

JAINA ART AND ARCHITECTURE

*Published on the Occasion of the 2500th
Nirvana Anniversary of Tirthankara Mahavira*

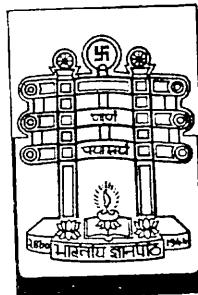
EDITED BY

A. GHOSH

Former Director General, Archaeological Survey of India



IN THREE VOLUMES
VOLUME III



BHARATIYA JNANPITH

NEW DELHI

1975

1-x vii, 331-662

CHAPTER 31

MINIATURE PAINTINGS

(On *Paṭṭas*, Palm-leaf and Paper)

INTRODUCTION

IN THE FIRST FEW CENTURIES AFTER THE NIRVĀṆA OF MAHĀVĪRA THE KNOWLEDGE of the Jaina canon was preserved only in the memory of the Jaina monks and was transmitted orally from preceptor to disciple. But often famines and epidemics claimed the lives of these learned men and with their death some knowledge of the religious doctrine was irretrievably lost. In course of time Jaina theological teaching began to suffer from irreparable gaps in its continuity as well as many aberrations from the original text.¹ Recognizing these inherent dangers in the system of oral transmission, and fearing that unless some remedial steps were taken the holy word would disappear forever, the Jaina community made attempts in the direction of saving the sacred lore. A conference of monks was held at Pāṭaliputra, where the canonical literature was systematically compiled and put into written form. Later, in the fifth century, according to the Śvetāmbara tradition, a council of monks assembled at Valabhī in Gujarat and agreed that all religious texts be committed to writing.² Apart from these conferences, individuals, too, strove to translate the oral tradition into a written one. Two Digambara monks—each independently of the other—in the early years of the Christian era collected the floating body of religious knowledge and reduced it to writing.³

Curiously enough, despite the efforts of the Jaina monks to transcribe their religious texts no Jaina manuscript written earlier than the tenth century is known to exist. What could have been the cause of this hiatus between the earnest resolves of the Jainas to write their texts and the actual appearance of the written scriptures? Possibly, the Jainas, in spite of their sincerity of purpose, were not fully able to implement their decision as enthusiastically as they had made it. Besides, it is more than likely that the early manuscripts have

¹ Moti Chandra, *Jain Miniature Paintings from Western India*, Ahmedabad, 1949, pp. 2-3.

² K. Kasliwal, *Jain Grantha Bhandaras in Rajasthan*, Jaipur, 1967 p. 2.

³ H. Jain in his Introduction to *Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, Amaravati, 1947.

wooden cover for a text called *Ogha-niryukti* on the rules of conduct for Jaina monks, must have been presented to the Sūri, maybe along with this very text or another text, by one of his followers on the occasion of the consecration of the Mahāvīra image. The donor was probably the *śrāvaka* who is portrayed in the *paṭlī* with his two wives. As this *paṭlī* can safely be regarded as being contemporary with this well-known Jaina Ācārya, its date is capable of fairly accurate ascertainment. Jinadatta-Sūri was a native of Rajasthan. He was born in 1075 and died in 1154. The labels on the *paṭlī* indicate who are the personages depicted therein. Jinadatta-Sūri became an Ācārya in 1122 and as the *paṭlī* could have been painted only after that event it belongs to the period 1122-54. The reverse of the *paṭlī* has only floral decoration on it. A significant feature of this *paṭlī* is the portrayal of the two wives of a *śrāvaka*. It is evident that in the representation of these two ladies we have a survival, however stylized and mannered it be, of the Bagh-Ajanta tradition of painting the female face and form. But it is the last flicker because thereafter it is not seen again. The bearded *śrāvakas* in this *paṭlī* are reminiscent of somewhat similar bearded figures in certain wall-paintings¹ in the Kailāsa temple at Ellora which are usually ascribed to the twelfth century but which may be somewhat earlier. That they are done during the rule of one of the Paramāra kings is now disputed.² It is thus not unlikely that the Ajanta tradition as well as the later Ellora manner of painting had continued in Gujarat, though in an increasingly stylized form.

We may accordingly surmise that the early *paṭṭakas* and paintings in Jaina shrines, of which now only literary references of the eighth and ninth centuries exist, may have been executed in this rapidly vanishing tradition. The convention of the farther projecting eye which is seen in the Jinadatta-Sūri *paṭlī* is first noticed in Cave 2 at Ajanta, but only in a few figures, and thereafter it is observed again in the Kailāsa temple-paintings at Ellora. More than one explanation for this extraordinary *cliche*, which become a marked characteristic of Jaina painting, has been suggested, but perhaps the one advanced by Muni Jinavijayaji is most plausible. He surmises that there grew up a hieratic or guild aversion to depicting the face of a deity or the human face, even when shown in profile, with only one eye, and the farther eye was consequently projected. Other explanations also exist. Two more *paṭlīs* which depict Jinadatta-Sūri and his disciples have also been published³ and are contemporary with this famous teacher. All the

¹ *Report of the Archaeological Survey of Hyderabad*, 1927-28, plates D and E.

² P. Bhatia, *The Paramāras*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 350.

³ One is published in *Apabhramśa-kāvyatrayī*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, 37, 1927, and the other in *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, March 1966, plate XXII.

Jinadatta-Sūri *paṭlīs* must have been painted in Rajasthan and are datable to the period 1122-54. They have a characteristic border of foliated loops and are very rich in colours (col.-ill. 22).

The hearkening back to the Ajanta tradition observed in the early *paṭlīs* is seen not only in female faces. There are several *paṭlīs* of this period with decorative meandering creepers forming roundels which enclose elephants, ducks (singly and in pairs), mythical aquatic creatures and other animals and birds (col.-ills. 23B, C, D). In one beautiful *paṭlī*¹ the roundels are absent but in the curves of the meandering creeper of flowering lotuses in a stream are seen an elephant, a leopard, a monkey, fishes, tortoises and men in running postures (plate 266A, B). This is perhaps the earliest of all the Jaisalmer *paṭlīs* but not likely to predate the late eleventh century. In two other *paṭlīs*, of which one is now very well-known and which also belongs to the Jaina Bhaṇḍāra of Jaisalmer,² we see a giraffe and a rhinoceros in the roundels of the meandering creepers, birds, aquatic monsters and bare-breasted girls in alluring poses (plate 267A, B and 268A), as also antelopes, a boar and a flute-player (plate 268B). The giraffe is not an Indian animal but an inhabitant of the African plains. It was no doubt seen by the illustrator of the *paṭlī* when it passed through Rajasthan with a trading caravan from a foreign country or was sent as a present to some Indian potentate. We know that rare animals and birds were included as ambassadorial gifts. It may even have come by sea to one of the Gujarat ports in a big merchant-vessel. The inclusion of such a novelty in the *paṭlī* indicates the freedom of expression which the painters enjoyed before their art became more formal in later times. The single-horned rhino is, however, found in India and though now confined to the Terāi it was in those days known to exist in other parts of the country, and a specimen, probably in captivity, must have been seen by the painter.

In yet another *paṭlī* from the same Bhaṇḍāra we see elephants, birds with foliated tails and heraldic lions, all shown in roundels placed in squarish compartments (plate 269A, B). These decorative paintings take us back to the spirit of the painted ceilings at Ajanta with their wealth of floral, animal and foliage designs. Here again we have evidence of a lingering Ajanta tradition of decorative motifs as practised in Gujarat and Rajasthan where such *paṭlīs* were painted.³ An inscription on this *paṭlī* reads *Niṣīhā-bhāsya-pūjā Śrī-Vijayasīrṇhācārjānam*. This would indicate that the *paṭlī*, and probably

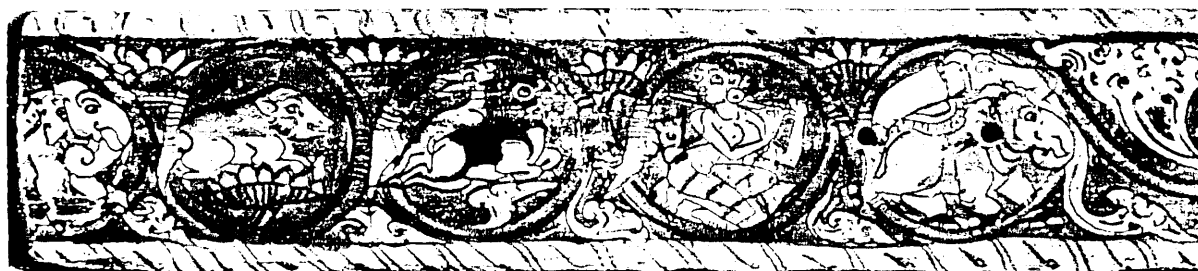
¹ Sarabhai Nawab, *Oldest Rajasthani Paintings from Jain Bhaṇḍārs*, Ahmedabad, 1959, plates 3A to 8A.

² *Ibid.*, plates W and Y.

³ *Ibid.*, plates 1 and 2.



A. Illustration from a book-cover, early twelfth century (see text for earlier date), Gujarati or west-Indian style (Jaisalmer Bhaṇḍāra)



B. Part of an illustrated book-cover, early twelfth century (see text for earlier date), Gujarati or west-Indian style (Jaisalmer Bhaṇḍāra)