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The Uses of Light: Visuality, Metaphor and Rhetorical Strategy in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*

Abstract: The *Daśabhūmikasūtra* has a number of distinctly visual components. However, how, and to what ends, imagery functions in this text is less clear. Taking a single narrative episode at the beginning of the text as its main focus this paper offers an examination of the pivotal metaphor of the *peaked dwelling of networks of dense clouds of great light rays (mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra)*. In attempting to show the importance of visuality to the rhetoric of the text the following approach is offered: exploration of the conceptual domains of the elements of the composition to provide approximated access to cultural context; visual reconstruction of the narrative sequence; analysis of the visual articulation of meaning and interpretation of the strategic use of visual rhetoric.

Keywords: *Mahāyāna*, visuality, metaphor, rhetoric, *Daśabhūmikasūtra*

‘A newly-invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image’

– *George Orwell*[1]

1 Introduction

That the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*[2] has a number of distinctly visual components is obvious. What is less apparent is how the visual mode informs understanding

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1 Orwell (1968: 130).

2 I have primarily used Kondō's (1936) edition as it is currently considered the best available (Hamar 2015 citing Yuyama 1996: 269). It also seemingly provides more information on variants within his manuscript sources and can be compared with Rahder's (1926) earlier edition, although there are few differences in the case of the principal passage examined it is nonetheless useful to do so. However, it is worth mentioning that Yuyama outlines problems with both Rahder's and Kondō's editions, and suspects that emendation to 'normalise' the Sanskrit has crept into the materials used. Vaidya's edition is essentially a representation of Rahder's. References in the rest of the paper will however be to Vaidya as it is the most easily

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of this text. In particular, how images are exploited for rhetorical effect. A significant amount of recent scholarship has contributed to the increased recognition in Buddhist Studies of visuality as a distinct area of cultural discourse.[3] Many scholars have also noticed the visual aspect of the scriptures of the early *Mahāyāna*.[4] Yet it seems surprising that in recognising the distinctly visual quality of some *Mahāyāna* texts few seek to engage with the texts in those terms. That is to say, if these texts were concerned with the visual aspect of imagination, then this would suggest that a reconstruction of these elements in conjunction with text analysis would be revealing of the underlying logical suppositions, their cultural values and the consequent rhetorical agenda of the text. If the texts trade in images, so to speak, then

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available online and conveniently presents both verse and prose. It would appear from Yuyama, and also having found some incongruities myself, that a new edition is indeed a *desideratum*. According to Kondō's schema there are two recensional categories of Indic manuscripts; the first including Takakusu Ms. S.405 (New catalogue 167) of Tokyo Imperial University and Ms. Add. 867.2 held at Cambridge University, the second comprising Kawaguchi Ms. S.34 & S.35 (New catalogue 165 & 166) both held at Tokyo Imperial University; Hodgson Ms. 3 held at the Royal Asiatic Society; Ms. B.45 held at the Asiatic Society of Bengal; Burnouf Ms. 73 (New Cotologue Ms. 51) & Ms. 52 held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; and Ms. Add. 1618 held at Cambridge University. For his part Rahder also had access to a manuscript held at the Royal Library in Kathmandu dated N.S. 967 (1847 CE) and made use of manuscripts in Tibetan and Mongolian and several Chinese translations that are often a part of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*. See Kondō (1936: ii); and Rahder (1926), Yuyama (1996) and Chun (1993: 132–141) for references and discussion of Ms. Sources. Widely known English translations from the Sanskrit are surprisingly few in number, with Megumu Honda providing a version with revisions by Rahder in 1968. Thomas Cleary's (1984) English translation of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, undertaken as the 26th chapter of Śikṣānanda's late seventh century 80- fascicle Chinese translation of a Khotanese Sanskrit manuscript of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*, whilst somewhat imprecise, is still of some utility as a quick guide. As a general note on all text references, where I have them to hand I have also included those for English translations in parallel to Sanskrit editions.

3 Whilst visuality can be defined as the particular social description of the processes of vision, here I opt for a broader interpretation. For alternate definitions and discussion of this term see Bogel (2009: 57, 59) and McMahan (2002: 55). For further understanding of visuality and discourses from visual studies as they relate to Buddhist cultures see also Astley (forthcoming), Bogel (2009), DeCaroli (2015), Eckel (1992), Kinnard (1999), Rambelli (1994), Rotman (2009), Wang (2005), and Winfield (2013).

4 For an overview of theories in explanation of the visual character to Mahāyāna sūtras see Rotman (2009: 189–192). See also McMahan (2002: 95–99) for one such example that focuses on the possible impact of writing on modes of cognition. Beyer (1977) provides a well-known examination of the structural continuities between Mahāyāna 'vision quests' and *bhakti* influenced materials.

surely it is to images we must look for our knowledge of them.[5] It seems that as yet nobody has formally attempted a visual conversion of parts of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* in order to tease out the visual means used in the commitment of meaning. This paper seeks a modest beginning in redress of this lacuna. By examining the use of light, and in particular the central metaphor of the *peaked dwelling of networks of dense clouds of great light rays* (*mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*), I attempt to show that this metaphor is reliant on its visual means for communication, is itself rhetorical and is also pivotal in a wider strategy of visual rhetoric. I seek to demonstrate that this metaphor is being used to assert the superiority of a particular conception of the knowledge of the Buddha, and that visual experience of an emblem of that knowledge is considered as authoritative.

In thinking of the visual in relation to Buddhist religiosity different areas of praxis spring to mind. While visionary episodes and structured visualisation are obvious contenders,[6] it also leads us to consideration of the way we conceive of the relation between practices of vision and texts.[7] This is a complex area explored by, most conspicuously, Mitchell.[8] However, it is Hatchell's characterisation of texts as an integral part of the process of vision itself, giving meaning through the stabilisation of interpretations and definitions, and thus both influencing and being influenced by vision, that allows us to conceive of a texts' words and concepts as enablers of "particular kinds of seeing".[9]

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5 The only comparable published instance I am aware of is Gomez's reconstruction of Sukhāvatī, Gómez (1996: 260), and Gogerly's (1908) depiction of world-systems reproduced in Kloetzli (1983: 260).

6 Understandings of the development of visualisation practices is well covered by Harrison and the practice of visions and thematic similarities in their narrative depiction by Beyer. See Harrison (1978: 36–39); Beyer (1977: 333–337).

7 It is worthwhile to try briefly to draw some kind of distinction between visions and visualisation here, although there is likely a large degree of overlap between the two. That distinction rests in how what is 'seen' is accomplished. In the case of visions; even when techniques are mastered for their inducement, they are spontaneous, inspirational as it were, and potentially the source of new revelation. Visualisations are mental images carefully constructed by the visualiser within a pre-existing framework, mostly with a clear goal of cognitive transformation. It appears that with control of visions one is competent at creating necessary conditions, whereas with visualisation one is to create what is seen.

8 See Mitchell (1996).

9 See Hatchell (2013b: 357).

2 The importance of visual rhetoric

It thus follows from our perspective that understanding how words and concepts are complicit in vision requires knowledge of the mechanisms behind the instantiation of the visual within the verbal. Whilst contemporary theoretical examinations of the functioning of image-schema in metaphorical concepts show us this type of understanding is inherently visual,[10] even in standard verbal form, cross-domain mapping is also carried out using more explicitly visual means such as image metaphor and visual metaphor. These examinations also reveal metaphorical understanding as inherently rhetorical, both in the only partial ability of a source conceptual domain to structure its target – the choice of source domain revealing a perspective on that target – but also by expressing, through the avoidance of conflict in the formation of meaning, varying priorities and definitions of the cultural values embodied in metaphor.[11]

Whilst we may speculate as to the reasons for variation in any literary device the particular passage examined below remains somewhat opaque. What the process of illumination it includes is telling us and what we are to understand by its subsequent transformation into a *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* are obscure.[12] This episode is puzzling because it relies on a uniquely visual rhetoric. That is to say a practice that relies on images for the communication of symbolic cultural meaning. The authors appear to be drawing on an archive of cultural discourse whose repertoire is images, or what we might call visuality, in order to communicate. It is proposed that a certain degree of proficiency in non-material culturally accrued image forms, mental constructs that exist in the public imagination, is assumed by its authors in

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10 An image-schema could be said to be a dynamic, yet gestalt, pattern. That is an arrangement or set of relations of the elements of a concept that is only characterisable in spatial or compositional (i. e. visual) terms. These patterns that give coherence and structure to our experience are used in metaphor and constrain mapping through the maintenance of correspondence. That is to say parts map onto parts, wholes onto wholes and exteriors onto exteriors etc. See Johnson (1987) and Lakoff (1993).

11 For general treatment of metaphorical concepts see Lakoff and Johnson (1980). For a representation in a Buddhist studies context see McMahan (2002: 64). For a recent alternative approach see Tzohar (2018). For image-schema see Johnson (1987: xiv) from Hampe (2005: 1) and Lakoff (1993: 10, 230). For the inherently visual character of even abstract reasoning as a result of image-schematics see Lakoff (1993: 228). For image metaphor see Lakoff (1993: 228–230), for visual metaphor see Carroll (1994) and Serig (2008) for an overview of other interpretations. For Indian perspectives on comparison in dialogue with western terminology see Kragh (2010: 481–483). For an adumbration of metaphor (*rūpaka*) from the perspective of Indian poetics (*alaṃkāraśāstra*) see Gerow (1971: 239–259). For a study of the use of metaphor and simile in earlier Indian literary contexts see Patton (2008).

12 See Vaidya (1967: 7).

their deployment of visual elements to particular rhetorical effect.[13] Embedded in this use of imagery are values and priorities that are obscure to us because the passage is reliant for its formation of meaning on interaction with the reflexive nexus of visuality. If this is the case, then we must engage with the passage in those terms. In order for us to approach access to a cultural perspective that can 'read' this display we must analyse the domains signified. We must also pay attention to the particularly visual means by which meaning is formed as well as account for the role of the visual within argument in order to render this passage transparent.

For my part, in order to gain understanding of the role of the visual in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* I present a fourfold approach to analysis. First, I explore the conceptual domains signified by the two main images deployed in the text in order to approximate access to the cultural context necessary for any recognition of semblances drawn. Second, I reconstruct the compositions that use these different elements to create a significant image that stands as a visual argument. Third, I attempt to explain the ways that this visual rhetoric operates and articulates meaning and fourth I suggest an interpretation of visual rhetoric as seen in the narrative structure of the text. That is that the weight given to a visual signal in the narrative reflects a normative view of the rhetorical strategy for the reception of the text as a whole. Taking as an example a sequence from the beginning of the text I draw upon references from across the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* as well as Buddhist and Indian religious literature in general.

3 Passage under analysis

The scene we are examining occurs at the start of the first chapter on the ten stages of a bodhisattva's career and is set in the palace of the king of the Heaven of the Controllers of Other's Emanations (*paranirmitavaśavartin*).[14] We are told of an assembly of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. We next have described a vision of the foremost bodhisattva in attendance, Vajragarbha, whilst in a concentration (*samādhi*) named 'Light of the Great Vehicle' (*mahāyānaprabhāsa*), during which he becomes endowed with numerous abilities. Following the vision Vajragarbha announces the titles of the ten stages and is requested to teach,

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13 I concur with both Wang and Bogel that this visuality can include both material and non-material imagery. Wang uses the term 'protopictures' for the non-material (Wang 2005: 75).

14 I am convinced by the arguments of Bhattacharya (2010) that it is appropriate to render bodhisattva with a single '*t*'. However, in the near decade since that paper this convention is yet to become widespread and, *pace* Skilling (2018: 56 n.1), I have chosen to use the naturalised English spelling of bodhisattva.

discussing his reluctance to do so with the Bodhisattva Vimukticandra. After this a visual spectacle is described:

> ... At that time, from the *ūrṇākośa* (the tuft of hair between the brows of the Buddha) the Buddha Śākyamuni emitted a ray of light named unworldly power of the bodhisattvas,[15] surrounded by innumerable rays of light that spread out illuminating (having illuminated) all world-systems in all ten directions. Having removed all dissatisfactions and eclipsed all the palaces of Māra[16] it illuminated immeasurable assembly-circles of the buddhas. Having shown the inconceivable range of the forms of the Buddha's miraculous power of transformation, [and] having illuminated the bodhisattvas' control of the superhuman powers of dharma instruction in all the assembly-circles of all the thus gone ones in all world-systems in all ten directions, the inconceivable miraculous transformation was seen as a *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* ('great ray of light dense cloud web peaked dwelling') stationary in the sky above.
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> Moreover, in the same manner, rays of light named unworldly power of the bodhisattvas emanated from the *ūrṇākośa*s of those buddhas, surrounded by innumerable rays of light that spread out illuminating (having illuminated) all world-systems in all ten directions. Having removed all dissatisfactions and eclipsed all the palaces of Māra it illuminated immeasurable assembly-circles of the buddhas. Having shown the inconceivable range of the forms of the Buddha's miraculous power of transformation; having illuminated the bodhisattvas' control of the superhuman powers of dharma instruction in all the assembly-circles of all the thus-gone-ones in all world-systems in all ten directions; having shown the inconceivable miraculous transformation of the Buddha and having illuminated the body of the Bodhisattva Vajragarbha and the assembly-circle of the Buddha Śākyamuni, in the same manner the rays of light formed a stationary *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* .
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> Thus, by the means of the rays of light issued from the *ūrṇākośa* of the Buddha Śākyamuni those world-systems, those assembly circles of the buddhas and the bodies and thrones of those bodhisattvas having been suffused with light were all simultaneously visible. And, in the immeasurable world-systems of those buddhas, by the light beams issued forth from the *ūrṇākośa*s of those illustrious ones, this three-thousand-great-thousand world-system, the assembly-circle of the Buddha Śākyamuni and the body and throne of the Bodhisattva Vajragarbha were suffused with light and all became simultaneously visible.
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> Then, from that place, from the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*, by the superhuman power of the Buddha, this sound issued forth.[17]

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15 Alternately the compound *bodhisattvabalāloka* could be read as 'light of the power of bodhisattvas' or 'seeing by the power of the bodhisattvas'.

16 I follow Lamotte in understanding *mārabhavana* as 'palaces of Māra', Lamotte (1998: 177). As the palaces of supranormal beings are generally assumed to be emitting light, the eclipsing (*dhyāmīkṛtya*, literally having been made black) of Māra's palaces by the illumination establishes the superiority of the Buddha's luminescence.

17 Kondō (1936: 12–13); Rahder (1926: 8–9); Vaidya (1967: 6); *atha khalu tasyām velāyāṃ bhagavataḥ śākyamuner ūrṇākośad bodhisattvabalālokā nāma raśmir niścacāra | asaṃkhyeyāsaṃkhyeya raśmiparivārāḥ | sā sarvāsu daśasu dikṣu sarvalokadhātuprasarān avabhāsya | sarvāpāyaduḥkāni prasrabhya sarvamārabhavanāni dhyāmīkṛtyāparimitāni buddhaparṣanmaṇḍalāny avabhāsya | acintyaṃ buddhaviṣayākāraprabhāvavikurvaṇam ādarśya*

Following from this the 'peaked dwelling' then goes on to speak, requesting Vajragarbha to teach the ten stages, which he subsequently does.

4 Emanation of light from the Buddha(s)

The miraculous emission of light by the Buddha as a precursor to a discourse is a trope we see in a number of *sūtras*, for example at the start of *The Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra),*[18] *The Questions of Rāṣṭrapāla (Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchāsūtra),*[19] *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines (Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra)*[20] or in minor echoes such as in *The True Lions Roar of Queen Śrīmālā (Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanādasūtra).*[21] This standardised format is also seen to be applicable to characters other than the Buddha, as we see in *The Sword of Wisdom (Suṣṭhitamatidevaputraparipṛcchāsūtra)*[22] where Mañjuśri manifests this light.[23]

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sarvāsu daśasu dikṣu sarvalokadhātuprasareṣu sarvatathāgataparṣanmaṇḍaleṣu dharmadeśanādhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhitān bodhisattvān avabhāsya | acintyaṃ buddhavikurvaṇaṃ samdarśyoparyaṃtarīkṣe mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāraṃ kṛtvā tasthau | teṣām api buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ uṃākośebhya evam eva bodhisattvabalālokā nāma raśmayo niścerur niścaryāsaṃkhyeyāsaṃkhyeyaraśmiparivārās tāḥ sarvāsu daśasu dikṣu sarvalokadhātuprasarān avabhāsya | sarvāpāyaduḥkhāni pratiprasrabhya | sarvamārabhavanāni dhyāmīkṛtya | aparimitāni buddhaparṣanmaṇḍalāny avabhāsya | acintyaṃ buddhaviṣayākāraprabhāvavikurvaṇam ādarśya | sarvāsu daśasu dikṣu sarvalokadhātuprasereṣu sarvatathāgataparṣanmaṇḍaleṣu dharmadeśanādhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhitān bodhisattvān avabhāsya | acintyaṃ buddhavikurvaṇam ādarśyedaṃ bhagavataḥ śākyamuneḥ parṣanmaṇḍalaṃ vajragarbhasya bodhisattvasyātmabhāvam avabhāsyoparyantarīkṣa evam eva mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāraṃ kṛtvā tasthuḥ | iti hy ebhiś ca bhagavataḥ śākyamuner ūrṇākośaprasṛtābhī raśmibhis te lokadhātavas tāni ca buddhaparṣanmaṇḍalāni teṣāṃ ca bodhisattvānāṃ kāyā āsanāni ca sphuṭāny avabhāsitāni samdṛśyante sma | teṣaṃ cāparimāṇeṣu lokadhātuṣu buddhānāṃ bhagavatām uṃākośaprasṛtābhī raśmibhir ayaṃ trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātur idaṃ ca bhagavataḥ śākyamuneḥ parṣanmaṇḍalaṃ vajragarbhasya ca bodhisattvasya kāya āsanaṃ sphuṭam avabhāsitaṃ samdṛśyaṃte sma || atha khalu tato mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgārad buddhānubhavenāyam evaṃ rūpaḥ śabdo niścarati sma ||

18 Vaidya (1960b: 1–12); Kern (1884: 4–12).
19 Finot (1901: 1–4); Boucher (2008: 114).
20 Kimura (1986–2007: 1–29); Conze (1975: 38–39).
21 Chang (1983: 363 (T. XI 310)).
22 Chang (1983: 42–43 (T. XI 310)).
23 For a full examination of the metaphor of light in the Nine Dharmas of the Nepalese tradition which covers some of the texts of interest here see Weber (2002). This detailed study pursues a categorical rigour in tracking down many permutations of this prevalent comparison.

From within the logic of the text this sign (*nimitta*) of the ensuing miracle of instruction is considered as a proof of attainment of superhuman power (*ṛddhi*) and could be seen solely as an instance of a miracle (*prātihārya*) in its own right.[24] However, it need not be, and the variation that occurs in the detail of this relatively stable narrative device can be viewed as indicative of differing rhetorical objectives on the part of the authors. Variation occurs in several places, such as the particular part of the Buddha's body this light is emitted from, what it is that is illuminated by this light, what abilities or impacts that light has or what that light subsequently does. We shall examine in more detail below what light can signify.

In this example light is emitted from between the brows, which, if we follow tradition by considering the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* as the anthologic context of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and conduct a rough survey of instances within it, reveals by my count six occurrences, second only to no specific location being mentioned. Other locations for emission of light by the Buddha are: the hair pores (three times), the teeth (twice), from the wheel marks on the feet (twice), from wheel marks on the knees (once), the toes (once), the top of the feet (once), the top of the head (once) and from the mouth (once). This survey seems to indicate that the basic format was a common model but that authors felt free to improvise, presumably to utilise image-schematic aspects of the body parts employed in the service of particular rhetorical agenda. In this case the choice of between the brows, the *ūrṇā* (hair treasure/tuft), perhaps seeks to emphasise themes of knowledge and concentration in correlation with access to divine vision. This mark of a great being (*mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*) is, according to the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*, expressly caused by the Buddha's commitment to speaking the truth.[25] It is conceivable that this association complements the rhetorical agenda by further implying the truth of this *sūtra*. However, although prevalent in anthropomorphic iconography, explicit statements of the symbolism of this particular mark of a great being are hard to find.[26]

A further example of this can be found in the description of the coronation (*abhiṣeka)* of the bodhisattva upon the completion of the ten stages.[27] Here light

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24 For a good overview of the concepts and dynamics within 'miracle literature' in both non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna contexts see Fiordalis (2008).
25 See Walshe (1995: 455. D III.171).
26 Most scholarly mentions of the *ūrṇā*, for example Powers (2009: 16), reference Buddhaghoṣa's descriptions of the thirty two great marks of the Buddha (*dvātriṃśadvaralakṣaṇa*) in the *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī* (Sv II 451), without offering much, if any, discussion of its symbolism. The following examples from the *Divyāvadana* might suggest that the *ūrṇā* is associated with the figure of the *pratyekabuddha* but this seems unlikely given Mahāyāna polemics.
27 See Vaidya (1967: 55–56).

is emitted from various body parts, escalating upwards from the soles of the feet, illuminating, and by topologic implication superior to, domains that begin with the traditional six realms of Buddhist cosmology and are extended rather polemically to include those of the *śrāvaka*s (literally listeners – *viz.* non-Mahāyāna adherents), *pratyekabuddha*s (independently awakened buddhas) and bodhisattvas at the lower levels of achievement. The work of Mus includes a caution against drawing links between geographically and temporally distant texts that invoke the linked motifs of the *puruṣa*, the universe(s), and the classification of society hierarchically.[28] However, this description from the tenth stage appears to contain echoes of cosmographies such as that found in the *Mahāsīhanāndasutta* and,[29] if it is not related to the corporeal mapping of castes in the *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda*,[30] can be likened to the description of the emanation of forms of various beings from Sāradhvaja in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* that elaborates on traditions of contemplative practice.[31] This is an example that features an ascending social hierarchy mapped from the soles of the feet upwards to the cranial protuberance.

The heterogenous and mostly non-Mahāyāna collection the *Divyāvadana* also contains several repetitions of the emanation of light by the Buddha.[32] These are most strikingly detailed in the Buddha's granting of a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*). The Emanations of light traverse the various realms of the cosmos before re-entering the Buddha in a location on his body determined by the nature of the prediction. The ingress of the emanation of light is organised hierarchically from the soles of the feet (rebirth in a hell realm) up to the *uṣṇīṣa* (buddhahood). According to Strong these related and structured passages involve a situation where "different types of beings in the cosmos [...] are symbolically made to correspond to different parts of the body of the Buddha."[33] The range of the light also aids in the suggestion of a different cosmological scope for the different types of beings.[34] Here again we can see the three by now familiar elements of a social hierarchy, the body, and the cosmos, albeit used for different purposes.

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28 See Mus (1968: 540–545, 559–561). I am indebted to one of the reviewers of this article for directing me to Mus's work on this matter.
29 See Bodhi (1995: 169. M I 73).
30 See Jamison and Brereton (2014: 1539–1540).
31 See Vaidya (1960a: 68–79). This would be a borrowing of the procedural schematic of *asubhabhāvanā* in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasuttanta* of the *Digha Nikāya* (D II.293).
32 For example Cowell and Neil (1886: 67–70, 72–4, 138–40). Translated in Rotman (2008: 135–139, 143–149, 245–248). On the composite nature of the *Divyāvadana* see Rotman (2008: 7–15).
33 Strong (1983: 53). See Strong (1983: 60) for the hierarchy of beings and their relation to parts of the Buddha's body.
34 Strong (1983: 62–63).

5 Elements implied in the composition

Before looking in more depth at a few of the elements of this composition, it is worth mentioning briefly some concepts that play a supporting role to the narrow focus of this analysis. It is well noted that Buddhist literature presents understandings of vision both as physical sight and as a metaphor for verbal knowledge.[35] Furthermore, the linking of supra-normal sight, or visions – and the subsequent understandings – to practices of concentration (*samādhi)* are also well attested in scholarship.[36] The notion of a 'supranormal intuitive (in)sight' (*pratibhā),*[37] its predication upon *samādhi* and role in discourse has also been observed in Indian religious literary cultures.[38] As a result of Gonda's examination of the term *pratibhā* we can see how a variable conception of a bright flash of immediate intuition, predicated upon intense concentration, giving access to novel 'vision' and also 'visions' of what lies beyond the mundane phenomenal world, was pervasive throughout many periods of Indian culture. I would suggest that this explains the assumptions we will see in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* of the link between concentration and visions characterised by illumination and supranormal intellection.[39]

5.1 Light

The common factor to the concepts discussed above, and our principal element, is light. The link between light and vision has a self-evident experiential basis and the association of terms of light (e. g. *jyotis, raśmi, āloka*) with knowledge and the experience of the divine eye, or other fruits of advanced religious practice and

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35 For emphasis of the frequent description of the acquisition of verbal knowledge as 'seeing' see McMahan (2002: 66) and Gonda (1963: 312).

36 For a model of visual perception see the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta,* Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi Trans. (1995: 203) (M I.108–114) from Hatchell (2013a: 340) and for further discussion see Hatchell (2013a). For further discussion of traditional and Mahāyāna taxonomies of the three and five eyes (Pāli. *cakkhu*/Skt. *cakṣus*) and their relationship to concentration practices see Wayman and Elder (1984: 155), Hatchell (2013a: 342, 343) and Gonda (1963: 305). Respectively 'eye of flesh' (*maṃsacakkhu/māṃsacakṣus*), 'divine eye' (*dibbacakkhu/divyacakṣus*), 'eye of insight' (*paññācakkhu/prajñācakṣus*), 'dharma eye' (*dharmacakṣus*) and Buddha eye (*Buddhacakṣus*).

37 See Gonda (1963: 347).

38 See Gonda (1963: 318–348) and for a more detailed examination Christie (1979).

39 The metaphorical understanding of this concept as illumination is inherent in the term, deriving as it does from √*bhā* which encompasses meanings of shining, being bright, luminous, radiant etc. as well as reflection, appearance or manifestation. This root, and variants √*bhās* and ā√*bhā* generate many relevant terms in this context.

visions, is well established in Indian culture. Turning again to Gonda, amongst numerous examples he provides a very interesting and clear precedent concerning light and visions in the *Ṛg Veda*: "when the visions which are concealed glow spontaneously, the Kaṇvas (begin to glow) by the stream of *ṛta*".[40] We also find that this internal light is equated with Brahman or an expression of the highest divinity, as in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that reports "the light which shines above this heaven ... that is the same as which is here within the person".[41] We see an extension of the equation: VISION = KNOWLEDGE mentioned above to VISION = KNOWLEDGE = LIGHT such as famously in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* "there arose in me vision, there arose in me knowledge, insight arose, wisdom arose, light arose".[42] Less formulaic, and so perhaps more interesting, is the *Saḷāyatana* section of the same *sutta* collection that provides a similar set of connections in verse. Here the *Dhamma*, which is truly valuable knowledge, is characterised as light in a paradigmatic manner:

> Behold this Dhamma hard to comprehend:
> Here the foolish are bewildered.
> For those with blocked minds it is obscure,
> Sheer darkness for those who do not see.
>
> But for the good it is disclosed,
> It is light for those here who see.
> The dullards unskilled in the Dhamma
> Don't understand it in its presence.[43]

It would seem that those in receipt of inspired light were often considered to be the vehicle of others' illumination, in the sense of teaching others doctrine. For

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40 *Ṛta* – "Universal law, divine law that is also truth". Monier-Williams (1899: 223). *Ṛg Veda* 8,6,8 from Gonda (1963: 273).

41 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3,13,7 from Gonda (1963: 270).

42 S 36.24 amongst other instances cited in Gonda (1963: 268). Here the formula is repeated eight times. Similarly, there are multiple repetitions during the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*'s version of the Buddha's first turning of the wheel of the Law at S 56.11 (I am indebted to one of this article's reviewers for this reference). There are also other instances from the same collection such as at S 12.4 and S 12.10. Capitalisation here reflects the common denotation practice in studies of metaphor. The metaphorical and symbolic extension of the link between light and knowledge has not gone unnoticed in scholarship. See McMahan (2002: 72), where he discusses light as a metaphor citing mostly the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā,* and also suggests it acts as a bridge between the more scholastic and visionary aspects of Buddhism. See also McMahan (2002: 131–132). See also the third chapter of Weber (2002) for a thoroughgoing discussion of light and abstract values (*werten*) beginning with knowledge (*jñāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). Weber (2002: 39–40) provides references from multiple Mahāyāna sources.

43 S 35.136, translation by Bodhi (2000: 1209).

example, the *Itivuttaka* applies to them epithets such as 'dispellers of gloom', 'bringers of light', 'bringers of lustre and radiance', 'torch-bearers' and 'enlighteners'.[44] Those in receipt of inspired light were also considered capable of emitting actual light. This emission was consistently a culture-wide sign of greatness and divinity. In the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* this capacity of divinity is referenced in a simile using Indra, whose already occurring luminosity is increased as a result of placing a jewel in his topknot.[45] As we might expect, the Buddha is considered as a primary producer of light in its many senses in Buddhist literature, and in the same text we are told in chapter thirty-four ("The Ocean of Physical Marks of the Ten Bodies of Buddha") that the primary marks of the Buddha's greatness are radiated lights.[46] From our perspective it is enough to conclude that the link between light and realisation in its many forms seems widely established in Indian literary cultures.

5.2 *Avabhāsa*

Related to the linking of knowledge and light, and to the concept of *pratibhā,* is a type of light, also generated and strengthened by the practice of *samādhi,* that is associated with the term used to indicate the initial emanation in our example – *avabhāsa* (Pāli. *obhāsa*). When used literally it can mean 'reflection' but could be translated as 'splendour or lustre'[47] or even 'effulgence of light'[48] although neither of these is adequate. We could imagine then a kind of emanation of light that signifies the great accomplishments or status of the individual that is also strongly linked to advanced practices of concentration and signification of an individual's accomplishment in this regard. In the *Sūtra on the Concentration of Heroic Progress (Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra)* we have evidence of a very clear statement of the link between *samādhi* and *avabhāsa.* In a long list of what one assumes are desirable effects resulting from the Bodhisattva Dṛḍhamati's questioning of the Buddha with regard to *samādhi,* the ability to illuminate all the ten regions by means of his own light (*avabhāsa*) is ranked third after achieving the topmost form of enlightenment (*anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi*) and visions of the buddhas.[49]

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44 See Gonda (1963: 269, It: 108).
45 See Cleary (1984: 830).
46 See Cleary (1984: 933).
47 See Monier-Williams (1899: 101).
48 See Gonda (1963: 269).
49 See Lamotte (1998: 110).

Another way of understanding *avabhāsa* is to highlight different directional senses between it and the term *pratibhā*. As a result of the Vedic uses of the prefix, *avabhāsa* carries with it an implication of a downward direction or expansion outward in contrast to *pratibhā* that conveys a sense of shining toward or proximity. One conceivable further distinction could be made by characterising *avabhāsa* as primarily public and personally external, with *pratibhā* taken as private or personally internal, although such experience is not truly private as some sense of internal experiences of illumination is clearly communicable.[50] Although closely interlinked, the two terms are not interchangeable and certainly the contexts of their usage show differences in the understanding and interpretation of their phenomenological basis.

Whilst these terms help us to get a general sense of the connotations of the imagery used, in order to extend this and provide definition it is worth looking to the text of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* for further understanding.

5.3 Properties of light (mostly) from the perspective of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*

We must now examine how light was understood as a physical entity by the authors of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, specifically what qualities it has. Obviously, there are quite a few different ways in which light is presented, but aside from explicit descriptions of how it functions we can also extract some idea of this by reversing some of the comparisons made. Below are some generalisations and specific illustrative examples.

5.3.1 Light is pure

When discussing the superiority of bodhisattvas in the fourth 'resplendent' stage (*arciṣmatī*) to bodhisattvas of preceding stages the text makes comparisons between the pure (*śuddha*) lights of jewels and their inability to interrupt light emanating from a completely pure sphere of light beams (*pariśuddharaśmimaṇḍala*).[51] Purity is repeatedly ascribed to various lights, such as that of the benevolence of bodhisattvas in the eighth stage 'immovable' (*acalā*) or in the welcoming of the coming of the light of the sage in verse in the fifth stage.[52]

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50 See Kapstein (2004: 270).
51 See Vaidya (1967: 26).
52 See Vaidya (1967: 97, 82).

5.3.2 Light is infinite in extent

Several passages refer to light rays as infinite in number and therefore, we must assume, everywhere simultaneously. This is often stated as part of a comparison to an ability of a bodhisattva but also directly in relation to a source of light. An example of this is found once more in the eighth stage where Vajragarbha recounts the advice of the buddhas encountered within this level of realisation to observe the infinite spheres of light that surround their bodies.[53] A more oblique example occurs in the verses of the tenth stage (*dharmamegha*) when having stated that just as the Buddha is seen sitting in one land so does he appear reflected in all lands, and that emerging from a single pore are light beams so numerous as to be incapable of calculation.[54]

5.3.3 Light is incapable of disruption

As it is presented in the text this is an assertion that comes across most curiously to modern ears, namely that forces of nature such as wind, rain or water cannot affect light. Whether it be from the sun, moon, planets or stars there is particular emphasis on the notion that light cannot be deflected by wind; and in fact is "not of the same basis".[55] The term used here is *asādhāraṇa* to denote the lack of commonality between the light and the wind. The light is said to be insuperable (*asaṃhārya*) or not to be diverted or stopped by a whirlwind (*vātamaṇḍalī*). The comparison within which we see this property uses the same two terms to refer to the roots of virtue (*kuśalamūla*) of those in the bodhisattva's stage of Sudurjaya (hard to conquer) that cannot be surpassed by all of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s. The bodhisattva's roots of virtue are said to be not of the same basis as worldly beings. Presumably light is positive and supramundane whilst wind is a lower type of natural phenomenon. There are it seems four whirlwinds that similarly cannot divert beings' enjoyment of the light of the moon in an earlier comparison that is structured in much the same fashion.[56] As a part of the rhetorical use of poetic imagery these comparisons help define light as incomparable and insuperable.

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53 See Vaidya (1967: 43).

54 See Vaidya (1967: 102).

55 See Vaidya (1967: 29).

56 See Vaidya (1967: 35). Edgerton (1953: 476) suggests we assign each of the four to a cardinal direction.

5.3.4 Light is of different simultaneously occurring types

Aside from the light from the sun and artificial sources such as lamps, reflected light such as that from jewels or water is often treated as a distinct entity. There is also a kind of 'hierarchy of lights', where some are considered superior to others. For example, in asserting the superiority of the roots of virtue of a bodhisattva of the seventh stage (*dūraṃgama*) the text uses the stated superiority of the radiance of gold set with all kinds of gems over that of all other ornaments as a comparison, suggesting that the radiance of the *kuśalamūla* of this class of bodhisattva cannot be outshone by that of listeners and solitary buddhas. In its taking further the use of simile (*upamā*) here the text then goes on to liken the incapacity of the moon and stars to outshine the sun with the same two classifications of practitioners.[57] Suffice to say there are lights of different types with different levels of brightness.

5.3.5 Reflected light is identical to and different from itself, its source and the object of reflection

In supplement to the above, the text also understands reflection to be a feature of the infinite aspect of light. Reflections are seen as identical to, yet still different from, the object from which they emanate. Somewhat obliquely this is expressed as the ability of bodhisattvas of the eighth stage to appear in any appropriate form in any type of assembly-circle in any world as a result of their knowledge of how to appear as reflections (*pratibhāsaprāpta*). However, for a more explicit statement of this perspective we must briefly step back out of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and into the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* again. The identity of light beams with their sources of reflection is seen in a discussion of views as to whether light beams seen shining in jewelled mountains and valleys emanate from the mountains or the valleys. The authors put it clearly: "the sunbeams on the jewel mountains all appear in the lights of the valleys, and the sunbeams in the valleys all appear in the lights of the mountains." They go on to describe how the "sunbeams reflect back and forth boundlessly; their nature is not existent, not non-existent, not abiding in the mountains, not apart from the mountains."[58] Here we see a classic statement of the emptiness of phenomena, unsurprisingly being used as a way of comparing how bodhisattvas interact with the world whilst in the "concentration of subtle light".

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57 See Vaidya (1967: 40–41).
58 See Cleary (1984: 820).

However, in the same chapter, in a section describing the ninth concentration (*samādhi*), we have a wonderfully rich reworking of origin myths relating to the great rivers of the Ganges basin that includes a minor supplement to the above. In the depiction of the rivers' source in a heatless lake, presumably a distant folk echo of Lake Manasarovar, the reflections of the jewelled trees surrounding this lake form a network of light and the other nearby objects similarly jewelled are: "Clearly mirroring lights, all reflected in the orb of the sun, and all reflecting and re-reflecting each other; these reflections, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither merged nor separated, are clearly visible as though they were the original substance itself."[59] Note the fact that the lights, although different and neither merged nor separated from each other, here are given equivalence but are still *not* quite considered the same as the source of the reflection. That small distinction being made, the general point of the interpenetration in existential terms of differing beams of reflected light is solidly reinforced.

These then are some basic functional properties of light, though it is given a number of other attributes and capabilities in the text that are particular to the light of the Buddha. However, having established to a degree the parameters of the concepts involved in an emanation of light we may now turn to look in more detail at the principal symbolic image in this composition.

5.4 Peaked dwellings made of light

What is rendered here as 'peaked dwelling' is a translation of the term *kūṭāgāra* which occurs in extant Indic recensions of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and we must look at the definitions and associations of this compound in order to try and reconstruct the intent behind the mental image created by this description.[60] However, whilst conceptual domains constitute a hierarchy of properties from the consistent to inconsistently attributed, and from the relatively uncontested public to the contestable private interpretation of signification, nonetheless certain category defining properties are clear and readily available for any transfer topologically. That is to say that what is considered as included within the bounds of a conceptual domain varies.

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59 See Cleary (1984: 841).

60 Manuscript sources are listed in n.2. Although the significance of the net[work] (*jāla*) in light of East Asian attention, and of the dense-cloud (*ghanābhra*) in light of the characterisation of the tenth stage, are recognised, I have chosen in the interests of brevity to focus on the two elements of this compound that appear most prominent.

These properties can be sorted on the frequency of attribution and a common inventory established. Importantly though, it is precisely the open-ended variability of the lower registers of this conceptual taxonomy, as well as the subsequent flexibility and increased range of meaning of the concept onto which these variable interpretations are metaphorically or metonymically mapped, that gives this type of understanding its potency and allure. The same can be said of our term *kūṭāgāra*; its choice is likely not haphazard but has probably been selected for the introduction of particular structural elements in order to highlight certain aspects of the existing symbolism of the emanation of light as well as to increase the extension of the symbol's semantic range. This structure can be sought in verbal definitions but also in existing visual representations of the term.

5.5 The *Kūṭāgāra*

The basic definition offered by Monier-Williams is that of an upper room or apartment at the top of the house.[61] The word is a compound of *kūṭa* and *āgāra* – both of which could stand for house or hut or dwelling on their own. However, it is the additional meanings of *kūṭa* in the sense of any raised prominence, peak, summit or mountain that give the term its elevated nature. Ashraf gives a translation of the whole term as 'sky room' and situates it within a matrix of related and differently interpreted architectural terms, noting that the *Cullavagga* makes a distinction between a *pāsāda* (Skt. *prāsāda*) as a long building of several storeys and a *hammiya* (Skt. *Harmya*) as being a *pāsāda* with a *kūṭāgāra* at its uppermost level.[62] Supplementing our understanding of its meanings is the fact that a near equivalent of *kūṭa* is *kuṭī*.[63] *Kuṭī* or *kuṭīka* is the simple 'hut of leaves' associated with both Brahmanical and Buddhist ascetics.[64] Further to this is another possible meaning of *kuṭī* as a room with openings, ostensibly for fumigation. The other meaning of *kuṭī* that has some relevance is that of a type of water vessel, that is to say a form of container. For his part Coomaraswamy defines the whole term as a "self-contained and separately roofed pavilion on any story of a *pāsāda* (palace, mansion)".[65] It is also from

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61 See Monier-Williams (1899: 299).
62 See Ashraf (2013: 45).
63 See Monier-Williams (1899: 288).
64 See Ashraf (2013: 38, 45).
65 See Coomaraswamy (1975 [1931]: 6), in which he gives a detailed discussion of the term drawn from mostly 'non-Mahāyāna' literary contexts.

Coomaraswamy's discussions of the spatial organisation of *pāsāda* that we can ascertain the cachet of these upper apartments.

The most extensive recent study of the term to date is that of Bollée's in which he supplements Coomaraswamy's work and De Vreese's strictly philological conclusions by tracing the development of this building in both literary and material records from its Magadhan roots.[66] His exposition reveals multiple usages for this construction and a term that may indicate an ornament upon a roof, a building often on the upper level of another structure, the uppermost section of a building or a palanquin type of vehicle similar to the *śibikā*. In Bollée's view this building probably originated in a structure reserved for fraternities that had a relation to the sauna (Pāli. *jaṇṭāghara*). Most likely situated outside the village or in the forest, this building was well constructed with securable portals suitable for keeping out monsoon wind and rain, and, is typified by a gabled or peaked roof with a main opening that appears to have represented, at least at one stage, the open mouth of a guardian spirit. It also seems to have been especially associated with initiatory rites held within its sacred space and, not unconnectedly, can be understood as a funeral bier in some contexts.[67]

5.6 *Kūṭāgāra*s in Mahāyāna literary contexts

Reference to some Mahāyāna textual sources will give us a further glimpse of how this structure was deployed in the literary imagination of this movement. Confirming the interpretation of the *kūṭāgāra* as an architectural superstructure above, yet also adding to the polyvalent nature of this term, is its repeated use in the *Lalitavistarasūtra* within long eulogistic lists of other architectural features, such as arched gateways (*toraṇa*) and circular apertures (*gavākṣa*), which serve to adorn such buildings as the great crystal palace (*mahāvimāna*) of the Bodhisattva as he dwells in the Tuṣita Heaven.[68] Conveniently, one of the

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66 See Bollée (1986: 189–214), De Vreese (1947: 323–325). De Vreese rests on an analysis of this compound as a dependent determinative (*tatparuṣa*) "with a *pūrvapada* standing for an original *instrumentalis qualitatis* in accordance with Pāṇini 2, 3, 21 *ittambhūtalakṣane*". It seems useful to me to understand at least three interpretations as valid within differing contexts: as a building *with* a peak (finial) upon it, a building that *is* peaked (in form) and a building *on* or *at* the peak [of another structure].

67 See Bollée (1986: 197).

68 For example Vaidya (1958: 8, 15, 29) – *vitardiniryūhatoraṇagavākṣaharmyakūṭāgāraprāsā-datalasamalaṃkṛtā* and similar variations. *Pace* those holding to the view that the *Lalitavistara* is a non-Mahāyāna (Sarvāstivāda) and not a Mahāyāna text in line with Winternitz (1912); Thomas (1940);

most elaborately described *kūṭāgāra*s also serves as a vehicle for his miraculous descent to the womb of Queen Māyā. This particular *kūṭāgāra* confirms this building's role as a container and delimiter of purified space as it clearly performs the function of addressing the assumed incompatibility of the Buddha-to-be inhabiting such an unclean space as the womb of Queen Māyā in this narrative.[69]

In terms of the actual structure, the exterior visibility of the interior seems to have varied with the perspective of the author; in both the Vasanti and Māyā chapters of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* it is quite clear that they can both be seen within the *kūṭāgāra* from an external vantage point, such as, in Vasanti's case, the crossroads of Kapilavastu.[70] However, in the famous scene in the same text where Sudhana enters the *Kūṭāgāra* of Vairocana he is clearly only able to see the miraculous displays within it once he has crossed the threshold, and once Maitreya has opened and shut the door for him.[71] At the very least, this reference does confirm the structure's possession of a door (*dvāra*) before which Sudhana is able to prostrate himself (*purastā dvāramūle*).[72] Although this 'door', and Maitreya's control of it, may be metaphorical, in all of these instances the 'sight' is visionary in nature and related to the practice of various concentrations, a factor which puts the structure into the realm of the imagination of our authors.

The best evidence we have for a general understanding regarding the nature of this building within the Mahāyāna literary imaginaire is seen within the context of demonstrations of the miraculous powers of various protagonists. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra, Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* and *Lalitavistarasūtra* all feature minor variants of a stock description of *kūṭāgāra*s as having four posts, or pillars (*catusthūṇa*), four corners (*caturasra*),[73] as well as being well proportioned or symmetrical (*suvibhakta, samabhāga*) and beautiful to look at (*darśanīya*).[74] The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* differs slightly

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Banerjee 1979 [1957]; Vaidya (1958). For discussion of why this may not be the case and for references to the perspectives of Okano and Hokazono see He (2012: 8–10).

69 See Vaidya (1958: 48–49).

70 See Vaidya (1960a: 171) & Vaidya (1960a: 342). This edition is problematic, as discussed by Osto (2008: 6), but is widely available.

71 See Vaidya (1960a: 407).

72 See Vaidya (1960a: 360).

73 All three examples (below cited) use *asra* for *aśra (aśri)*.

74 *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*: Kimura 86–07: 109, *atha khalu tāni puṣpāṇi vaihāyasam abhyudgamyāsya trisāhasramahāsāhasrasya lokadhātor upariṣṭāt puṣpakūṭāgāraḥ saṃsthito 'bhūt catusthūṇaś caturasro bhāgataḥ suvibhakto ramaṇīyo manorama |* *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*: SGBSL 2004: Vkn 3.75, *yathā ca sarvā parṣat paśyati taṃ ca marīciṃ lokadhātuṃ taṃ ca duṣprasahaṃ tathāgataṃ taṃ ca muktāhāraṃ duṣprasahasya mūrdhasaṃdhau muktāhārakūṭāgāraṃ prādurbhūtaṃ citraṃ darśanīyaṃ caturasraṃ*

by describing Dharmodgata's *kūṭāgāra* as having illuminating jewels in the four corners (*koṇa*) and placing four censers on each side.[75] Suffice to say then the expression denotes a hut or dwelling that has four sides, is usually peaked and may also have openings.

5.7 Broader implications of *Kūṭāgāra*

Turning now to the *kūṭāgāra*'s connotations, both Monier-Williams and Edgerton alert us to this type of structure's association with the Buddha by giving meanings for the compound *kūṭāgāra-śālā* as referring to a "hall or house near Vaiśālī where the Buddha often stayed".[76] The sources for this connection are given as the *Divyāvadāna, Avadānaśataka, Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* and the *Mahāvastu*, all texts associated with mainly 'non-Mahāyāna' perspectives, with the first three texts currently considered as being associated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda.[77] Also notable is that a similar, if somewhat broad, timeframe (c. 200 BCE – 200 CE) applies both to the formation of these texts, and to the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, giving some support to the claim that this was an association relevant here. Furthermore, Ashraf draws attention to Buddhaghoṣa's *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī* where the Theravādin exegete considers a *kūṭāgāra-śālā* to be a *prāsāda* topped with the Buddha's perfumed chamber or *gandhakuṭī*.[78] A *prāsāda* being most frequently supported by pillars, and the *gandhakuṭī* being a space consecrated not only by the actual presence of the Buddha, but also by the devotional offering of flowers and perfumed incense that give it its name. These devotional acts transform the space of a *gandhakuṭī* into one suitable to receive the Buddha and precipitate his arrival, or as Strong puts it "the presence of the Buddha is recaptured in a vivid and first-hand way".[79]

More poetically Osto has argued that *kūṭāgāra*, and buildings in general, are metaphors for the *dharmadhātu* (*lit.* dharma realm, but also ultimate reality)

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catuḥsthūṇaṃ samaṃbhāgaśaḥ suvibhaktam | *Lalitavistarasūtra*: Vaidya (1958: 48) (the *ratnavyūha* in question is subsequently described as *kūṭāgāra*), *sa khalu puna ratnavyūho bodhisattvaparibhogo 'bhirūpaḥ prāsādiko darśanīyaś caturasraś catuṣthūṇaḥ* |

75 See Vaidya (1960c: 249–250).

76 See Edgerton (1953: 190), Monier-Williams (1883: 299). More precisely on the banks of the Markaṭahrada (Monkey pool), *Divyāvadana*, Cowell and Neil (1886: 136).

77 See Buswell and Lopez (2014: 262, 81, 555 & 512).

78 See Ashraf (2013: 45). See also Ghosh and Sarkar (1964–1965: 172) for discussion of Buddhaghoṣa's implication in the *Samanta-pāsādikā* (Sp.VI. 1215–1219) that the *kūṭāgāra-śālā* at Vaiśālī stood on pillars. I am indebted to Monika Zin for this reference and assistance in exploring these terms, any subsequent misinterpretation is entirely my own.

79 See Strong (1977: 399).

within the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*.[80] Suggesting that *kūṭāgāra*s and the elaborate displays seen within them are "representations of the Dharma realm as the 'Supreme array' (*gaṇḍavyūha*)".[81] He also suggests that the spatialisation that the image of a building allows for, in terms of both entering into and progressing upwards through successive levels, betokens a clear hierarchy of spiritual attainment and a structured representation of the path of the bodhisattva's career.

Eckel also views the *kūṭāgāra* as a representation of reality that fits into a three-part structure of architectural metaphors mirroring the transformation of perspective seen in the thought of Bhāviveka. This is a three stage metaphor that Eckel argues structures much of this philosopher's thinking.[82] Interestingly Eckel also highlights the possibility of a double purpose for the *kūṭāgāra* when seen within a transformation miracle, such as in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, as both a devotional offering and expression of superhuman power (*ṛddhi, anubhāva, adhiṣṭhāna*). In these terms it can be concluded that a *kūṭāgāra* should be regarded as an object of worship (*pūjākarman*) when, as the *Lalitavistara* states, it is offered to Śākyamuni at the place of enlightenment by the Bodhisattva Guṇamati.[83] Similarly, in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* when a bodhisattva arrives from the northeast to offer the Buddha clouds of *kūṭāgāra*s made of a multitude of classic devotional materials, such as jewels and lotuses, the demonstration of the superhuman power of transformation (*pāriṇāmika*) is simultaneously seen – again as a part of a much larger thematisation of space.[84] So, whilst symbolic of the Buddha this building may also be seen as a vehicle of devotion to him and part of a demonstration of powers.[85]

Ashraf adds a further nuance when he states that the *kūṭāgāra* refers symbolically to the structure of metamorphosis where "one enters, dies to this world and is born anew", which he justifies on the basis of linking *kūṭāgāra* architectonically *via stūpa* structures with the *harmikā* as tomb, coffin or sarcophagus.[86]

In our case it appears the *kūṭāgāra* is less explicitly intended to signify the *dharmadhātu* (elaboration of the internal features of the building is effectively

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80 See Osto 2008: 20–21).

81 See Osto 2008: 20–21).

82 See Eckel (1992: 4, 9, 19–21).

83 See Vaidya (1958: 211–217).

84 See Vaidya (1960a: 8).

85 Of the extant Indic commentaries to the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* preserved in the Chinese and Tibetan canons (for details see Hamar 2015: 126) the **Daśabhūmivyākhyāna* (十地經論 *Shidi jing Lun* T. 1522), attributed to Vasubandhu, certainly supports the view of this episode as a demonstration of superhuman powers of transformation, T. XXVI 1522.0131a10-15. I am extremely grateful to Marc Nürnberger for this reference, his reading of earlier drafts and suggestions. All subsequent misinterpretations are, of course, my own.

86 See Ashraf (2013: 102).

non-existant) and more obviously related to a demonstration of power. Although, this is not to say that the *dharmadhātu* is not relevant at all in this instance, but that it is a less prominent implication in our passage: one that is more likely reflected in the structuring of the miraculous illumination as a whole. However, the *kūṭāgāra* can be included amongst such visual symbols of powerful beings as the parasol, or high value offerings of jewelled cloth, and so it appears that the invoking of indexes to the metaphors of the *cakravartin* and *mahāpuruṣa* is a conscious deployment of imagery for poetic, and so increased rhetorical, affect. At this stage though, it is the conventional and traditional pedigree of this building, and its basic cultic connection to the imagined or actual presence of the Buddha, that I wish to emphasise.

5.8 *Kūṭāgāra*s in material representations

Having briefly considered what *kūṭāgāra* denotes as an architectural concept, I will turn to iconographical representations for comparison. Most notable in this respect is a famous example from the reliefs of Borobodur that shows Sudhana entering the *kūṭāgāra* of Maitreya (Figure 1). This depiction illustrates a scene from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* and, as a result of inscription, is significant because it enables a precise identification between textual reference and artefact.[87] Although somewhat elaborated, the basic structural principles outlined above stand and we appear to have a peaked building, the upper tiers supported on columns, allowing for a view of the interior through a door.

If we move closer in time and place to the generation of our text and look at some of the multiple interpretations for the term indicated by Bollée's analysis, Figure 2 from Sāñcī shows the application of the term as an ornament – what Bollée calls a 'pinnacle' – on the roof of many types of structures.[88]

A vaulted roof with the characteristic 'horse shoe' or 'open mouth' shape revealing the beams of the interior construction at its front is observed in two instances of Figure 3; although it seems that this shape was applicable to many upper aspects of large buildings such as can be seen in representations of Rajgir (Figure 4). However the positioning of the *kūṭāgāra* on the upper levels of a larger palatial edifice is also clearly observable in depictions of the departure of Bimbisara in Figure 4, and of either Siddhārtha or Śuddhodana in Figure 5.[89] This latter attempt at simultaneous plan and elevation gives us a perspective on

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87 See Gómez and Woodward (1981: 175).
88 See Bollée (1986: 192).
89 See Marshall (1918: 56) for discussion of the identification of figures in Figure 5.

Figure 1: Borobodur: Relief III13 (Krom and Van Erp's scheme). Representation of a *kūṭāgāra*, eighth-tenth century CE.
Photo: Ānandajoti Bhikkhu; CC BY 3.0. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

the platform-like structure supported on columns that subsequently has a building on it with a characteristic opening and pinnacle ornaments.

That the elevated structure need not always be on the upper levels of another larger building is evidenced by a similar perspective on a space including trees enclosed by railings (*vedikā*) in Figure 6. This relief, that Ghosh and Sarkar carefully analyse as depicting scenes from the final movements of the Buddha before his

Figure 2: Sāñcī: Eastern gateway South pillar, North face. Relief showing 'pinnacle' ornament on assorted structures, second – first century BCE.
Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

Figure 3: Bhārhut: Railing fragment. Relief showing two variations of the 'open-mouth' style apertures, second – first century BCE.
Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

Figure 4: Sāñcī: Northern gateway East pillar, West face. Relief showing the use of vaulted roofs across various structures including raised upper building, second – first century BCE. Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

parinirvāṇa, clearly depicts a 'pinnacled' and 'open-mouthed' building.[90] The inscription seen here also helpfully identifies this building as the *kūṭāgāra-śālā* in

90 See Ghosh and Sarkar (1964–1965: 172).

Figure 5: Sāñcī: Northern gateway West pillar, North face. Relief showing peaked structure raised on a platform at the upper levels of a larger edifice, second – first century BCE. Photo: Ānandajoti Bhikkhu; CC BY 3.0. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

the great forest near Vaiśālī.[91] Of similar appearance to a *kūṭāgāra* on the upper level of a *prāsāda* – in that it is raised on columns – is the very clear depiction provided by Figure 7 from Jaggayyapeta of a building I would tentatively suggest may be referred to as a *kūṭāgāra*.[92] Here we might note the palm tree as evidence of a grounded location as well as the roof pinnacles and characteristic 'open mouth' shape, although it is not seemingly important that this is on the end of the vault, but

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91 The inscription reads: "*Vesaliya(ye) viharati Mahāvane kuḍāgā[ra]sālāya*", Ghosh and Sarkar (1964–1965: 172).

92 Burgess (1996 [1887]: 108) in fact identifies this building as a "shrine or *puṇyaśālā* [almshouse]", and Meister and Coomaraswamy (1988: 19) as a "*sabhākhāra* shrine" (assembly hall). However, with all due respect to Coomaraswamy's relating of this depiction to the *Sudhamma-sabhā* described in the *Digha-Nikāya Aṭṭakathā* 2.220, and to the Bharhut relief labelled as *Sudhaṃma-devasabhā* (Figure 9; Commaraswamy 1988: 10; inscription in Majumdar 1937: 44) the apparent *pars pro toto* use of *kūṭāgāra* in the case of the *kūṭāgāra-śālā* of Vaiśālī, the implications above mentioned in the *Samanta-pāsādikā* and the closer match between the contents of the shrine in this case and that of Figure 6, lead me to this proposition.

Figure 6: Amarāvatī: Pillar relief showing raised structures within a railing, first century BCE. – first century CE.
Photo: John C. Huntington, Courtesy of the John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art.

Figure 7: Jaggayyapeta: Relief fragment showing elevated peaked structure with four pillars, second – first century BCE.
Photo: Regents of the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art, Visual Resources Collections; Dr Suresh Vasant & American Institute of Indian Studies.

appears to be midway along. The four pillar criteria detailed in the literary formula discussed above is most clearly depicted. The sanctified nature of the space is also beyond question, as the parasol (*chattra*), garlands (*mālā*) and supplicatory nature of the attendant figures all indicate.[93] It could also be read as having three levels, the lower reserved for this focal point of worship. The detail provided in the small fragment of Figure 8 – that is self-evidently a depiction of a very similar structure – seems to imply by the presence of garlands hung over the slightly ajar shutters that the upper story, while having decent securable openings, was also associated with the veneration of the Buddha; although I would hesitate to go as far as identifying it as a *gandhakuṭī*.
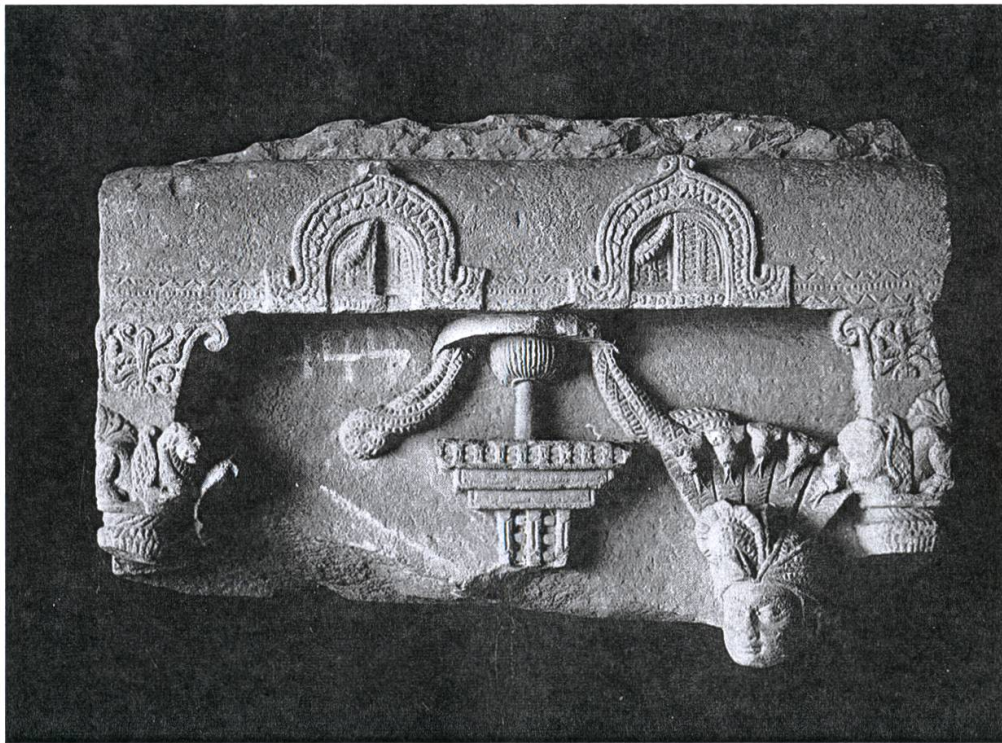
Figure 8: Uttar Pradesh: Fragment showing upper level of sanctified structure, first – third century CE.
Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

Finally, in terms of the *kūṭāgāra* as aerial vehicle or palanquin, the depiction of the Bodhisattva as a white elephant transported in what, admittedly, might be termed a *śibikā* in the story depicted (Figure 10), is startlingly similar to the

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93 These regal insignia were widely appropriated as symbols of the Buddha.

Figure 9: Bhārhut: Western gateway, corner pillar, railing fragment. Relief showing multi-levelled building and parallel elevated structure, second – first century BCE.
Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

structural principles outlined above and accords well with the image of a palanquin provided by Coomaraswamy and reproduced by Bollée.[94]

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94 See Bollée (1986: 196). Burgess (1996 [1887]: 35) links this vehicle to the *Lalitavistara*'s description of the descent from Tuṣita of the Buddha-to-be where, as mentioned, the conveyance is described as a *kūṭāgāra*. The depiction in Figure 10 may appear to lack the finials so often seen as typical of the *kūṭāgāra*, but their absence can be reasonably explained by the abutment of this element with the roundel above.

Figure 10: Amarāvatī: Pillar or drum fragment, showing aerial vehicle, ca. second century CE. Photo: John C. Huntington, Courtesy of the John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art.

These are all examples that I would suggest emphasise the manner in which the *kūṭāgāra* was used as a standard device to frame and present the (absent) Buddha or other authority figure in iconographical imagery. The *kūṭāgāra* as an iconographical concept would go on to become the bounding central container of many deities in the rich representations of sacred space in Tibetan *maṇḍalas*.

What I wish to highlight from these examples is the consistency of representation of the features of this kind of structure across a number of locations and dates. It seems, therefore, that the *kūṭāgāra* was an established archetype of Buddhist visuality, as a symbol capable of particularly effectively encapsulating a set of interrelated conceptual elements, the definitions examined earlier give an indication of the range of this, and thus was capable of generating an image in the mind of any reader familiar with the cultural contexts. For our purposes, the aspect that seems most relevant is that this image-schema carries with it not

only the concept of a container but a particular type of container associated with the traditional figure of the Buddha or other suitably empowered representative of his teaching. It is, however, also worth noting the consistently superior, and not only in the sense of elevated, implications of the designation.

In sum I would suggest that the very uncontested nature of the symbol of the *kūṭāgāra* conveys precisely the desired function. In encouraging the reader to think about the light emitted from the Buddha and buddhas in our example in the terms of a *kūṭāgāra,* the authors appropriate a significant traditional symbol and the associated authority and legitimacy that it conveys, thus promoting a rhetorical objective.

6 Visual reconstruction of the opening scenes of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*

6.1 Conditions in visual arguments

Having suggested that the arguments made in the passage under discussion are reliant upon the visual and explored the elements of the composition described, we can continue with our analysis of the mental imagery the *sūtra* evokes. If the rhetoric used is reliant on its visual rationality for communication, the composition of the mental image constructed by the entire passage under examination here may be useful to reconstruct. This is of course done with certain caveats: any such reconstruction is in itself reliant on the very open-ended and culturally conditioned nature of the metaphorical imagery used to constitute knowledge of it. That is to say, certain assumptions are made in composing an image in order to fill in the inevitable informational gap between verbal description and visual depiction. Whilst it is recognized that the information that fills these gaps is perhaps equally illustrative of the context and presuppositions of the producer it is hoped that enough additional insight is gained from such a reconstruction so as to discount any cross-cultural interference.

In addition, there are certain important differences between the constrictions placed on verbal and visual representation, the most obvious being temporal. Theoretically, the verbal narrative can use its sequential character to advantage by presenting events independently and without a spatial relationship, a mode largely not accessible to the single picture plane that has only a few means of depicting temporal sequence – means that are not necessarily always self-evident, for example scale and location in composition relative to the idealised viewer. The picture plane also suffers as a result of being basically

non-linear and so has a point of visual saturation beyond which any additional communication becomes incoherent. Obviously the cartoon strip or linear narrative friezes are two formats that are employed to escape this constriction. What visual depiction has to its advantage is that in its need for simultaneous representation it can better illustrate the cumulative impact upon the reader of the sequential build-up of a visual spectacle, such as the one under examination here, and so more easily depicts the force of the *sūtra*'s visual rhetoric.

What follows then is a compromise between the two, where I have presented a graphic representation of each element in the narrative sequence, with accompanying notes explaining certain choices, and continue by foregrounding the final total composition at the end.
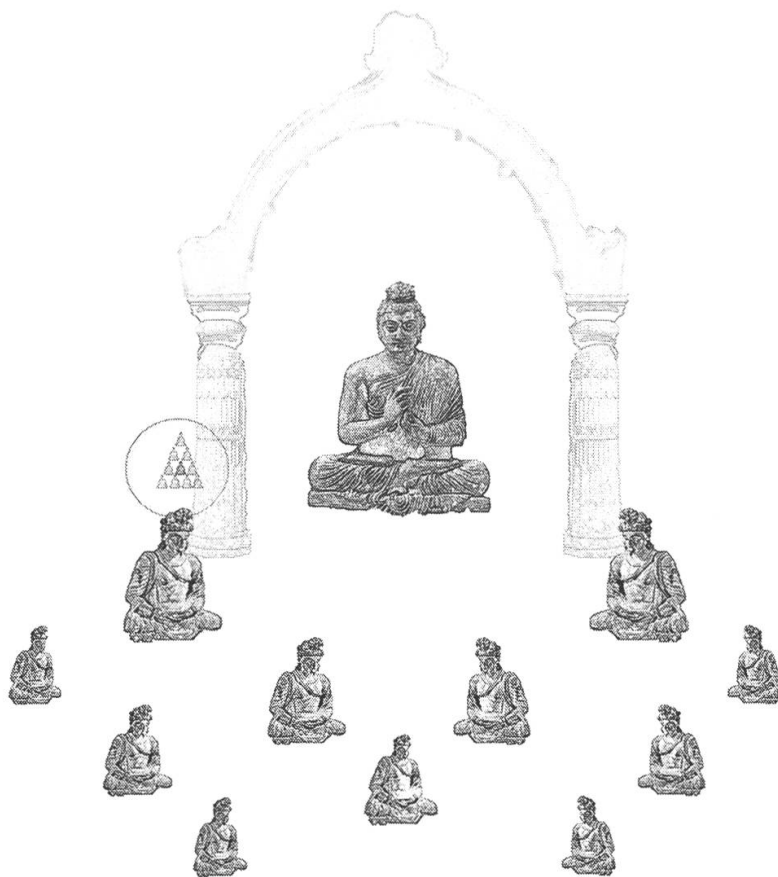
6.2 Visual reconstruction, Figures 11–17 and accompanying notes

Figure 11: The assembly of the Buddha in the Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven.
Image: Nic Newton.
Notes: 1. The architectural element is used to indicate the palace of the King of the Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven.

Figure 12: Vajragarbha enters the *samādhi* called *mahāyānaprabhśsa* and has a vision of innumerable buddhas.
Image: Nic Newton.
Notes: 1. Vajragarbha's vision is simply depicted contained within a boundary to denote a separate 'private' cognitive space using the compositional device of a circle. The vision is comprised of a pyramid of buddhas to indicate a large number, "equal to as many thus-gone-ones as atoms of the atmosphere of ten million buddha-fields from beyond as many world-systems as atoms of the atmosphere of ten million buddha-fields in ten directions"(Vaidya 1967: 2).
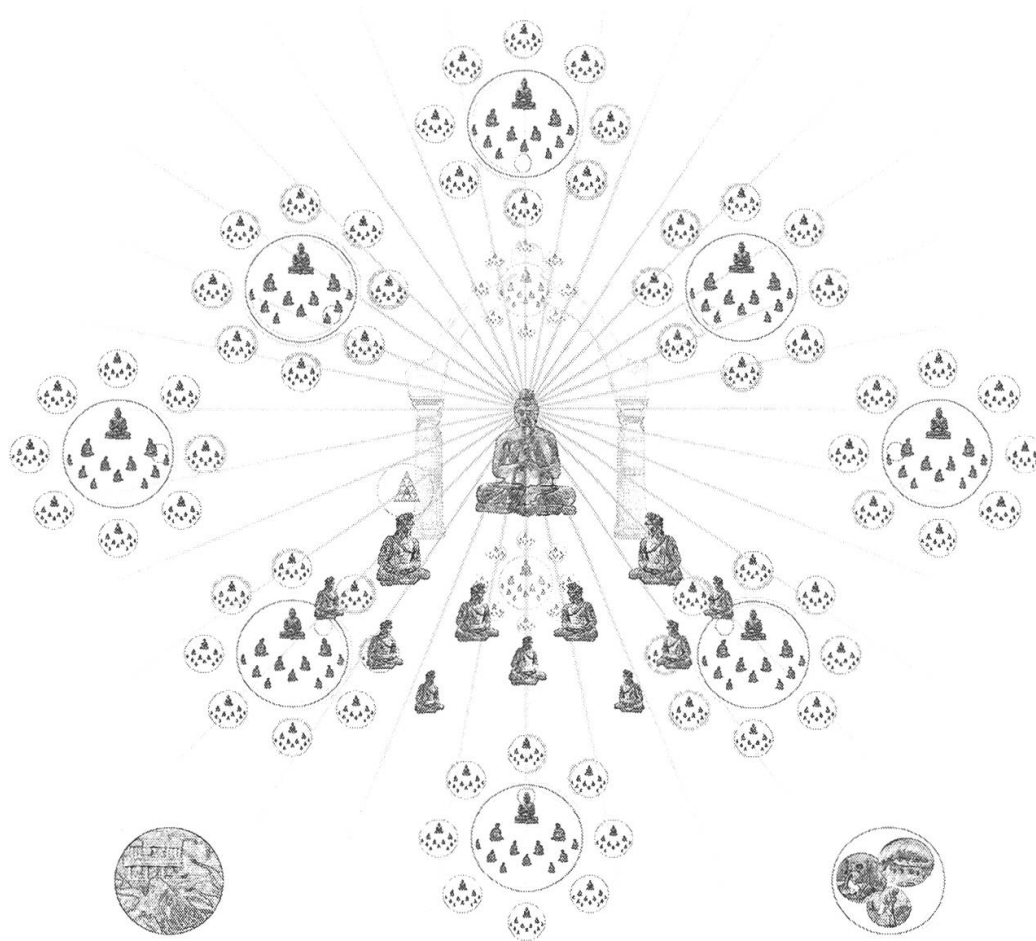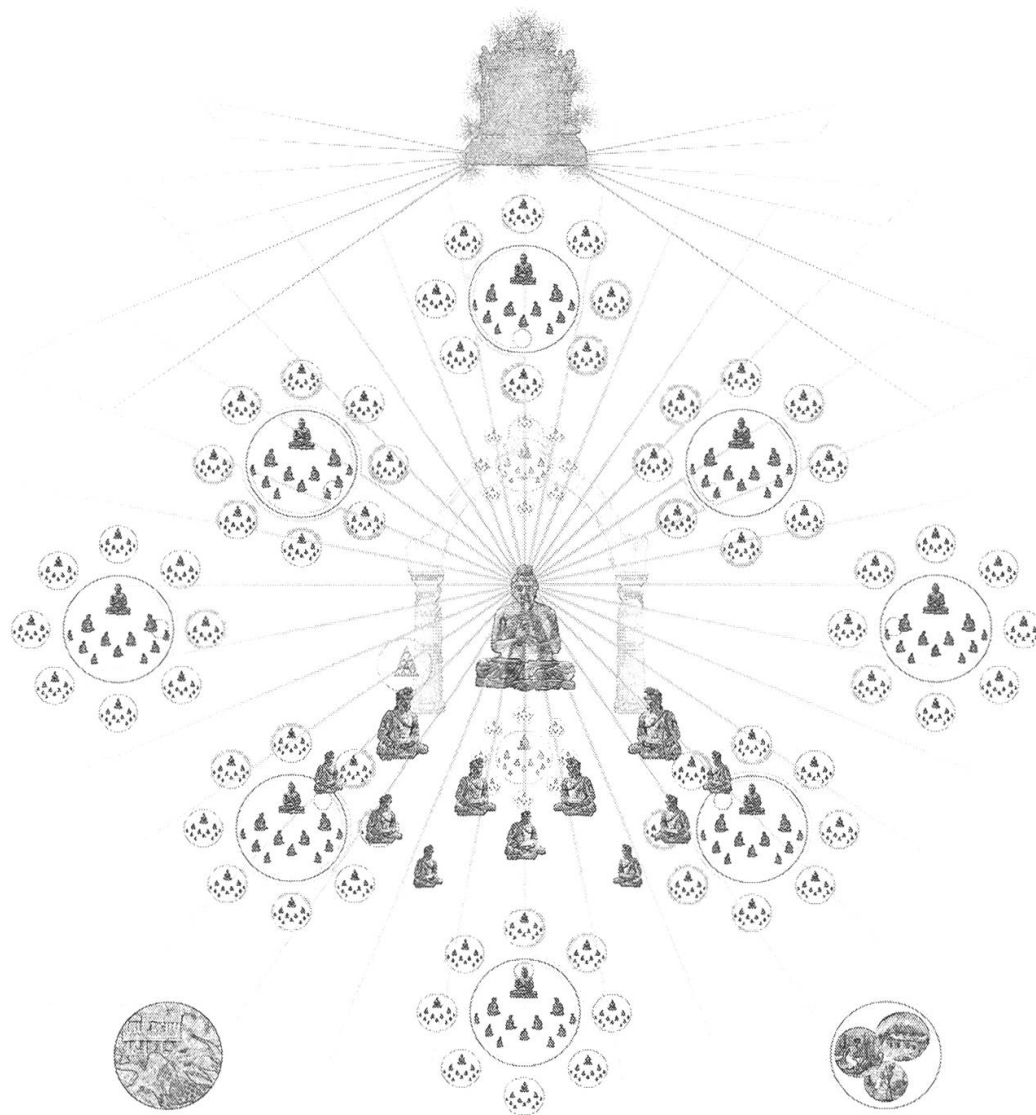
Figure 13: The Buddha emits light from between his brows.
Image: Nic Newton.
Notes: 1. Whilst the text states that all worlds in ten directions are illuminated, positioning the nadir and zenith is problematic in a two dimensional representation with a conflicting central component such as the original assembly-circle of the Buddha.
2. The multiplication of a single image is noted as the light illuminates the assembly-circles of all buddhas in all worlds in ten directions. Although infinite in extent, that number is indicated by re-iteration here.
3. The removal of all dissatisfactions and the eclipsing of all palaces of Māra are shown contained within a compositional boundary. The eclipse of palaces of Māra is illustrated by oversaturation of the image, that is to say the details of the image are occluded by increasing the brightness rather than representing a black circle. The removal of all dissatisfactions is shown by the standard shorthand of old age, sickness and death.

Figure 14: The emitted light forms a *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*. The Buddha emits light from between his brows.
Image: Nic Newton.
Notes: 1. The text subsequently makes it clear that although the light forms a *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* in the sky above, the *buddhakṣetra* etc. remain illuminated (Vaidya 1967: 7).
2. The formation itself as a fluid process is somewhat problematic to depict in a static image but is depicted with linear beams reversing their direction and narrowing into the *kūṭāgāra*.
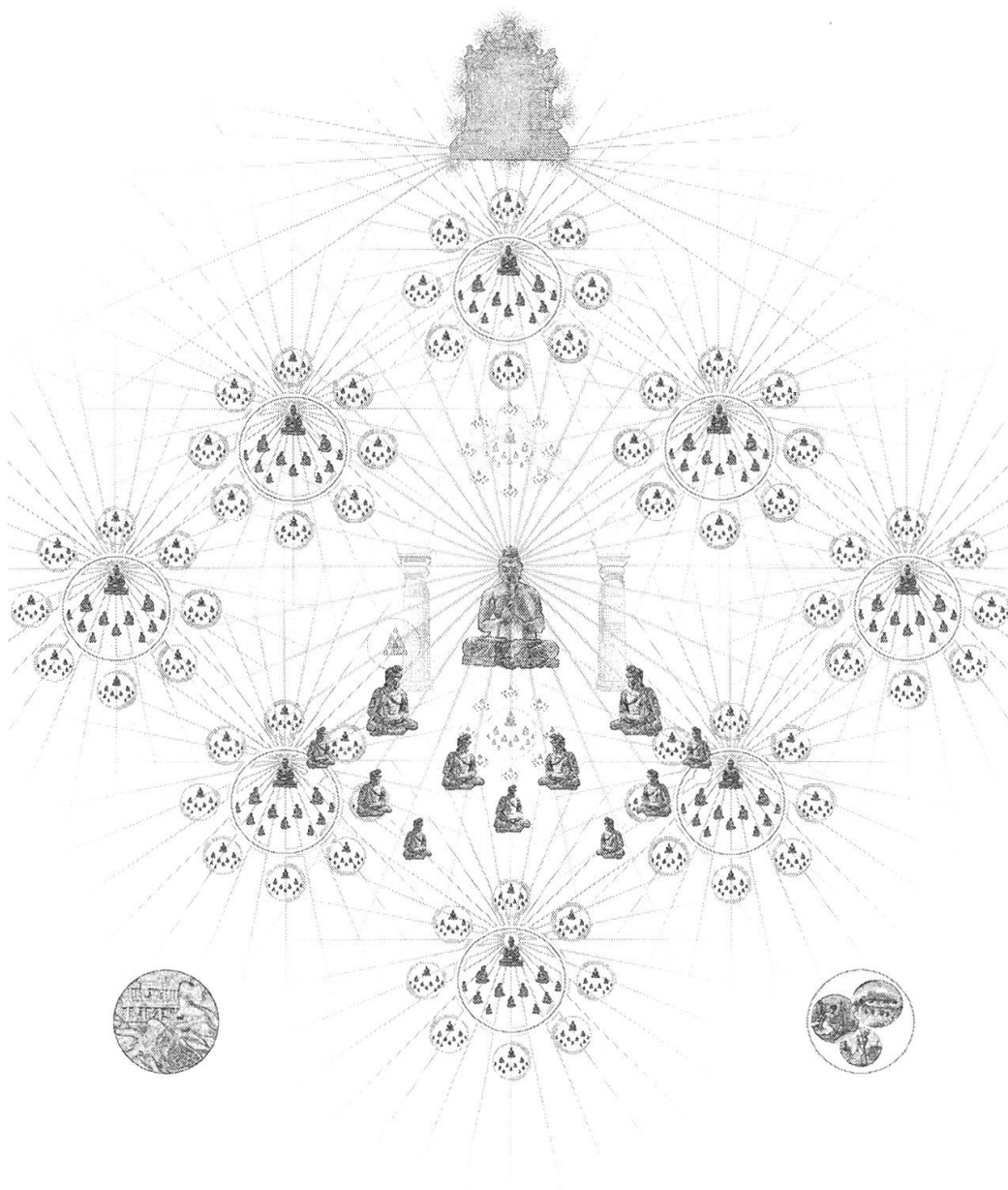
Figure 15: Buddhas in the illuminated *buddhakṣetra* repeat emission of light in same manner. Image: Nic Newton.
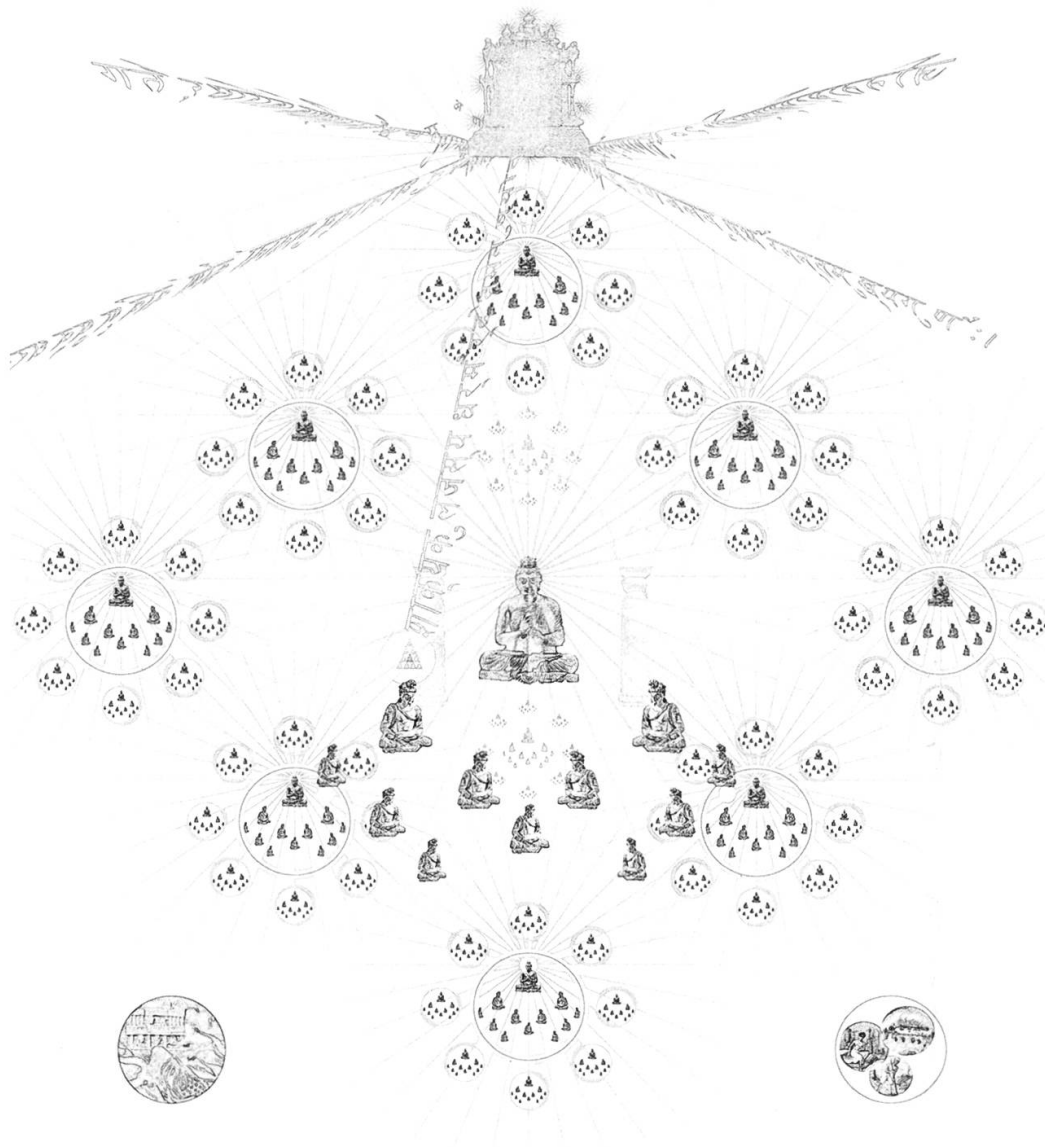
Figure 16: The *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* requests Vajragarbha to elaborate on the titles of the ten stages.
Image: Nic Newton 2015.
Notes: 1. Whilst Sanskrit text in *Devanāgarī* script of parts of the relevant passage has been used here to depict the speech of the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*, it is recognized that this is certainly not the script of the 'original(s)'.
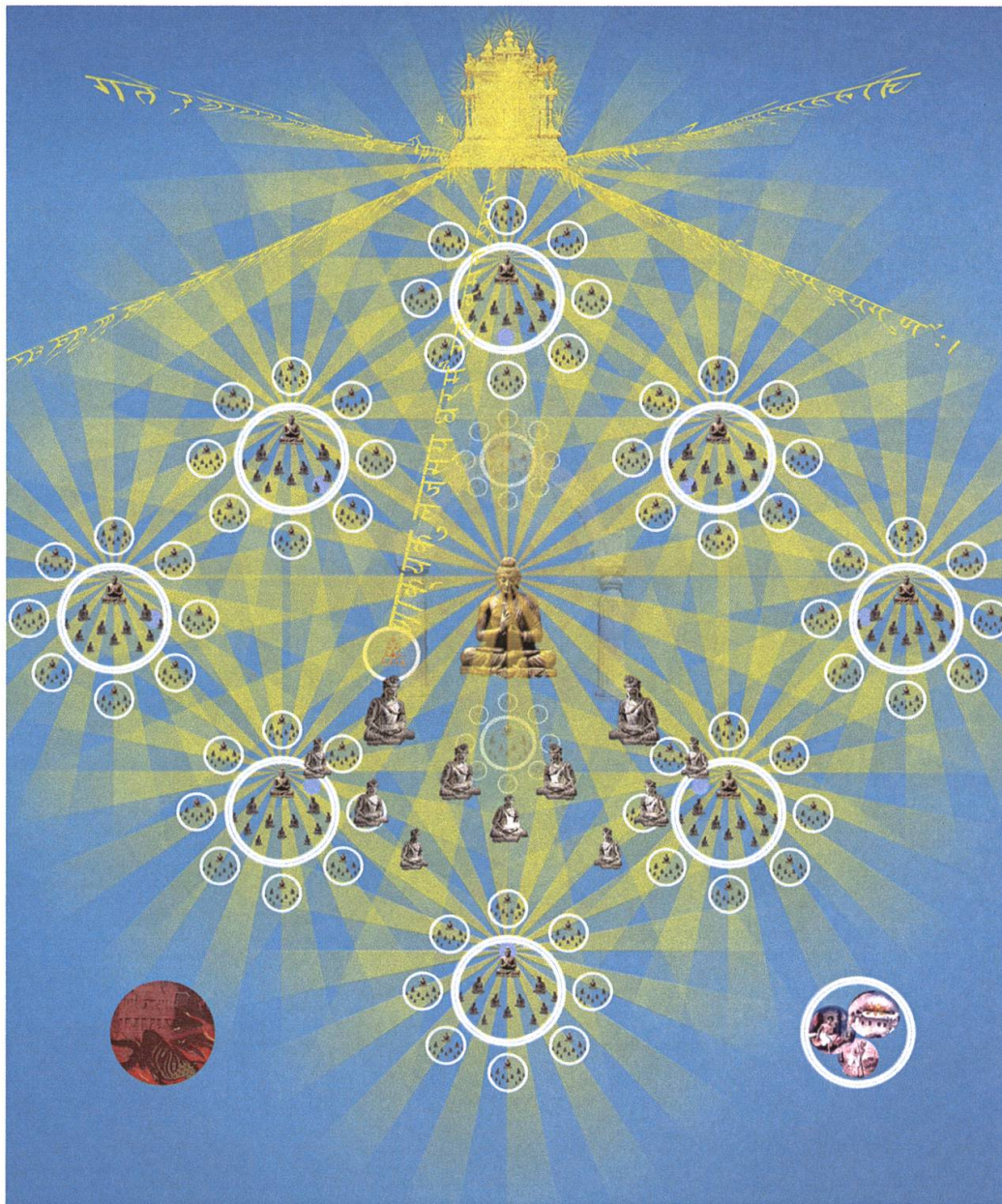
Figure 17: Full Colour of *previous figure*.
Image: Nic Newton.
Notes: 1. The full visual impact of such a display is really only communicated by a colour representation.

7 The articulation and operation of meaning in visual rhetoric

7.1 How should we understand the emanation of light?

Having looked at the two main elements in this composition and reconstructed the composition visually, it is now useful to understand the visual means by which meaning is articulated in this passage. The emitted light could be considered to be a form of religious symbolism and an example of what Lakoff and Johnston call a 'special case of metonymy'.[95] The light emitted from the Buddha stands for the 'Knowledge of the Buddha' in a number of senses. This is generically evident throughout the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, but is also stated specifically in reference to the *sūtra* as the embodiment of that knowledge.[96] And, as metonymy also functions in a similar way to metaphor, in that it enables understanding by providing a unique framing of the concept which it has been selected to represent, then the culturally conditioned features of light enumerated above, such as purity, infinite extent etc. can be applied to emphasise aspects of the concept 'Knowledge of the Buddha'.

If the cultural assumptions referred to earlier are not sufficient to make this substitution clear, some of the subsequent actions of the emitted light, including, such as 'removal of all dissatisfactions' and 'the eclipsing of all palaces of Māra', are the performance of functions conventionally attributed to the Buddha's knowledge.[97] That is to say, suffering is alleviated by knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination and so on, and the eclipsing of Māra is an extrapolation from the well-known ability of the Buddha to defeat Māra through his superior realisation and knowledge. All this is a reiteration of the point that the light is the knowledge of Śākyamuni Buddha. The final part of this small formula, where the preceding actions of light are said to have shown the 'superhuman power' of the Buddha, is an abstract concept used as a categorisation that can be understood only if the systematically related metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING is applied, and is only comprehensible if we are reading with the metonymic substitution LIGHT = KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUDDHA.

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95 See Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 40).
96 This is expressed succinctly as "by resolute progress on the path and by the light of the knowledge of the stages, the light of the knowledge of the Buddha is attained" (*mārgādhiṣṭhānāgamena ca bhūmejñānālokena ca buddhajñānālokaṃ prāpnoti*), Vaidya (1967: 13).
97 See Vaidya (1967: 7).

The emanation of light from the Buddha and effects of this illumination, such as removal of all dissatisfactions and the eclipsing of all palaces of Māra etc., are mirrored by all the buddhas that have been illuminated in the worlds in the ten directions. Furthermore, it is their collective radiance that illuminates the Buddha and Vajragarbha. It seems the structure of the verbal description reflects the understanding of the reflective nature of light that we saw earlier, and serves to emphasise and magnify the scale of this visual display.

7.2 Is 'LIGHT IS *KŪṬĀGĀRA*' a visual metaphor?

The emanation of light that is itself already a particular framing of a concept is then further transformed into the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*. We have examined the basic structure of the concept of the *kūṭāgāra* and the possible reasons behind its selection as an image. In order to test the hypothesis that the visual is a key vehicle of rhetorical strategy in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* it is now worth seeking an answer to the above question. In doing so it is important to distinguish between regular metaphors, which although inherently visual in some senses, rely on grammatical assertion of identity for the mechanics of their mapping of the terms of one domain unto another, and image or visual metaphor.[98] Image metaphor relies on the mapping of conventional mental images where the comparison is not included in the verbal but is enabled by the performance of visualisation. Visual metaphor, while conventionally encompassing this definition in the physical realm, extends it to include reliance on superimposition of visibly disjunctive images within the same temporal and spatial location, doing so as a means similar to the verbal assertion of identity. This serves as a cognitive prompt to seek metaphorical correspondence for heuristic gain across conceptually associated, though not necessarily visual, categories thus inter-animated. Therefore, cross-domain mapping is achieved via uniquely *visual means*. Although our metaphor is not a physical image *per se*, if we extend the definition of the term back into the realm of mental imagery, it gives us grounds for enquiry.

The seminal work on this type of metaphor is that of Carroll and we can submit this example to some of his criteria. First, the metaphor *is* asymmetric; the selected features of the concept of *kūṭāgāra* can easily be mapped onto light, but the conceptual structure of light does not map onto that of *kūṭāgāra*. A container by its very nature cannot interpenetrate or be infinite in extent. Secondly, the description presents a fairly clear incidence of homospatiality, what is constructed in the mind's eye is a superimposition of at least two distinct images. Finally, is it an

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**98** See note 11 for references on metaphor.

incidence of 'non-compossible homospatiality'?[99] This is more problematic to ascertain. The first difficulty arises from a further condition of Carroll's regarding non-compossible homospatiality – that the context of the image, and thus the intentions of the producer, creates a condition where non-compossible elements are perfectly capable of being composited. This would be in a so-called 'fictive space', for example where the 'normal' rules of what can physically be composited as understood do not apply. Carroll cites religious descriptions of divinities as one such example. This raises the very thorny question of whether or not our miraculous display is occurring in a realm of adjusted possibilities. The text indicates that this episode is occurring in the Heaven of the Controllers of Others' Emanations (*paranirmitavaśavartiṣu devabhuvaneṣu*) about which it is hard to say whether or not the regular rules apply.

I think both questions are answered by the transformation of the light into 'networks of dense clouds' (*ghanābhrajāla*) as the light is composited with the *kūṭāgāra*. This form change is important, because it indicates that the authors themselves believed the properties of the emanation of light (*avabhāsa/raśmi*) in its standard form (its image-schema) as *generally understood* would be incoherent with the properties of a *kūṭāgāra as generally understood* and no mapping would be intelligible if the two were superimposed unaltered. Specifically the parameters of the space within which these images are composited are indicated by the narrative structure of the text and despite the fact that the depicted event itself was miraculous and also occurred in a heaven, both are subject to rules drawn from wider cultural understandings governing the conceptual domains of *avabhāsa* and *kūṭāgāra*. These rules appear to reveal the perspective of the worldview of the authors, as indicated by the interaction of two concepts. That is to say, whilst redefining the metonym the need for coherence forces a change in form. It does of course, to a certain degree, lead us to conclude that this is not a visual metaphor in the strictest sense, i. e. networks of clouds of light could conceivably form the shape of a *kūṭāgāra* and the two images presented as simultaneously occurring in the same temporal and spatial location are, therefore, compossible, to use Carroll's term, under the rules of this space. Be that as it may, this certainly seems to be an incidence of image metaphor where mapping is reliant on the invocation of conventional mental images and the verbal does not include either adequate paraphrasing or direction as to which concepts suggested by the image of the *kūṭāgāra* to map.[100]

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99 Carroll (1994: 198). 'Non-compossible homospatiality' as a necessary and specific condition of visual metaphor is best understood as a composite image, composed of at least two clearly distinct – yet visibly disjunctive – elements of an otherwise recognisably homogenous single unit. Superimposition is the most extreme example of this.
100 Serig's review of the range of interpretations of how visual metaphor is defined also makes clear that it is unnecessary to adhere quite so strictly to Carroll's criteria. Serig (2008: 45).

Only visualisation achieves this. Consequently, I would suggest that the super-imposition of these two mental images in a novel configuration does elicit a metaphorical cross-domain mapping via visual means. (See Figures 18–20.)
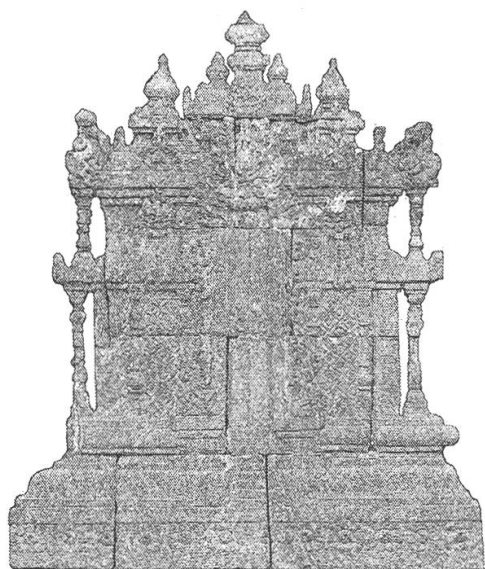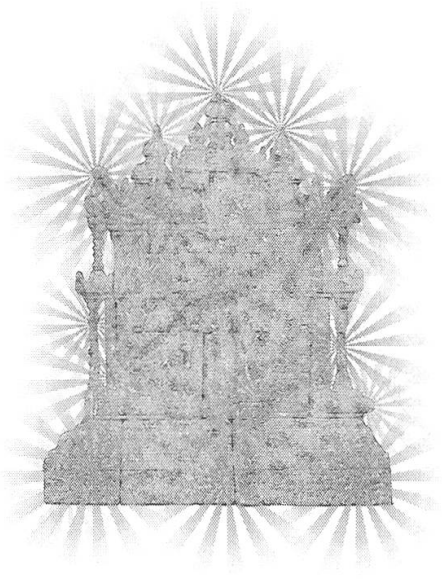

Figure 18: *Kūṭāgāra* only.
Image: Nic Newton.
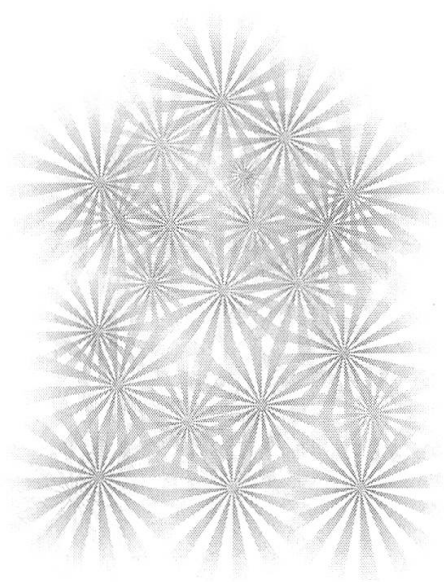
Figure 19: *Raśmighanābhrajāla* only.
Image: Nic Newton.

Figure 20: Mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra.
Image: Nic Newton.

8 A vision of rhetoric in visual reconstruction

Stepping back from this metaphor we can now look at how it sits in the wider composition by turning to some of the results of the visual reconstruction. The first of these is the superior placement of the symbol of the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*. If we are to base this analysis on a reconstruction of an 'image' in a *text,* it will be necessary to address a point made by Wang that was alluded to in the caveats to the reconstruction above. The compositional placement and subsequent spatial relationships established as a result of the accumulation of elements that a verbal narrative description would be able to sequentially take up and put down without regard for their spatial organisation within the same image, and which a single picture plane's depiction of an entire 'scene' forces into existence, entail decisions of placement which could reveal the perspective of the image producer more than that of the text if insufficient information exists within the text itself.[101] However, in this instance, the placement for the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* is adequately supported by the text, that placement being given explicitly as 'in the sky above' (*uparyantarīkṣe*). Admittedly, while the location of the sky in the

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101 See Wang (2005: 68).

Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven may be debated, nonetheless, the sense of being placed above the other elements seems clear.[102]

The placement of the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* on the basis of this topography puts it into a very obvious relationship of superiority. The position clearly indicates an elevation of the relative status of this symbol *above* the others depicted. This is of interest here because what this combination of indexical signs is located above includes the figure of the historical Buddha *per se*. What this compositional logic appears to show is that the meaningful content of the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra*, which we might denote as 'a framing of the knowledge of the Buddha(s)' (although that is really too restrictive an expression to encompass the broad range of allusion inherent in such an abstract, and as we have seen metaphorically defined, concept as the light of the Buddha) is considered to be superior to Śākyamuni. So, a distinction is being drawn between the figure of the Buddha and a broader somewhat more nebulous notion of what constitutes his knowledge (*jñāna)*, with that knowledge being held to be higher than and to overarch all other elements.

While the strong vertical relationship between Śākyamuni and the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* is echoed to a less emphatic degree in the relationship between this symbol and Vajragarbha, further evidencing a hierarchical component to the composition, also of interest from a rhetorical perspective are lateral and reciprocal relationships regarding positive and negative space during this narrative sequence. As all *buddhakṣetra* in all directions are illuminated, the entire negative space of the composition is effectively occupied by illumination. This has some interesting connotations.

By creating an infinite expanse and then by occupying what would otherwise be negative space within the composition, the metonymic concept of the light of the knowledge of the Buddha is given a central connective function and primacy. By bridging this negative space a lateral relationship between the proximate positive space of the foregrounded Śākyamuni and the inevitably distanced 'other buddhas' in all *buddhakṣetra* is established.

The explicit placement of figural representations or re-iterations of the central composition (i. e. the assembly-circle of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas) in all ten directions serves a function in colonising and asserting authority over all available spatial possibilities. This is a dominance made clear in the visual representation. Whilst the multiplication creates an imbalance between the centre and what we can only imagine as iterations of diminishing spatial importance based on distance as represented by scale, as perception of these

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102 See Vaidya (1967: 7).

buddhakṣetra (and hence of this imbalance) is only enabled by the light of the knowledge of the Buddha, the fifth property (5.3.5) of reflected light observed earlier counteracts this by expressing equality and making the distant simultaneously present and proximate.

9 The importance of the visual spectacle

If we step back from the minutiae of this composition and look at the vision of Vajragarbha and the emanation of light from the Buddha and buddhas in their broader narrative context, these events register clearly as instances of a distinctly visual rhetoric. A brief recapitulation of where these events are located in the sequence of the narrative is revealing. In sum, during an assembly of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, Vajragarbha has a vision, he indicates the contents of his interpretation of this particular vision, the assembly asks him to elaborate but he is reluctant to do so and is only convinced to give forth when the Buddha produces a sign which requests him to do so.

Two initial points are worth noting: first the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* does not describe the content of the vision as the ten stages (*Daśabhūmika*). The vision gives Vajragarbha the skill in means to reformulate the truth as indicated both by the description (including only how it comes about and what abilities it engenders, but not the specific formulation of the subsequent content of the *sūtra*, that being the *Daśabhūmi*), and by the Bodhisattva Vimukticandra (describing novel teachings as being equivalent to rearranging the alphabet when writing, which he does as a way of defusing Vajragarbha's concerns).[103] So, both the audience, as typified by Vimukticandra, and performer of this content, Vajragarbha, recognize to a degree its novelty. Secondly, within the narrative, that is, setting aside any wider issue regarding the use of a visual sign of validity to the audience of the text, Vajragarbha himself is only convinced of the need to set forth the novel reformulation of truth engendered by his vision as a result of this explicit miraculous visual sign. In emphasis of this point, Vajragarbha is not convinced by the *verbal* reasoning from the members of the assembly, but is convinced to speak as a result of a *visual* display of the Buddha's power combined with a *verbal* request from the *mahāraśmighanābhrajālakūṭāgāra* as a symbol of that power.

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103 This is subtly different from the understanding outlined in the *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra* which in describing the process states: "rather, while sitting here they see the Buddha Amitābha, hear the *sūtras* which he preaches, and receive them all. Rising from meditation they are able to preach them to others in full." See (Harrison 1998: 35. T XIII 418.905a25).

It may be feasible to view the rhetorical strategy of the authors in the same light: that is to say, the narrative structure employed here reflects a normative view of the rhetorical strategy for the reception of the text as a whole. There is a more or less explicit recognition of the novelty of the content which is addressed with reasoned responses to possible arguments, but the ultimate arbiter of validity is the metaphorically constituted visual display of the otherwise abstract concept of the power inherent in the 'Knowledge of the Buddha' combined with a verbal re-iteration of the symbolic content of the imagery. If the recognition of the novelty of the text's substantive content puts it ostensibly beyond the bounds of the authentic word of the Buddha (*Buddhavacana)*, the miraculous visual display of the power of the Buddha's knowledge and the words it speaks explicitly requesting Vajragarbha to teach, and thus authorising him to do so, re-categorises the ensuing content to '*Buddhavacana* by proxy'. This is an authentic category even though the evaluative criteria for its assignation are often contested (evidence of which can be found in earlier texts such as the *Mahāparinibbānasutta)*.[104]

If we take at face value the idea of a *sūtra* as a literary category that purports to be a report of actual events, then describing what was *seen* serves to secure the categorical assertion of the legitimacy of the following content, regardless of what that is. If the rhetorical objective is to convince the sceptical and assert the authority of the content in a contest of meaning, then the more miraculous the visual display, and the more elaborate the description of the display, then presumably the more convincing the proof of the validity of the *sūtra*. This would be a rhetoric that relies on the visual superlative for its strength of argument and that relies on the novel mappings engendered by its unique compositions for semantic potency.

10 Interpretation of the arguments

In the light of the foregoing argument we can now attempt to draw some broad conclusions as to the perspectives expressed in this particular episode of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*. As is well known, it was a common feature of Indian Buddhist culture to consider sight as knowledge and knowledge as light, and that this pair could be reversed to form the metaphors LIGHT IS KNOWLEDGE and KNOWING IS SEEING. The author(s) of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* appear to share these conceptions and also consider that the light that is the characteristic visual experience in *samādhi* of *pratibhā* is knowledge equivalent in scope and power to the light, or

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104 See Walshe (1995: 255. D II 72–160).

knowledge, of the Buddha. An explicit statement made by Vajragarbha following the main spectacle in regard to the power of his vision is a way of asserting this.

> Moreover, it is difficult to speak in words
> Of that immeasurable superhuman power of the thus-gone-one.
> The capacity is mine as a result of that superhuman power,
> And the body of light having entered into me.[105]

It would seem that the co-existential and infinite nature of light is a characterisation of this knowledge that explains its accessibility. The use of the *kūṭāgāra* to conceive of knowledge as light in terms of a traditional structure associated with the presence and transformative capacity of the Buddha seems to reveal an anxiety about the legitimacy of the equating of these two lights and the assertion of the experience as authoritative, as well as a tacit acknowledgement of the need to explain the novelty of certain subsequent doctrinal expressions. Nonetheless, it does seem certain that the prevalent *imaginaire*, a public realm of mental images with meaningful symbolic content, did play an important role in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, that visual proficiency in its audience was assumed and that the role was one of rhetorical importance.

11 Concluding remarks

It is probable that we can never be certain about the precise intention behind the words of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*.[106] The opaque nature of this episode and several like it seem to make interpretation a necessity. Given this opacity we must admit of the possibility of multiple interpretations, and that the view on this text expressed here is but one possible option. It is also important to select a perspective from which to orient an interpretation, in this case that of the rhetorical intent of an implied author.[107] It is, however, an interpretation that gives considerable weight to the apparently deliberate stimulation of imagination. It is also one that accounts for the importance of the visual aspects of the *imaginaire*s which the text and audiences are engaged in drawing upon and reconstituting. Furthermore, in the process of reconstructing the rhetorical techniques and perspectives of the implied author(s) of this text a degree of

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105 *suduṣkaraṃ tad vacasāpi vaktuṃ yaś cāprameyaḥ sugatānubhāvaḥ | mayi praviṣṭaḥ sa ca raśmimūrtir yasyānubhāvena mamāsti śaktiḥ ||* Kondō (1936: 15).
106 I would like to thank the reviewers of this article for informing the following perspectives with helpful suggestions and recommendations. Any misinterpretations are of course my own.
107 On the implied author see Booth (1983 [1961]: 74–75, 138, 157, 421).

imagination in constructing this particular interpretation has also been required. While there remains the need to guard against an over-reading of any text, it is, however, not imagination that lacks any kind of supporting structure. Aside from the attempt to provide conceptual and visual contexts it has been assumed that a theoretical perspective from which to make this interpretation is both necessary and affects the validity, or at least plausibility, of it. There are those that argue for theoretical frameworks that utilise a lexicon that is both temporally and culturally closer to the materials studied.[108] Whilst I agree with this perspective in many respects, I also feel that not only can concepts drawn from contemporary theories be a complimentary part of our interpretative toolbox, they are also especially helpful when gaps exist in the theoretical inventory of the traditions we study. If we wish to interpret a narrative text, to understand what its vision entailed, it is my view that all the appropriate means at our disposal should be brought to bear.

Whilst this paper's focus has been narrow in scope, I recognise that some understandings can only be garnered from the complete experience of the text, and as such the view presented here is incomplete. That having been said, the general conceptual domains in play can be sketched out, the mechanisms by which the meanings are determined for these complex systems of metaphorically defined domains can at least be partially understood and the interaction of the visual symbols of these systems can be interrogated for novel cross-mapping. Nevertheless, the very nature of the manner in which a metaphorically characterised system of knowledge – in visual, verbal or other manner – functions, and thus determines meaning, ensures that it has inherent within it a large quotient of flexibility and thus a certain ambiguity. In fact, this ambiguity, by leaving the door open to personal interpretation, enables the perennial re-interpretation of the text by each and every reader. Perhaps this semantic flexibility provides the best accounting of the potency of the text, especially when we give added weight to the impact on the imagination of the novel combination of equally flexible symbols from a typology of Buddhist visuality.

Having seen the manner by which the visual assists in giving understanding and definition to conceptual domains, and how these significant images are combined to present novel framings, as well as how visual displays could be acting as important arguments for the validity of doctrinal content, it seems clear that the mental imagery of a *sūtra* is deserving of greater attention than has previously been devoted to the subject.

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108 For example Tzohar 2018: 3.

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