. This Pāli text replaces the *dharmasāstras*’ multi-leveled criteria for *aurasa* legitimacy with a single abstract criterion, wholly devoid of social referent.

The AS illustrates this point with striking imagery. This *sutta*’s depiction of the *aurasa* son is the coda to a discussion between Śākyamuni and a Brahman named Vāseṭṭha concerning the relationship between social value and spiritual attainment. According to Vāseṭṭha, Brahmans claim supremacy

<sup>46</sup> Kane (n. 28 above), 3:655.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Olivelle (n. 25 above), pp. 42–43.

<sup>48</sup> Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom, 1995), p. 409. I thank Joseph Crea for bringing this passage to my attention. A parallel passage is found in the *Itivuttaka*, no. 100 (John D. Ireland, trans., *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka* [Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1977], p. 226).

over all other social and spiritual communities because Brahmans alone were created from the god Brahmā's mouth. Śākyamuni disagrees: the Brahmans are wrong. Brahmans are not spiritually sovereign, the buddha is. Why? Because the buddha embodies Dharma. Moreover, Śākyamuni Buddha dominates the social order as well. How do we know this? Because Pasenadi, a king who conquered the Śākyas and reduced them to vassalage, nevertheless humbles himself before Śākyamuni as a way of honoring Dharma. Dharma wipes out social distinctions; united in the Dharma, individuals of "different birth, name, clan and family" become as socially indistinct as black cats on a moonless night.<sup>49</sup> All are Śākyamuni's *aurasa* sons.

I would propose that this passage from the *AS* can help us understand Mahākāśyapa's and Upagupta's declarations of kinship with Śākyamuni: both figures are *Dharmācāryas*, and the connection between Dharmamastery and *aurasa* filiation becomes conceptually straightforward. But I would also propose that this same definition of *aurasa* kinship cannot so readily be applied to Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus. The term *aurasa* as used by the *AS* (and, by extension, Mahākāśyapa or Upagupta) is fundamentally antihierarchical, antistructural, and asocial. By contrast, the form and context of the Śākyabhikṣu epithet itself suggests that Śākyabhikṣus did not seek to eliminate all social differentiation; instead Śākyabhikṣus played on social distinctions, using social practices to adopt a specific social identity in order to signify a spiritual status.

Moreover, Śākyabhikṣus seem not to have been alone in their ideological struggle against the asocial image of Śākyamuni as father. Remember, the *MSV* was so ambivalent about casting the buddha in this role in part because its authors sought a means for disentangling the buddha from a purely spiritualized paternity. Some Mūlasarvāstivādins, at least, wanted their buddha to be able to support a hell-bound, not very faithful monk on his deathbed without cash. In order to accomplish this, the *MSV* had to set Śākyamuni's transcendental aspect aside and substitute a principle from Indian common law for regular codes of the vinaya. By contrast, the *AS* does not capitulate to social need; it would not allow a faithless monk to call buddha "father." The *AS*'s father-buddha has nothing to offer to a hell-bound monk desirous of a pūjā; one cannot buy incense and flowers with the kind of property the *AS*'s buddha gives to his sons. In short, this buddha would tell the *MSV*'s dying monk: "If you still need *my* help and do not yet have faith, then I am not yet your father; I have no legal obligation to you." This does not resolve the tensions over buddha's fatherhood we saw in the *MSV*, it merely denies their validity.

<sup>49</sup> Walshe, trans., p. 409.

DĪPAṆKARA, ŚĀKYAMUNI, AND RĀHULA: THREE GENERATIONS IN A FAMILY PORTRAIT

In short, father-buddha in the *AS* is too spiritual a figure to have been in the Śākyabhikṣu's minds when they adopted this epithet; he is too idealized to be an effective social actor. But, conversely, the father-buddha figure of the *MSV* is too worldly; in this text, kinship with buddha is legitimated by pragmatic exigencies, serving the lowest common denominator. A middle course between these two, however, can be found in the Lotus Sūtra, in a passage that also plays on the cliché of *aurasa* filiation and Dharma inheritance. Although the *AS* and Lotus both use the same cliché, their representations of buddha are radically different. Whereas the Pāli's father-buddha is an abstract *Dharmakāya*, the Lotus's Śākyamuni is flesh and blood, proud of Rāhula, his Dharma-heir: "Rāhula, my eldest son, was legitimately conceived [*aurasa*] when I was still a prince. Now that I have attained awakening, my son is a great seer, who preserves his inheritance, the Dharma."<sup>50</sup> Notice, first, that the Lotus, unlike the *AS*, accepts the conventional social usage of *aurasa*. In *dharmasāstric* terms, Rāhula certainly would be Śākyamuni's *aurasa* son or, per the *MSV*, his "beloved only child." The Lotus acknowledges this. But the Lotus does not restrict *aurasa* status to a mere function of biological parentage. Rāhula is his father's proper spiritual son as well. In fact, the Lotus calls Rāhula *aurasa* a second time, several verses later, specifically due to his realizations as a bodhisattva.

Śākyamuni's legitimate heir in both blood and spirit, Rāhula embodies a resolution to the tensions surrounding Śākyamuni as father. More to the point, we have been seeking to understand how members of Ajanta's community conceived Śākyamuni as a father and themselves as his sons, for this understanding will enable recovery of the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu*'s local significance. The Rāhula of the Lotus is our model; he is the paradigmatic Śākyabhikṣu, kin by blood and by religious goal. I would propose that Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus took advantage of the structural logic of Indian kinship, whereby family membership is determined through behavior, to set themselves up as *pratibimbās*, doubles, of Rāhula. In so doing, the Śākyabhikṣus reinterpreted the significance of *aurasa*. Neither blood—per the *dharmasāstras*—nor spirit—per the *AS*—is the primary criterion for *aurasa* status. Legitimacy is founded in behavior, a Śākyabhikṣu's acting as a member of Śākyamuni's blood and spiritual lineages.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> H. Kern and B. Nanjio, eds., *Saddharmapuṇḍarika* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1970), p. 220.

<sup>51</sup> This is an opportune moment at which to note several important parallels between my current argument and that presented by Paul Mus in the monograph-length foreword to his *Barabudūr*. (The citations that follow refer to the English translation, *Barabudūr: Sketch of a History of Buddhism Based on the Archaeological Criticism of the Texts*, trans. Alexander Macdonald [New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center of the Arts, 1998].) The foreword to *Barabudūr* ranges over a number of critical issues, from Indological methodology through

Actually, no one can say whether Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣus read the Lotus Sūtra or knew its Rāhula. This text cannot stand alone. Nevertheless, the Lotus does suggest a direction for further investigation because there is a remarkably high degree of interest in Rāhula evidenced at Ajanta. Rāhula figures prominently at this site, in an iconographic tableau that specifically addresses the question of what it means both to be a son of Śākyamuni and to participate in the lineage of buddhas. Ajanta provides clear evidence that the dynamic processes of familial identity—joining grandfather, father, and son—were important to Ajanta's community, providing a symbolic fabric within which to weave their own filial relationship to Śākyamuni. This iconography informs us that Ajanta's patrons considered Śākyamuni's association with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, his spiritual forefather, to have direct bearing upon Śākyamuni's relationship with Rāhula, his biological son. In line with the Lotus's broadened valuation of *aurasa* kinship, Rāhula is a bodhisattva at Ajanta.

The iconography to which I refer actually consists of two narrative illustrations, each depicting a scene from Śākyamuni's life. The first portrays

---

the history of Buddhism in India. But at the center of this melange, one finds Mus concerned to demonstrate the far-ranging implications of two "facts" that he considers to have been overlooked by the majority of Indologists. The first is that "Buddhism, grasped in the immensity of India, is a normal Indian fact" (p. 17); the second, that "the Mahāyāna, taken in Buddhism as a whole, seems a normal Buddhist fact" (p. 19). Thus, Mus views the Mahāyāna as the logical product of ideological currents present at Buddhism's inception; the Mahāyāna is the legitimate evolutionary successor to earliest Buddhism. Given Buddhism's status as an "Indian fact," one can plot the trajectory of Buddhism's evolution toward full-fledged Mahāyāna only if one's model accounts for general structures of Indian religiosity as represented by Brāhmanical literature. More specifically, a scholar can explain the Mahāyāna's "rise" by reading two Buddhist terms—*dharmakāya* (body of Dharma) and *dharmadāyāda* (inheritor of Dharma)—in light of common Indian assumptions about familial relationships. When Śākyamuni gained nirvāṇa he left behind the "body" of his teachings, his Dharma, which his followers inherited, and preserved in his stead. But, in India, inheritance is not simply a matter of transference of property: it is a transference of identity. "We read in the ancient Pāli text [representative, for Mus, of a primitive state in Buddhism's evolution] that the Buddha has for body the *dharmā*, sacred knowledge, and that he has left it to his disciples as a substitute for his person, and . . . we read at the same time that the disciples inherit this body in an Indian way, that is to say participate really in the person of the Buddha. . . . The personal relationship which the words imply, if it was the creation of ancient Buddhism and the exact deliberate translation of its dogma, would force us to believe that already in that epoch the disciples, participating in the nature of the Buddha, are each one a reproduction of the Buddha, a buddha at least *in posse*" (Mus, p. 140). Clearly it is only a simple step from this position to the common Mahāyānist trope, which speaks of the bodhisattva as the buddha's son and heir and explicitly presents the bodhisattva as a potential buddha. In short, for Mus, the paternal/filial relationship as logically structured in Brāhmanical literature is the direct prototype for the buddha/bodhisattva relationship. The similarities between my argument and that of Mus, here, are patent. More specifically, like Mus, I suggest that the title "Śākyabhikṣu" can only be understood if one thinks about its holders as Indians as well as Buddhists; and like Mus, I maintain that a consideration of inheritance in line with Brāhmanical texts is crucial for explaining the bodhisattva figure and the rise of the Mahāyāna. There are also significant differences between Mus's position and my own. However, I will not dwell on those here. The present article is the first of two dealing with Śākyabhikṣus at Ajanta, and I discuss Mus more thoroughly, and critically, in the body of the second (see n. 69 below).

a past existence of Śākyamuni, in which, as the youthful Brahman Sumati, he worships Dīpaṅkara Buddha and vows that he himself will become a buddha in the future for the benefit of all living beings. The second occurs during Śākyamuni's return to Kapilavastu, where he meets his son Rāhula for the first time and inducts Rāhula into the saṅgha. The pairing of these two scenes is particularly notable because there is no textual precedent or *prima facie* expectation that they should be conjoined.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in several instances these images are placed at critical positions within their cave's architectural program. Thus, we find them flanking the entrance to the buddha's shrine in cave 17. Similarly at cave 19, housing a rock-cut stūpa, these two images flank the entrance. The pair can be found elsewhere at Ajanta as well, albeit in less conspicuous positions: in a window jamb of cave 17 and the clerestory of cave 26.

As has already been noted by Suresh Vasant and Maurizio Taddei, these two images are "grouped together because they reflect a dynastic ideology—the [Dīpaṅkara] jātaka can be read as a 'Story of Lineage,' and the same could be said of the meeting of Siddhārtha and his son Rāhula."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> This last point is not entirely true. Yaśodharā is the link. In the first scene, Yaśodharā provides the flowers that enable Sumati to worship Dīpaṅkara properly; as payment for her flowers, she receives the right to be the bodhisattva's wife in all subsequent births until his awakening. In addition to being Rāhula's mother, Yaśodharā also sets the events in motion that result in Rāhula's induction into the saṅgha, by sending him to his father for his "inheritance." A family, even a spiritual family, cannot exist without a mother. Yaśodharā is that mother; she is genetrix and deliverer. As Khare puts it, "To become a *mata* is to create truly the factual basis for the *pita-putra* axis" ([n. 32 above], p. 71). In other words, Yaśodharā plays a far more important role in the consideration of *Sākyabhikṣu* as a kinship term than would be thought by the number of words I devote to her here. A companion piece to this article will focus intensively on the matter of lineage and give Yaśodharā the attention she deserves. That second article will build off John S. Strong's essay, "A Family Quest: The Buddha, Yaśodharā, and Rāhula in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 113–28.

<sup>53</sup> Suresh Vasant, "Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Ajanta," in *The Age of the Vākātakas*, ed. A. M. Shastri (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992), pp. 209–17, figs. 48–55; Maurizio Taddei, "Appunti sull'iconografia di alcune manifestazioni luminose dei Buddha," in *Gururājamañ-jarikā: Studi in onore di Giuseppe Tucci* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1974), pp. 435–49, and "The *Dīpaṅkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula: How Are They Linked to the Flaming Buddha?" *Annali di Istituto Universitario Orientale* 52 (1992): 103–7. Reproductions of these scenes can be found in Vasant or my "Setting the Three Jewels" (n. 12 above), figs. 60–65. Ajanta's walls are rather damaged, and we cannot be certain that the extant icons from caves 17, 19, and 26 were the sole instances in which this iconography was used. Cave 11, e.g., has a Dīpaṅkara on its facade, which may have been paired with a corresponding Rāhula scene; similarly inside cave 19, there is a Rāhula scene that may or may not have been paired with one of Sumati meeting Dīpaṅkara. In both cases, damage to the caves leaves a hole in our knowledge. On the Indian subcontinent proper, this iconographic pairing exists only at Ajanta. Parallel examples have been uncovered in Afghanistan. Additionally, the *Kao Seng Chuan* records that Guṇavarman, a monk from Kaśmīr, painted these two images on the walls of a temple he founded in China in 424 (Alexander Coburn Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* [Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959], p. 43). The quote is from Taddei, "*Dīpaṅkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula," p. 105.

Both scenes depict the transmission of a lineage. For the encounter with Dīpaṅkara this point is clear. Young Sumati, inspired by Dīpaṅkara, vows to become a buddha himself and certifies his sincerity by spreading his hair under Dīpaṅkara's feet. Dīpaṅkara predicts that Sumati's aim will indeed be realized: he will become "the son of the Śākya, Śākyamuni," in the words of the *Divyāvadāna*.<sup>54</sup> In this encounter, Sumati becomes Dīpaṅkara's heir and enters into the lineage of buddhas.

The tale of Sumati's encounter with Dīpaṅkara is well known, its symbolism clear. The tale of Rāhula meeting his father is both more obscure and ambiguous, as is Rāhula himself, who is seldom met in Buddhist literature despite his unique status as Śākyamuni's biological son. According to the *MSV*, Rāhula was conceived on the day of the bodhisattva's renunciation and born at the moment of the buddha's awakening, following a six-year period of gestation. During those six years, Yaśodharā performed ascetic penances like her husband.<sup>55</sup> Not only did poor Yaśodharā have the distress of a six-year pregnancy but also young Rāhula had the pain of never knowing his father. They met as follows. One day during Śākyamuni's return to Kapilavastu, six years after his awakening, Yaśodharā saw her husband begging for food at the palace. To entice him back into her arms, Yaśodharā purchased a sweet laced with a love potion from a local sorcerer. She then gave the candy to Rāhula, bidding him to offer it to his father. Buddhas know all. When Rāhula came to him, Śākyamuni miraculously created an array of five hundred identical buddhas. As Śākyamuni's son, Rāhula was able to identify his real dad. Rāhula gave buddha the candy. Śākyamuni returned it to Rāhula, who ate and fell under the magic spell. The story ends with the six-year-old Rāhula leaving his mother and becoming the first Buddhist novice under the tutelage of Śāriputra.<sup>56</sup>

There is a twofold significance to this encounter. The first, of course, is the familial element, the bringing together of a father and his son. The blood link between Rāhula and Śākyamuni is highlighted within the story by Rāhula's ability to identify his father from a field of five hundred duplicates. Second, this tale defines the relationship between this unique father and his only son through Śākyamuni's giving Rāhula to Śāriputra for ordination. The *MSV* explicitly intertwines the genealogical and spiritual bond between Śākyamuni and Rāhula. Rāhula's conception at the moment of the bodhisattva's renunciation, his gestation over a six-year period during which Yaśodharā performs penances equivalent to her husband's, and his birth at the moment of Śākyamuni's awakening make Rāhula a near duplicate of his father. Indeed, in the *MSV*'s telling, immediately after Śākyamuni awakens there is a narrative quick cut to Kapilavastu, where

<sup>54</sup> Cowell and Neil, eds. (n. 44 above), p. 252.

<sup>55</sup> Gnoli, ed., *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* (n. 6 above), 2:30, 1:119.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:31–32.

Rāhula's birth is announced.<sup>57</sup> Rāhula's life from gestation to birth is structurally equivalent, albeit on an abbreviated temporal scheme, to Śākyamuni's process of awakening, which began at his birth as Dīpaṅkara's spiritual son and ended with his realization of buddhahood. At this pivotal moment, Rāhula was born to perpetuate both Śākyā lineages. Here we have a graphic illustration of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa's statement that "the father is the same as the son, and the son is the same as the father."

But the *MSV* has more to tell us about the spiritual dimensions of Rāhula's role as his father's son, in a passage found at the beginning of the *MSV*'s "Chapter on Schism" (*Sanḅhabhedavastu*), the source for many of my examples. This chapter is predominantly biographical. And it starts at the beginning, the real beginning, with a complete enumeration of Śākyamuni's terrestrial genealogy. Modestly, Śākyamuni does not tell of his glorious ancestry. He leaves that privilege to Mahāmaudgalyāyana, who narrates a procession of kings from the Mahāsaṃmata at the beginning of time, through the founding of the Śākyā family, to Śuddhodana, the buddha, and finally son Rāhula. Mahāmaudgalyāyana's genealogical narrative spans several pages, ending thus:

*bhagavato rāhulaḥ putra iti gautamā rāhule mahāsaṃmatavamaṣaḥ pratiṣṭhitah; ucchinnā bhavanetrī vikṣiṇo jātisamsāro nāstīdanim punarbhavaḥ*<sup>58</sup>

Rāhula is the son of the Blessed One, O Gautamas. The lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula. The will to existence is cut, the round of births is broken: now there is no more rebirth.

There is something odd in this characterization of Rāhula. In keeping with the tenor of Mahāmaudgalyāyana's narration, Rāhula is presented as having blood most exalted in his veins. But mention of Rāhula's status as an arhat in his final birth is out of place in the *MSV*'s otherwise straightforward listing of kings and princes. This anomaly can be explained, however, by the fact that the *MSV*'s characterization of Rāhula draws from a broader tradition of statements about buddhas' sons, which has significant parallels in the Sarvāstivāda Mahāvādāna Sūtra and Buddhaghosa's *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*.<sup>59</sup> For our purposes, the *MSV*'s phrase, "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula," is most salient. The Mahāvādāna Sūtra's parallel passage is especially interesting and significant in its rendition of this line, for its Sanskrit invites interpretation:

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:119–20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:32.

<sup>59</sup> E. Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāvādānasūtra*, Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin; Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst: Jahrgang 1952, no. 8/ Jahrgang 1954, no. 3 (Berlin: Akademie, 1953–56). Buddhaghosa is cited on p. 79, n. 2.

*ete putrā mahātmānaḥ śarīrāntimadhārīnaḥ |*  
*sa(rve)ṣām (ā)sravāḥ kṣiṇā nāsti teṣāṃ punarbhavaḥ ||*<sup>60</sup>

These sons [of the buddhas] are great saints.

*They are the final preservers of the[ir fathers'] bodies.*

[or, alternately]

*They are heirs who succeed the[ir fathers'] bodies.*

All their afflictions are destroyed.

For them there will be no rebirth.

The two italicized lines of my translation represent two possible renderings of the Mahāvādāna Sūtra's equivalent for the *MSV*'s statement, "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula." Whereas the *MSV*'s Sanskrit is clear, the Mahāvādāna Sūtra's compound *śarīrāntimadhārīn* is not, allowing for at least two translations. It may be interpreted as saying either that Rāhula is the ultimate preserver of Śākyamuni's physical remains or that Rāhula is an heir who succeeded his father's body within the lineage of Śākyas. These two interpretations play off two syntactic functions of the word *antima*, which can be the adjectival *last* or the verbal "following after," and two meanings of the word *śarīra*, which can be translated as *relic* or as *body*. The first interpretation gives the sense of Rāhula as buddha's spiritual heir in living form, a living *caitya*, the physical flesh of the buddha's spiritual flesh; in the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is Śākyamuni Buddha's successor in a familial lineage.

The first interpretation gains particular significance in light of a tradition that held that Rāhula was one of a group of special arhats charged by Śākyamuni to wander the earth as protectors of his Dharma until Maitreya's coming.<sup>61</sup> Xuanzang attests to the currency of this legend in Rājagṛha as late as the seventh century, where Rāhula, after receiving a meal from a pious Brahman, revealed himself: "Have you never heard of Rāhula, Buddha's own son? I am he! Because I desire to protect the true law I have not yet entered Nirvāṇa." The Brahman responded by making a shrine for Rāhula, and revered his image as if Rāhula were present.<sup>62</sup> If Rāhula was seen as the final embodiment of the buddha's body, a living

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes, "Les seize Arhat protecteurs de la loi," *Journal Asiatique*, ser. 11, 8 (1916): 5–50, 189–304.

<sup>62</sup> Xuanzang (n. 13 above), 2:42–43. An interesting point (albeit one not apropos to Rāhula at Ajanta in particular) can be found in the Tibetan monk/translator Dharmasvāmin's account of his pilgrimage to the region of Bodhi Gaya between 1234 and 1236 C.E. Twice Dharmasvāmin notes that the laity commonly greeted Buddhist monks: "Ra-hu-la he bhanda-na," i.e., "salutation to Rāhula," signifying more generally, "salutation to the son of buddha" (Dharmasvāmin, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin* [Chag lo tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal], a Tibetan Monk Pilgrim, trans. George Roerich [Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1951], pp. 65, 87). In this way, an encounter with "Rāhula" would not have been remarkable in the least.

reliquary, the ability to meet him after Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa* would be significant indeed.

In the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is the buddha's successor in a familial lineage. This, of course, comes closer to the redaction of the *MSV*.

In short, this compound's ambiguity encapsulates the multivalent role that Rāhula played within this Buddhist tradition. The circumstances surrounding Rāhula's birth forced him to undergo in utero a spiritualizing process parallel to that performed by his father. Thus was Rāhula fit to be the *śarīrāntimadhārin*: to be the buddha's biological son, maintaining the Śākya lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata, and to be the buddha's spiritual son, the embodiment of the *tathāgatavaṃśa* during the long interval between Śākyamuni and Maitreya Buddhas. Rāhula is the paradigmatic Śākyabhikṣu.

#### KINSMEN OF THE SON: AJANTA'S ŚĀKYABHIKṢUS AS BODHISATTVAS

At the outset of this article, I noted that a gap of several centuries separates the earliest Mahāyānist literature from Indian evidence for the public support and popular acceptance of canons encoded in that literature. I proposed that a close analysis of the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu*, using data associated with a particular historical community, would reveal how bodhisattva—a classical Buddhist terminology for a spiritual status and a soteriological goal—became a social category. That analysis has proceeded in stages: establishing that *Śākyabhikṣu* is a kinship term; considering whether blood Śākyas may have populated Ajanta; defining kinship broadly as a ritually defined relationship founded on shared soteriological behaviors; unpacking the particular importance of *aurasa* kinship; and explaining how Rāhula can be considered the epitome of a Śākyabhikṣu. Let me clarify this intermediate conclusion: (1) Rāhula is a Buddhist monk. This requires no further comment. (2) Rāhula is the buddha's son. In fact, Rāhula is paradigmatic as Śākyamuni's *aurasa* son. Recall that *aurasa* is multivalent, referring variously to biological and dharmalogical filiation; in both cases it signifies a natural, appropriate, and legitimate relationship between father and son. The Lotus Sūtra uses *aurasa* for Rāhula in both meanings. (3) Rāhula actualizes his father's religious aspirations. I will discuss this in conjunction with the following item. (4) Rāhula performs his duties within the ancestral lineage of which his father is a part. This is a tricky point. The *MSV*, the Mahāvādāna Sūtra, and Ajanta's iconography all represent Rāhula as belonging to Śākyamuni's spiritual and blood lineages. But they suggest divergent conceptions of the spiritual. The *MSV* and other literary accounts of the Rāhula story present him as seeking a worldly aim—his “inheritance”—in his first meeting with his father but receiving membership in the saṅgha and arhatship as his due. Ajanta's iconography, however, bids us

to overlay another level of interpretation. Through a chain of visual associations, Ajanta links Rāhula with Dīpaṅkara Buddha. When we see Rāhula we also see the moment at which his father, in a previous life as Sumati, received confirmation of his own future buddhahood. Ajanta intimates that Rāhula, like Sumati before him, is a bodhisattva in a lineage of buddhas, one of whom just happens to be his dad. Here we come close to the Lotus, which states that Rāhula's practice as a bodhisattva consists precisely in his always being born the eldest son of a buddha.<sup>63</sup> (5) Rāhula's performance as a son entitles him to proudly carry the family name. No comment necessary for Rāhula. But the generalized validity of this statement is foundational for my argument vis-à-vis Ajanta's Śākyaabhiṣus. (6) Rāhula's performance as a son entitles him to share the family wealth. This "inheritance" is represented in several ways. Rāhula, having realized Buddhism's highest good, is an arhat. Or, Rāhula is one of several disciples wandering the earth and protecting the Dharma until Maitreya comes; as Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes observed, there is no need to question Rāhula's place among the special arhats, for he was especially qualified to inherit and continue the paternal oeuvre.<sup>64</sup> Or Rāhula, a bodhisattva like his father, is bound to become a full and perfect buddha.

The Lotus aside, the conclusion that Rāhula was a bodhisattva as well as a model for Ajanta's community may seem to overinterpret the iconography. Additional evidence exists, however, to support this reading. Namely, the patrons whose caves include the images of Sumati meeting Dīpaṅkara and Rāhula meeting Śākyamuni explicitly describe themselves as bodhisattvas. These paired icons are found in three structures at Ajanta: caves 17, 19, and 26. The donors of these caves—a king (17 and 19) and a monk named Buddhahadra with ties to the royal court (26)—left long verse inscriptions, telling of their accomplishments and beliefs. The monk Buddhahadra is direct: he refers to himself as a "powerful and affluent bodhisattva, who desires mundane pleasures as well as ultimate liberation."<sup>65</sup> Cave 17's donor is less blunt, though no less clear. His text is charged with the language of bodhisattvahood. He practices a meditation in which one develops "the perfect equality of affect toward the wise man and the criminal alike"; he amasses the accumulations of merit and wisdom, the two *sambhāras*, requisite for buddhahood; and he dedicates his cave at Ajanta in the hope that it will "complete his vow to become an Indra among sages," a buddha.<sup>66</sup> In brief, the two donors who include

<sup>63</sup> Kern and Nanjio, eds. (n. 50 above), p. 220.

<sup>64</sup> Lévi and Chavannes, p. 197.

<sup>65</sup> My "Setting the Three Jewels" (n. 12 above), p. 379.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 370–71.

Rāhula in the iconography of spiritual dynasty also explicitly identify themselves with the beliefs and practices of bodhisattvas.

And the courtiers responsible for caves 17, 19, and 26 were not the only donors at Ajanta to identify themselves with bodhisattvahood, on the one hand, and a concern for kinship relations, on the other. Individual Śākyabhikṣus, too, shared these same interests. Recall from this article's beginning that *Śākyabhikṣu* has been interpreted as a synonym for bodhisattva before. Schopen and Shizutani determined that *Śākyabhikṣu* "must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community," in Schopen's forceful words.<sup>67</sup> Both scholars found a significant statistical correlation between a donor's use of the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* and his use of a dedicatory formula in which the spiritual merit produced through gift giving is transferred to all sentient beings in order that they may attain buddhahood.<sup>68</sup> This acceptance of responsibility for one's own and/others' buddhahood is the definitive act of a bodhisattva; Śākyabhikṣus who dedicated their merit to their own and others' attainment of buddhahood were bodhisattvas. Such bodhisattvas were kin to Ajanta's Rāhula in that they participated in the spiritual lineage of buddhas. They were also kin to Rāhula in that they performatively laid claim to a place in Śākyamuni's family through the adoption of the Śākya name.

This concludes my analysis. Many questions remain, for although the definition of *Śākyabhikṣu* stipulates six aspects, only two have been examined in any depth. Behavior is central to my delineation of the Śākyabhikṣu identity, yet no behaviors have been discussed. Nor have I even touched on deeper questions of motivation. Why did India's Śākyabhikṣus mark their bodhisattvahood through plays on kinship and the paternal/filial relationship? Why did they adopt a new cognomen in a bid for social self-representation? What symbolic or social capital accrued to bodhisattvas through their explicit association with the Śākya family? What was at stake here within the economy of Buddhist ideals? These are crucial issues that

<sup>67</sup> Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions" (n. 2 above), p. 142.

<sup>68</sup> I invoke Schopen's and Shizutani's India-wide analyses of *Śākyabhikṣu* here because Ajanta's evidence is too indeterminate to support a certain conclusion. Of the twenty-eight inscriptions that name their donors as "Śākyabhikṣu," "Śākya-upāsaka," or "Śākya-upāsikā," four are damaged beyond the point of utility. Among the remaining Śākya inscriptions, eight use the bodhisattva formula conclusively; e.g., "This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu Dharmadatta. Whatever merit there is in it, may that foster the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by my parents and all sentient beings" (see my "Setting the Three Jewels" [n. 12 above], esp. app. A, pp. 325–86). Six use a variant of the bodhisattva formula wherein merit is dedicated to all beings, but there is no mention of *anuttarajñāna*; e.g., "This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu Dharmadatta. Whatever merit there is in it may that go to my parents and all sentient beings." But ten are still indeterminate. These ten record the name and title of their donors, but they are located in cramped spaces where there was no room for more than a brief statement of identity. We just cannot be certain what more these ten donors may have wanted to include, if anything. In short, fully half of Ajanta's Śākyabhikṣu inscriptions are not reliable documents vis-à-vis their donor's intentions.

I must leave aside for the present.<sup>69</sup> Here we have come to understand what three-quarters of the donors at a fifth-century monastic site, the Ajanta caves, meant when they used the term *Śākyabhikṣu* in their inscriptions.

The epigraphic use of *Śākyabhikṣu* filled an ideological gap opened by Mahāyāna literature's imaginative transformation of the commonplace structures of Indian kinship into a sociospiritual polemic. This Mahāyānist rhetoric challenged India's bodhisattvas to act as true sons of the Śākya, to realize his aims, and to preserve his lineage through rituals of compassion. At Ajanta this rhetoric translated into an iconography that showed Rāhula as simultaneously Śākyamuni's son and Dīpaṅkara's grandson. The relationship that made Rāhula a Śākya also revealed him to be a bodhisattva. The *Śākyabhikṣus* inverted this chain of associations: as bodhisattvas—Śākyamuni's *aurasa* sons in the spiritual realm—they named themselves *Śākya*—Śākyamuni's sons in the social realm. In one way of configuring this transformation, Ajanta's *Śākyabhikṣus* were Rāhula's *pratibimbās*, in another way, his brothers.

*University of California, San Diego*

<sup>69</sup> I turn to these questions in a companion essay, tentatively entitled "Lineage as Attainment in the Formation of a Mahāyāna Social Identity."