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G. J. R. Mevissen

The Riddle of the Four-Armed Māricī Image from Udalā, Orissa

In memoriam Debala Mitra (1925–2003)

Māricī, the Goddess of Light and Victory, is well-known to scholars dealing with Buddhist iconography. As an emanation of Vairocana, Māricī has sixteen *sādhana.s* in the *Sāadhanamālā* describing six distinct forms with two, eight, ten or twelve arms, and the *Niṣpaṇṇayogāvalī* adds another six-armed variety¹. No description of a four-armed form of Māricī is found in these pre-13th century texts.

Nonetheless, the subject of my paper is her four-armed form. In 1959, N. K. Sahu published his well-known book *Buddhism in Orissa*, in which he drew attention to and published for the first time numerous images that were lying unnoticed in the go-downs of the smaller Orissan museums. On page 222 Sahu describes two stone images of Māricī, obtained from Udalā area in Mayūrbhañj district². They are, he writes, “at present lodged in the Bāripadā museum. Both these figures are three faced with the sow like face on the left, and both of them stand in Ālidha attitude on the chariots driven by seven sows with Rāhu as the charioteer. They, however, differ considerably from one another in iconographic features and while one of them is six armed the other is a four armed variety of this deity. The six armed figure is now broken into two pieces and one of the pieces contain[s] the upper portion of the body including the three left arms and only one right arm (fig. 79) [our fig. 1] while the remaining portion of the body is found in the other piece. It holds in the right hands the Vajra, double arrows and the goad, and displays in the left hands the Tarjanī and noose, a bunch of Aśoka flower[s] and the bow. A small figure of Vairochana is visible on the crown and the figures of four attendant gods are found on the four cardinal sides of the main image. The four armed figure carries on its crown a miniature representation of Vairochana and holds in the two right hands the Vajra and the arrow, and in the two left hands the bow and the noose with Tarjanī” (Sahu 1959, 222).

Since the latter (four-armed) image is not illustrated in Sahu’s book, no comment on the description can be made; we must believe it or not. And the four lines were believed and repeated faithfully in the decades to come, as we will see.

But let us first focus on the six-armed figure. If we compare the image illustrated in Sahu’s fig. 79 (our fig. 1) with his description, we notice a number of incongruities:

1. Although the left face is correctly described as that of a sow, the distribution of the remaining arms, namely three on her left and one on her right side, does not conform to the photograph, but is rather *vice versa*.
2. Although “a small figure of Vairochana is visible on the crown”, none of “the figures of four attendant gods are found on the four cardinal sides of the main image”, as suggested by Sahu. There is just a flying *vidyādhara* figure in the remaining upper right corner.
3. Although the image is said to be “now broken into two pieces”, the photo would suggest at least three pieces, namely
 - a. the main portion illustrated in his fig. 79;
 - b. the missing upper corner with parts of the upper left hand and the top of the noose;
 - c. the lower part of the sculpture. The photo shows a sharp cut running right through the figure below the girdle. The straight line of this “break”, however, looks more like a cut of the photograph than a break in the image.

In fact, the image in question is almost intact, except for the missing upper corner. It is now on display in the main gallery of the Bāripadā Mu-

¹ See e. g. Mallmann 1975, 259ff.; Donaldson 1985; 1995; 2001, 306ff.; Mitra 1991; Bautze-Picron 2001.

² Length of description: 21 lines.



Fig. 1. Māricī image from Udalā (detail), Bāripadā Museum, no. II3/9. After Sahu 1959, fig. 79.



Fig. 3. Two Māricī images, Bāripadā Museum; left: from Udalā (no. II3/9), right: from Khiching (no. II3/2). Photo: A. J. Gail 1999.

seum (fig. 3)³. The full view (fig. 2) reveals another incongruity in Sahu's text: although he correctly describes the chariot as being driven by seven sows, there is no figure of Rāhu as the charioteer, but a large lotus is carved in the centre above the seven sows.

An interesting detail is the fact that the accession number II3/9 has been written twice on the sculpture itself: it appears at the top and again in the middle part. This double numbering could



Fig. 2. Māricī image from Udalā, Bāripadā Museum, no. II3/9. Photo: G. J. R. Mevissen 2005.

suggest that the sculpture was, at the time of its acquisition, broken in two pieces, and the two pieces were reassembled only subsequent to the initial numbering. However, the sculpture as it stands today does not show any sign of a previous break, and certainly not such a precise and straight break as is visible on Sahu's fig. 79 (our fig. 1). To make things even more complicated, we see an-

³ Acc. no. II3/9, c. 44.5 × 20 cm. The complete sculpture has been published repeatedly; see e. g. Joshi 1983, fig. 52; Donaldson 1985, fig. 29; Mishra 1997, pl. 33; Behera/Donaldson 1998, 120f., no. 73, pl. 74 (erroneously labelled: "Khiching: Māricī"); Donaldson 2001, fig. 365; Moharana 2001, pl. 60.



Fig. 4. Viṣṇu image and two views of Mārīcī image from Khiching (no. II3/2). After Joshi 1983, fig. 48: "Rishabhanatha, 10th century A.D., Khijjinga", fig. 49: "Marichi, 11th century A.D., Baripada Museum" and fig. 50: "Marichi, 11th century A.D., Khijjinga".

other number inscribed on the wooden socle of the image in the museum's gallery (fig. 3). It reads "B.M. 7.", perhaps suggesting that the socle was meant to support an object with the museum's number "7" and not "9".

Let us now focus on the further life of the two images from Udalā. In 1978, 1979, and 1983, A. Joshi published a short descriptive text which is almost identical in all the three publications⁴, except for minor editorial differences⁵. Joshi's text is largely based on Sahu's description; he just repeats the details, often quoting his predecessor *verbatim*⁶. Though written about two decades after Sahu's book, Joshi's text does not contain any new information. Fortunately, Joshi's book of 1983 is accompanied by illustrations. A closer look at these, however, reveals a number of inconsistencies that generate new misunderstandings. Although the Mārīcī sculpture no. II3/9 from Udalā is illustrated in his fig. 52, on page 155, in the description of the two Udalā images, Joshi misdirects the reader to his "figs. 49 and 50" (our fig. 4). These, however, do not illustrate the two images from Udalā, but two different views of another image: the well-known eight-armed Mārīcī from Khiching (fig. 5)⁷, also housed in the Bāripadā Museum (as visible in our fig. 3). Interestingly, this image too has its accession number II3/2 inscribed twice, the

these images are three-faced with the left face that of a sow and both of them stand in the *alidha* attitude on the chariot driven by seven sows with Rahu as the charioteer. They, however, differ considerably from one another in iconographic features. One of the images is six-armed, where as the other is four-armed. The six-armed variety is broken in two parts, the upper portion has the three left arms holding a *tarjani* and noose, a bunch of Asoka flowers, and the bow, where as the right hands hold the *vajra*, double arrows, and the *gada*. The crown is decorated with a miniature image of Variochana [*sic*] and on the four cardinal sides of the image are displayed the four attendant-gods. The four-armed figure has also a miniature Variochana [*sic*] figure on her crown and holds in the two right hands the *vajra* and the arrow and in the two left hands the bow with noose and *tarjani*."

⁶ Joshi's close adherence to Sahu's text goes as far as to repeating his errors. While describing the eight-armed Mārīcī image from Ayodhyā, Sahu (1959, 210) remarks that the goddess "stands . . . on a chariot drawn by eight pigs instead of seven". Although this statement is not correct – on Sahu's fig. 64 as well as in subsequent publications (e. g. Donaldson 1985, fig. 33; 1995, fig. 16; 2001, figs. 368, 384; Behera/Donaldson 1998, pl. 71; for further references cf. Mevissen, in press, no. 31) it can well be seen that there are only seven pigs – Joshi (1978, 52; 1979, 51; 1983, 152) as well as Moharana (2001, 142, pl. 57) repeat Sahu's fanciful "eight pigs" theory.

⁷ Acc. no. II3/2, 65.4 × 40.6 cm. Astonishingly, on page 150 Joshi (1983) correctly refers to his "fig. 50" when repeating Sahu's description of the Khiching Mārīcī. Also published in Sahu 1958, 214, fig. 71; Joshi 1978, 49f. (n.i.); Joshi 1979, 48f. (n.i.); Donaldson 1985, 39, fig. 30; Srivastava 1986, 36f., fig. 23; Mishra 1997, pl. 32; Behera/Donaldson 1998, 120f., no. 74, pl. 73 (erroneously labelled "Udalā: Mārīcī"); Donaldson 2001, 313, 328, note 233 (pointing out the mistake in Joshi's illustrations), fig. 366; Moharana 2001, 142f., pl. 58. For further references see Mevissen, in press, no. 29.

⁴ Length of description 1978: 16 lines; 1979 and 1983: 18 lines.

⁵ To quote Joshi 1983: 155, "In the Museum at Baripada, two images of Marichi collected from the Udalā area of Mayurbhanja have been preserved (figs. 49 and 50). Both



Fig. 5. Mārici image from Khiching, Bāripadā Museum, no. II3/2. Photo: G. J. R. Mevissen 2005.

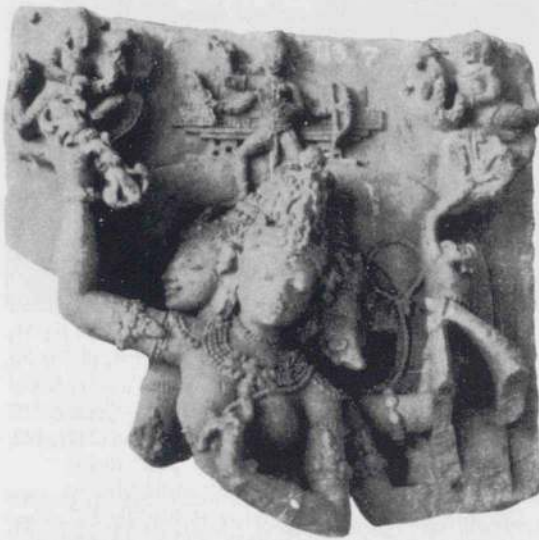


Fig. 6. Broken Mārici image from Udalā (upper part), Bāripadā Museum, no. II3/7. After Joshi 1983, fig. 51: "Upper portion of Marici, 11 century AD., Baripada Museum".

number at the top now painted over. Since this image is not broken, the double numbering, obviously a common practice in the Bāripadā Museum, cannot be taken as indicating a previous break of the images.

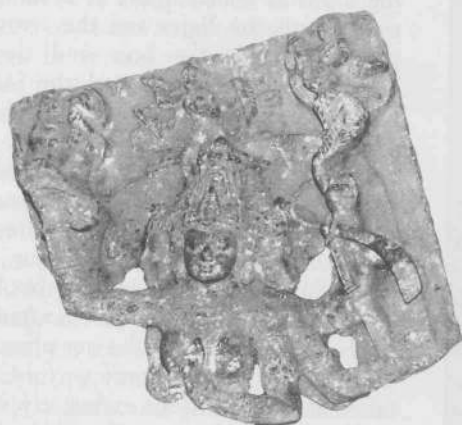
A peculiar detail of Joshi's fig. 49 (our fig. 4) is the short gap on the proper left side of the backplate, just below the bow. This gap is not present today, as can be seen on the photo taken in 2005 (fig. 5). It must have crept in Joshi's photo during the editing or printing process of the book. That the editor of Joshi's book played havoc with the illustrations becomes also clear from his fig. 48 (on the left of our fig. 4), which is labelled "Rishabhathā" but obviously depicts a standing Viṣṇu image.

An unexpected new information, however, is gained from Joshi's fig. 51 (our fig. 6), which is not referred to anywhere in the text of his book. This figure seems to have been added to the illustrations after the text was already finalized, presumably causing some of the discrepancies between the references in the text and the actual figure numbers. It illustrates a hitherto unpublished fragment of a Mārici sculpture in the Bāripadā Museum⁸. The fragment preserves large parts of three left arms and one complete right arm of the goddess. The lateral distribution of the arms as well as the attributes held in the hands conform almost perfectly to a section of Sahu's description, viz. "... one of the [two broken] pieces contain[s] the upper portion of the body including the three left arms and only one right arm. ... It holds in the right hands the Vajra, double arrows and the goad, and displays in the left hands the Tarjanī and noose, a bunch of Aśoka flower[s] and the bow." The only difference between this description and the image illustrated in Joshi's fig. 51 (our fig. 6) is the absence of the arrows and the goad in the (missing) right hands. Since Sahu informs us that "the remaining portion of the body is found in the other piece", we may deduce that the attributes of the missing right hands are found on the broken lower part of the sculpture. Both these attributes, however, are also present on the II3/9 Mārici from Udalā (fig. 2). The supposed "goad" is, in fact, a needle, the usual attribute corresponding to the *tarjanī-pāṣa* in six-armed images of Mārici.

A second interesting detail in Joshi's fig. 51 (our fig. 6) is the four-armed attendant figure in front of the superstructure of the *caitya* just above the head of the goddess, and the two flying *vidyā-dhara*s in the corners. This reminds us of another section in Sahu's description: "A small figure of Vairocana is visible on the crown and the figures of four attendant gods are found on the four cardinal sides of the main image." Although the effigy of Vairocana in the centre of the bejewelled

⁸ See Mevissen, in press, no. 30.

Fig. 7. Broken Māricī image from Udalā, Bāripadā Museum, no. II3/7. Photo: G. J. R. Mevissen 2005.



crowns can more be guessed rather than seen in the reproduction, the small four-armed attendant figure⁹ does conform to Sahu's text, suggesting that the other three companions are preserved on the broken lower part of the sculpture. If they are, we can further deduce that the fragment most probably belongs to an eight-armed image of Māricī, since only some of her eight-armed forms are accompanied by the four female companions¹⁰.

The third interesting information in Joshi's fig. 51 (our fig. 6) is the inscribed accession number visible at the top of the image; it reads II3/7. This number is very close to II3/9, the accession number of the other Māricī image from Udalā (fig. 2), suggesting that also II3/7 was acquired from Udalā and entered the Museum at about the same time¹¹. Perhaps even the wooden socle inscribed "B.M.7", which today supports the II3/9 Māricī (fig. 3), was once used as a stand for the II3/7 Māricī, an assumption that is, of course, highly speculative unless otherwise verified.

Anyhow, after having examined Joshi's text and illustrations, the suspicion increases that Sahu, in his description of the six-armed Māricī from Udalā, mixed up two different images, namely II3/9 and II3/7. Keeping all this in mind, I decided to pay a visit to the Bāripadā Museum in the beginning of 2003 in order to verify the case. Although certain obligations eventually prevented me from going there, I was lucky enough to meet a young scholar from Kolkata, who was just on her way to the Bāripadā Museum to do some research there¹². After her return I received the

following information from her¹³, corroborating my initial suspicion: There are two images of Māricī from Udalā in the museum¹⁴, numbered II3/7 and II3/9 respectively. The image II3/7 (total size: c. 76 × 38 cm) is broken in two pieces but otherwise almost complete; only a small part on the lower proper left side seems to be missing. While the upper part is well kept in the go-down of the museum, the lower portion is just tucked

⁹ The figure has been identified by Donaldson (2001, 316) as Vartālī, one of the four female companions of the eight-armed variety of Māricī described in several *sādhana.s* of the *Sādhnamālā*.

¹⁰ Donaldson (2001, 315, Chart 25, 11th entry; 316) includes the image in his chapter on the eight-armed Māricīs, suggesting that it was originally eight-armed, though without explicitly saying so.

¹¹ In his discussion of the fragment, Donaldson (2001, 316), who does not seem to have seen the image himself since he refers only to Joshi's fig. 51, assigns its provenance to Khiching without giving any reason for this attribution. – That neighbouring accession numbers in the Bāripadā Museum do refer to the same provenance is evident, e. g., from the Māricī (cf. note 7) and Tārā (Donaldson 2001, fig. 298) images from Khiching bearing the acc. nos. II3/2 and II3/3, respectively.

¹² I am most thankful to Ms. Rajasri Mukhopadhyay, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, for kindly supplying relevant information on the image.

¹³ E-mails dated 23 and 24 February 2003.

¹⁴ Both were acquired in 1930 after having been collected by the late Mr. P. Rao from the quarter of the sub-divisional officer of Kaptipadā.



Fig. 8. Māricī image in niche of monolithic *stūpa*, Ratnagiri, Orissa. Photo: G. J. R. Mevissen 1997.

away in a corner. It has the usual seven sows with Rāhu beneath them, as well as a female subsidiary figure driving the chariot and another one near the right knee of Māricī.

Due to ongoing repair work in the Bāripadā Museum during 2003, I was able to obtain a photograph of the two parts only in early 2005 when visiting Bāripadā. I found the two parts installed side by side on a single socle, but still dusty, uncleaned and unrepaired (fig. 7). Though the quality of the photo is not satisfying, it can well be seen that the image was originally eight-armed. Two and a half figures of the attendant goddesses are clearly visible on the lower portion, and the chariot is provided with a railing, an iconographic device that becomes standard on most of the later, i. e. 11th century Māricī images from Orissa¹⁵.

Thus it becomes quite clear that Sahu's description of the six-armed Māricī refers – at least partly – to II3/7 which, in fact, is eight-armed, and in any case is not the one illustrated in his fig. 79, to which he misdirects the reader. He presumably got confused by the sharp cut at the bottom of the photograph (of II3/9) and mixed it up with

the upper fragment of II3/7. Since we know for sure that there are only two Māricī images from Udalā in the museum, it is now easy to solve the riddle of the four-armed Māricī: it must be the six-armed one (II3/9), described by Sahu after the defective photograph printed in his fig. 79 (our fig. 1). The blurred quality of the photo indeed does allow for such a misunderstanding, as only two pairs of arms are properly visible. By describing the four-armed figure as holding “in the two right hands the Vajra and the arrow, and in the two left hands the bow and the noose with Tarjani”, Sahu just ignored the indefinable and bulky mass as which the middle right arm appears on the photo.

The four-armed Māricī from Udalā thus reveals herself as a mere phantom generated by a series of mistakes and misunderstandings that were perpetuated for more than four decades. Th. Donaldson, in his voluminous book on the *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* published in 2001, includes our phantom as the last entry in his otherwise very useful Chart 24¹⁶. The fact that Chart 24 deals exclusively with six-armed images of Māricī shows Donaldson's difficulty in accommodating the supposedly “four-armed” image from Udalā. It should be deleted from his chart since it duplicates the foregoing entry (i. e. II3/9 from Udalā).

I could conclude my paper here, if there were not some rare images of four-armed Māricīs for which the textual sources have yet to be ascertained¹⁷. There is, for example, a Tibetan *thangka* depicting a wrathful single-headed and four-armed form of the goddess riding a black boar. Her identification as Māricī is indicated by an inscription on the back of the painting starting with the *mantra* “*om māricīyai svāhā*”¹⁸.

In the present context, however, a small – and apparently unpublished – image from Ratnagiri in Orissa is of much more interest (fig. 8). It is carved in a niche of a monolithic *stūpa*, which was kept

¹⁵ See e. g. the Māricī sculptures from Udayagiri (?), As-taraṅga, Rāmacaṇḍi, Gopalpur, (Kaduapara), Tārāpur, Māricīpur and Odisoandeigoda, illustrated by Donaldson (2001, figs. 370–375, 377–378, 385–387).

¹⁶ Donaldson 2001, 312. He refers to Sahu's and Joshi's descriptions and admits that he has not seen the image himself (Donaldson 2001, 310f.).

¹⁷ Vajrācārya Amṛtānanda's *Dharmakoṣasamgraha*, a text written in Nepal in 1826 AD, contains a short description of a single-faced and four-armed Māricī called Aśokakāntatārā, holding a rosary and a bunch of the Asoka tree in two of her hands while the two other hands are in *kṛtāñjalimudrā* (cf. Bhattacharyya 1974, 32). None of the two images presented below correspond to this description.

¹⁸ Hahn Kwang-ho Collection, Seoul, 60 × 36.5 cm. Publ.: Tanaka 1999, 169, col.pl. 77.

in 1997, when I took the photo, in the lapidarium at the site. The figure is single-headed, seated in *satvaparyānikāsana* and has four-arms, holding in the upper right and left hands a sword and a bough respectively; the lower right hand displays *varadamudrā* against her right leg and holds an indistinct object, while the lower left hand is missing. The identification as a form of Mārici is suggested by the seven galloping pigs carved in the pedestal. The sword should not pose any problem to this identification: As one of Mārici's right-hand attributes, *khaḍga* appears in several of her twelve-armed forms described in the *Sādhanamālā*¹⁹, and is also found in some of the well-known six-armed seated Mārici images at Ratnagiri itself²⁰. The image illustrated in fig. 8, which – astonishingly enough – seems to be unrecorded both in D. Mitra's and Th. Donaldson's meticulous surveys of Ratnagiri sculptures, thus demonstrates that the rare four-armed type of Mārici did exist in the Buddhist art of Orissa already before the 10th century.

In conclusion, on the one hand we got rid of the riddle of the four-armed Mārici from Udalā by proving that Sahu's and Joshi's publications were riddled with mistakes; on the other hand we are now faced with another riddle, this time of the four-armed Mārici from Ratnagiri. Only the evidence has changed: from a text without image to an image without text.

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¹⁹ For references see e.g. Donaldson 2001, 321, Chart 27.

²⁰ See e.g. Mitra 1981, 133f., pl. LXXVIII.C (= Bénisti 1981, fig. 125; = Donaldson 2001, 308, fig. 358); Mitra 1981, 133f., pl. LXXVIII.D (= Donaldson 2001, 308, fig. 359).