



Fig. 3a The front side of the upper dais.

The double panel at the centre of the dais shows prince Siddhārtha with a teacher and then leaving the palace (Figs. 4, 5) where he encounters a sick person, an old man, a corpse and resolves to become an ascetic.

A panel, now damaged, on the right of the upper dais (Figs. 7a & b) was identified by Boisselier (1963: 270) and Guillon (2001: 94) as showing Buddha in the heaven of the Tuṣita gods, who venerate him. The old photograph (Fig. 7b) however suggests that the seated figure has breasts and Nandana Chutiwongs

sees this scene as the Buddha's mother Māyā ascended to Trāyastriṃśa heaven, as recorded in the *Lalitavistara* or Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* ('Acts of the Buddha'). For Chutiwongs (2011: 15), the panel 'depicts the rarely seen episode of Queen Māyā attaining heaven after her demise, enthroned, surrounded by a halo (*prabhāmaṇḍala*) of divine radiance and being worshipped by the gods.'

Fig. 3b Queen Māyā in the Lumbinī garden.



Several scholars have tried to identify the Buddha life stories on the reliefs, yet deciphering the scenes remains problematic. The double panel on the viewers left has two pictures of the birth of prince Siddhārtha. The upper panel (Fig. 3b) has queen Māyā in the Lumbinī garden touching the sala tree of fertility and the lower right panel shows her standing with her arms folded and possibly relating to king Śuddhodana of her dream of the white elephant entering her womb.

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