

Conclusion

Both literary evidence and the visual representations of the *dik-lokapālas* reveal certain degrees of variation. In the early Vedic scriptures, the four main directions, generally including the zenith as the fifth coordinate, were clearly differentiated and assigned to the guardianship of particular deities. Although the positions of these deities or overlords varied, Yama as the southern and Varuṇa as the western guardian appear significantly often, especially in the *Atharvaveda* (table I). Most of the main gods of the Vedic pantheon were classified in the directional scheme, which was later enlarged and filled up with other deities. There is no available evidence for the existence of a parallel tradition of minor or folk deities during this early period. During the time of the later Vedic texts, however, the evidence from the two great epics can be regarded as a kind of parallel tradition, with the four *lokapālas* – the assigned directions varying – clearly dominating. The tradition of four guardian *yakṣas* (minor tutelary deities), for which there is some evidence, may have been another parallel tradition in this period.

In the Purāṇic texts of c. first millennium A.D., the degree of variation is definitely lesser than in the Vedic texts. Obviously the canonic group had evolved during a process of consolidation, and the individual characteristics of the *dikpālas* then remained rather constant. However, the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, a very informative and probably relatively “early” text, includes a number of rare details in the description of the directional deities, some of which have never been mentioned in any other independent text nor represented in art (e.g. a chariot drawn by parrots for Agni; table X). The *Matsyapurāṇa* is particularly informative regarding the variety of contexts that the *dikpālas* appeared in. They are not only mentioned as inhabiting their particular cities in the mythical landscape which served as a cosmic scheme, but they also took an active part in fighting evil forces, were worshipped during elaborate rituals, and there existed several versions of descriptions of their characteristic features.

Regarding the absolute chronology of textual references, there is little evidence: A *Matsyapurāṇa* passage describing the group of four *lokapālas* (*MtP* 124.19–24) probably dates to the 5th century, while explicit mention of the canonical *aṣṭadikpālas* is made by the 6th century-author Varāhamihira in his *Yogayātrā* (ch. 6, table XI). It is, however, very likely that the assignment of deities to the eight directions started earlier or at least had earlier roots.

The development of *dikpāla* representation in the period under study gradually underwent different stages, referred to as phases. The knowledge about the process of development depends on the available evidence, which is particularly scarce in the period of “Early Development”, c. 400–650 A.D. During the subsequent centuries as well, the evidence in some regions is not continuous, e.g. in Orissa, where, after the first occurrence in the early 7th century, a second introduction of the theme seems to have taken place in the late 9th century.

A group of four directional guardians has been represented on separate panels in the Kuṣāṇa period, of which several examples are known (section 2.1.4). It is a peculiar fact that the deities in this case have identical features. Although such a concept is also expressed in a few textual passages, no actual iconographic prescription is known for this case. It is possible that these panels reflect the above-mentioned folk tradition of four guardian *yakṣas*, who were not shown with individual traits since this was not prescribed for *yakṣas*.

The depiction of individualized *dikpālas* started with the lintel relief from Pawāyā of c. 400–410 A.D., on which the guardians

appear lined up beside a mythological scene. Apart from this very early lintel, other depictions from the 5th–6th centuries occurred at Bhūmarā, Elephanta, Ellorā and Bādāmi, showing the *dikpālas* in various modes of representation and visual concepts. While some of these heterogenous beginnings had no successors, Elephanta, Ellorā and Bādāmi became the models for future development, with certain modifications. At Elephanta and Ellorā, a limited (not complete) number of guardians is shown among the entourage of the god Śiva on monumental relief panels, which continued to be a mode of depiction for the following centuries. At Bādāmi, the inception of a subsequently very popular mode of *dikpāla* representation, i.e. on carefully laid-out ceiling panels, can be observed. Both sites, Elephanta and Bādāmi, present some variations within certain limits, which can be understood as an indication of the creative effort of an incipient stage in the development.

The evidence from the early 7th century shows that the directional guardians were mostly depicted on the temple wall (wall frieze – *jaṅghā*), which continued to be the common mode of representation. This important development occurred first, almost simultaneously in the first decades of the 7th century, at Muṇḍeśvarī Hill, Bhubaneswar (Paraśurāmeśvara temple) and at Nālandā, although only on the plinth of the temple at the latter site. There is one occurrence of about the same time of (only two) *dikpālas* placed high on a temple tower (*sikhara*) at Ālampur, which had no lasting influence in art, although other depictions on temple towers did occur at a later date.

According to the available evidence, complete sets of the canonical *aṣṭadikpālas* appear only after c. middle of the 7th century, first at Cittaūḍgaḍh in the north-west, at Ālampur in the Deccan and at Chatrārhi in Central India. From this inception onwards, the theme was introduced successively in other regions of India, though not necessarily through a direct transfer of concepts. The number of representations also substantially increased. Only in the extreme south, where matters remained unclear for quite some time, a full set of *dikpālas* cannot be conclusively ascertained before 1000 A.D. While in the Deccan, the placement of *dikpālas* both on ceiling reliefs and on the temple exterior was common, the latter placement was, almost exclusively, practised at the temple sites in Central and Western India. In Central India, there may have been older representations, now lost, as successors of the early depictions at Pawāyā and Bhūmarā, but a separate development starting with the installation of only three *dikpālas* on the temple exterior at Amrol, can be clearly discerned in Central and Western India (Pratīhāra kingdom) in the 8th century.

At Ālampur, the site in the Deccan with a number of complete *dikpāla* sets on temple exteriors dating as early as the latter half of the 7th century, both the Sun and Moon Gods are associated with the *dikpālas*, as they have been placed in the corresponding niches. Strangely enough, further to the north and slightly later, images of either the Sun or the Moon God (the latter not in the position of a guardian of the north) were often associated with the *dikpālas*. This occurred in the 8th century in Central and Western India, mostly on temples with incomplete, formative sets. In these cases, a distinctive rule must have determined the placement of the Moon God on the left side of the idol in the *garbhagrha*, while the Sun God, when present, was positioned on its right. Thus, a left- and right-hand symbolism was involved in the placement of the Sun and Moon, which actually never influenced the positioning of the *dikpālas* proper.

The indispensable inclusion of both Sun and Moon, however, is found in the case of the related group of Manu Lokapālas (ills. 2, 31), which was depicted from the 7th through 9th centuries, but

generally in the form of a frieze and not in a specific directional scheme. The Manu Lokapālas have been classified as a related group with partly substituted members here. Other groups of *dikpālas* with substituted members also occur (e.g. **figs. 15–18**, where Kārttikeya replaces Yama), but these did not become as popular as the Manu Lokapālas.

Regarding the fully developed set of *aṣṭadikpālas*, there were still a few variations in their placement and their individual characteristics. A number of examples are known for the distribution of the group which started with Indra on the (north-)east, others, where some members have not been depicted (**ills. 28, 30**); further, spatially restricted representations of *dikpālas* (**figs. 203, 204**) and seemingly degenerated, hybrid images (e.g. **fig. 181**) have also been noticed.

There was obviously a gradual increase in the number of *dikpāla* sets on a temple or temple complex, which, in the case of a *pañcāyatana* set-up, could have accommodated up to five sets on its walls. However, for this theoretically possible number, no example can be cited. The choice of several *dikpāla* sets must have been made in order to protect all parts of the temple by the guardians. Minor variations in their iconography were often made (e.g. at Gaṇeśwarpur, **figs. 249–265**).

Dikpālas were also included as attendant deities on panels depicting one of the main deities of Hinduism. In this mode of representation, it is a significant fact that the complete number of guardians was rarely shown. This fact could be interpreted in the same way as the fact that from the very beginnings of the depiction of the theme, a restricted number of members, sometimes only two, quite often occurred. In complete contrast, e.g., to the depiction of the group of planetary deities (*navagrahas*), which were always represented in a complete set, this minimum was probably sufficient for a reference to the group of directional guardians. A concept that has been suggested by the 6th century text *Yogayātrā*, where it is described that a military expedition had to carry an image of the guardian of the direction in which it was proceeding: the very

nature of the *dikpālas* was such that the group did not have to be necessarily complete, since its single members already conveyed the intended symbolism. Moreover, the group of directional guardians was probably so popular that everyone must have been able to immediately recognize them on a diagrammatic or narrative panel.

The absence of the necessity in depicting the complete group of directional guardians must have been a lingering phenomenon, which for a relatively long period allowed the incomplete, substituted or otherwise varied representation of *dikpālas*, which only gradually ceased because of the structural necessity to accommodate eight related deities at the corners of the temple walls or on the eight outer panels of a decorated ceiling bay, respectively. This lack of numerical determination of the group could actually have promoted its representation, as ample scope was left for variation, which eventually concerned not only the number of deities but also other aspects of the depiction (also enhanced by varied literary descriptions). Thus, the *dikpālas* for quite some time held the position of “variables” in art.

When a set has been described here as “formative”, this is only from the chronological point of view: in all the enumerated modes of representation of the directional guardians, the tendency towards the depiction of a complete group is clearly visible – it was only achieved at different times, and even given up in certain cases later on.

Regarding the remaining two deities, Brahmā for the zenith and Viṣṇu for the nadir, their inclusion has only been reported from Ghāṇṣarāv/Rajasthan. It is noteworthy, however, that in the earlier diagrammatic ceiling panels, Brahmā clearly dominated the central position (**figs. 13, 14, 47, 48**), which he most probably had been allotted because of his guardianship of the zenith. In the examples from the 9th–10th centuries, the central deity is generally god Śiva or, in the case of Jaina temples, a Jina or Yakṣa (**ill. 23 e, f**). However, one case of a central Brahmā is still known from the later period (**fig. 130**).