The kūṭāgāra or, from men's house to mansion in eastern India and South-east Asia.¹

When one looks up kūṭāgāra in the Dictionaries one will find in Monier Williams for the few real Sanskrit references existing the meanings 'an upper room, apartment on the top of a house.' These only tell us something about its location and function, not about its form though the compound kūṭāgāra itself points to it. This information subsequently came from Rhys Davids and Stede who for their Pāli-English Dictionary had many more references at their disposal because we probably have to do with a kind of building which has its origin in the eastern part of India. They give as meanings 'a building with a peaked roof or pinnacles, probably gabled; or with an upper story.' They could have been more explicit had they known Jouveau-Dubreuil's Archéologie du Sud de l'Inde as this scholar had worked already before 1914 extensively on the development of the kūṭāgāra restricting himself to pure history of art.

This induced Coomaraswamy, about 1930, in the frame of his studies of architectural terms, also to deal with the facts with which the Middle Indo-Aryan texts he had to hand at the time provided him. The translators of these texts, however, hardly took any notice of his works — the last to be written on the subject to my knowledge.²

Taking this fact as an opportunity once more to revert to the kūṭāgāra I should like to first sum up Coomaraswamy's results and add some observations of my own in order eventually to

¹ The French original of this paper will appear with more notes in the Bulletin d'Etudes Indiennes in Paris (1987 ?). I should like to thank Professor T.S. Maxwell and Mrs S. Zingel for making adjustments to my English phraseology. — For illustrations see P. Brown, Indian Architecture. Bombay, 1976.
2 Dr. H. Sarkar, of New Delhi, kindly informed me at the conference on The Shastric Tradition in the Indian Arts held at Heidelberg in July 1986 of an article by Dr. A. Ghosh and himself entitled "Beginnings of sculptural Art in South-east Asia: a stele from Amarāvatī", in: Ancient India 20-21 (1966), pp. 168-177, esp. p. 172 and plate XL showing the caitya-arched entrance of a building with a vaulted roof with three pinnacles. Inside there is a pair of Buddha-pāda. The left upper corner over the roof bears an inscription saying [Vesa]liya (-ye) viharati Mahāvane kuṭāgāra[r-a-sā]lāya '(The Lord) dwells in the kuṭāgāra-cottage in Mahāvana at Vaiśāli.' This seems to be the oldest representation extant of a kuṭāgāra inscriptio

Upper part of a pillar found among the ruins of the Bharhut stūpa (ca. 150 B.C.). The inscription on the sanctuary's cupola says that it represents Sudhammā, the assembly hall of the Gods, at the time of the Buddha's Hair Relic festival.

The palace to the right of it is Vejayanta, Indra's residence. (A.K. Coomaraswamy, La sculpture de Bharhut. Paris, 1956. Planche xii, Fig. 32)
discuss its geographic extension and possible origin. To begin
with, it strikes us that the construction in question, or part
of it, is more frequent in Middle Indo-Aryan languages than in
Old Indian.

From Coomaraswamy's papers it is clear that the meaning of
some architectural terms in a certain context is difficult to
define, e.g. as regards kūṭa and kaṇṇika which are both equally
roof-plates to which the curved rafters converge in apsidal form

Kuṭāgāra, sīha-panjara, hammīya and canda-sāla all pass for
separate spaces in a large building each with a roof of its own.
Kuṭāgāra, however, also occurs as a kind of roof ornament or
pinnacle, whereas Coomaraswamy elsewhere expresses the opinion
that sīha-panjara would really be a 'windowed bay.' The whole
terminology of sāla he considers similarly difficult. In definin
things from textual sources one has to bear in mind that one
largely depends on commentaries written after all by monks.

At different places in his articles, sometimes adding "all
references and representations considered" Coomaraswamy has de-
ined kuṭāgāra in more than one way, e.g. in JAOS in 1928 'a
house with a finial (or finials) or 'an honourable building'
whereas in Eastern Art in 1931 he states that "the term kuṭāgāra
especially when combined with -sāla may sometimes mean an entire
building with a peaked roof, the 'gabled mansion' of Pāli trans-
lators, but I am not convinced of this; and usually the kuṭāgāra
is a self-contained and separately roofed pavilion on any storey
of a pāsāda, either a gabled pent-house on the roof (...) or
more often a gabled chamber on other storeys." Finally, in IHQ
in 1938 Coomaraswamy again admits of a general meaning 'gabled
house.' However, in the Tipiṭaka passage in which good qualities
such as behaviour and faith, so to speak as contribuents to
samādhi are compared to the converging rafters of a kūṭāgāra he takes the latter to have "really a domed rather than a ridged or even a pointed roof."

In 1947 Coomaraswamy's remarks were provided with a parallel from Jain sources by J.C. Jain's useful cultural study Life in Ancient India as depicted in the Jain Canons whereas Moti Chandra only paraphrased both at the All India Oriental Conference in 1951.

For, in the Scriptures of the Śvetāmbara Jains kūṭāgāra is also found, but the references are disappointing in technical details its form being compared e.g. to trees or to Mahāvīra's frontal bone, in the first case in a long list of architectural terms. Here, as in Pāli, the kūṭāgāra's or kūṭāgāra-sāla's being weatherproof (or rather, their not being so) seems occasionally to be mentioned. Sometimes, then, the adjective duhacā-littā 'smeared on both sides' appears. This is important, because it supports Buddhaghosa's explanation of the ambiguous Pāli compound ullittāvalitta by 'smeared inside and outside' against the Pāli -English Dictionary's etymological translation by 'smeared up and down, i.e. all round' and proves the latter wrong.

As to this, the information from the texts nicely supplements data from architecture in which there no longer exist kūṭāgāras as separate upper class accommodations (as opposed to houses for ordinary people) of the type offered already to the Buddha himself in the forest at Vesālī, and later to his monks as a dwelling during the rainy season. The only buildings of this kind that have come down to us are, in fact, sacred ones, and they are either hewn in the rock like the Lomaś Rṣi cave at Barābar (South of Rājgīr; 3rd cent. B.C.), Ajaṇṭā and Eḻūrā, Bhājā (between Bombay and Poona) etc., or else have a different function, like the massive monuments in Māmallapuram. The original ones,
however, made of mud and wood, and thereby not fire-resistant which very fact is hinted at by a Pāli text have long since disappeared. On the other hand, some so-called caitya halls such as the ones at Guntupalli or Bhāja (3rd/2nd cent. B.C.) give us a good idea of the interior construction.

We have just referred to a kutāgāra's attributes that seem to pertain to a weather-proof state, for which purpose the Buddha (at Vinaya II 148,24) explicitly allowed a coating on both sides as a temperature insulation. In doing so we had in mind particularly nivāta which may signify 'protected from the wind', but also 'safe' and is followed by nivāta-gambhīra; gambhīra means 'deep, dense' when used of a forest, as well as 'secret, hidden.' Other adjectives in this context, such as gutta 'guarded' and gutta-duvāra 'with doors guarded' or Pāli phusit'-aggala 'with fastened (clinched) bolts (or better: door-wings)' (PED) and pihita-vātapāna 'with windows shut' do not necessarily go with being weather-proof. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that Pāli gutta-duvāra is used only figuratively, that is of a monk guarding the "doors of his senses." We retain this stock list for the purpose of later on defining the original function of the kutāgāra and have yet to occupy ourselves with a use of this building to find which in India may at first strike us as slightly out of place. The Indians do, however, hold themselves to be its inventors – the inventors, that is, of the sauna – janta-ghara in Pāli, janta-hara in Prākrit, afterwards sanskritised as yantra-grha, whereas Sanskrit earlier borrowed from an unknown but probably Middle Indo-Aryan source the word jentakā.

The physician Caraka (14,46) describes the construction of this structure at the beginning of our era as follows, prescribing also its site: 'on a nice, even, fertile, black or yellow
The metaphoric meaning of Pāli gutta-duvāra is only possible as long as the kuṭāgāra gable is remembered as a face or with a face.
Sivika with a kutagara on top from an Amaravati coping relief (Coomaraswamy, "Early Indian Architecture", EA III [1931], Plate xcix Fig. 25).
plot of land in the northern or eastern part of the village the
patient should have a kutāgāra built pointed towards these same
directions. It should stand on the south or east side of a pond
some 3,5 metres from the edge, hemispherical, 7,30 metres high
and in diameter. All along the wall a bench should be placed,
and in the centre a round clay stove as tall as a man and of
1,80 metre diameter with many holes.' It remains unclear why
Caraka called the sudatorium kutāgāra.

Incidentally, saunas already existed in Buddhist monasteries
in pre-Christian times. The Vinaya pāli does not inform us
either about their shape or about an oven. The text, however,
speaks about a half-timber wall and a door with a bolt as well
as about a probably open fire-place for one was allowed to pro-
tect oneself against the heat by means of water. Perhaps the
structure carved out of the rock at Bangala Motta Paramba, taken
by Jouveau Dubreuil to be an Āgnīdhṛīya-hut, in fact is a sauna
which would equally well have needed the kind of chimney visible
but I have not seen it myself.

The kutāgāra is found not only as an ornament on buildings,
but also on palanquins as is shown on a parapet relief at Amarā-
vatī, whereas the chassis looks like a covered waggon framework.
Here we apparently have to do with a luxury object of a later
period, probably after Christ, for the Canons of Jains and Bud-
dhists only mention śibīka-type palanquins for the use of sick
bhikkhus only.

We first learn of kutāgāra palanquins in the commentaries
Buddhaghosa wrote in Ceylon about 470 A.D. By that time the old
Vinaya ban on means of transport had fallen into disuse and a
contemporaneous or even invented state of things was projected
back into the past. Thus e.g. we read of Sakka, i.e. Indra, the
king of the gods turned into the Buddha's servant, addressing Vissakamma the divine technician and architect in the following words: "Friend, today the Lord (i.e. the Buddha) will go on a 3,000 miles' begging tour. Have 500 kuṭāgāras produced and make them ready on the entrance building of the Jeta forest (i.e. probably of the monastery named after its donor Jeta in that forest)."

Vissakamma does what he is told. Then, for the Buddha there is a kuṭāgāra with four openings or entrances, for his two main disciples the same with two, and for the other monks kuṭāgāras with a single entrance. When all have got into their travelling carriage the latter rise into the air for, according to Buddhaghosa, the conquest of gravitation marks those who have given up earthly bonds. It is interesting for the development of Southern Buddhism as well as for the semantics of kuṭāgāra that this holds true also when the occupant has entered nirvāṇa, to use the periphrastic terminology customary with monks, i.e. when he has died.

Such a case is narrated by Buddhaghosa concerning the Ceylonese therā Kujjatissa who feeling his end near told his fellow monks to put a second bench (pallanka) in his kuṭāgāra. Now he either died in it or was placed into it after his demise - at any rate the kuṭāgāra subsequently drifted with him to the Thūpārāma sanctuary. There another monk named Mahāvyaggha who at the time was teaching the Vinaya rules high up in the nearby Lohapāsāda palace caught sight of it. Mahāvyaggha then travelled through the air to Kujjatissa's kuṭāgāra, sat down on the second bench and also entered Nirvāṇa.

Here, therefore, kuṭāgāra has turned from 'portable seat' to 'bier.' This emerges still more clearly from the Mahāvaṃsa, the older Ceylonese chronicle. For when Mahinda, the first missionary to the island, died, about 200 B.C., he was placed
Toda hut near Ooty. Notice the stick-like objects at roof top. Copyright W. Bollée
into a gold coffin, this again into a gold kūṭāgarā which was burnt on a pyre a week later.\(^1\)

After this sketch of kūṭāgarā as a multi-purpose construction and of the semantic change involved we now turn to its geographical spread in order subsequently to occupy ourselves more closely with its possible original function. Coomaraswamy went into the former matter only in India, but he proved the existence of kūṭāgaras all over Southeast Asia in his photographs.

When in some pre-Christian period Jains and Buddhists emigrated to the West of India the kūṭāgarā as a type of building followed in their wake from the Barabar hills via Bhārhut and Sāncī to Ajañṭā and Elūrā, Kārlī and Bhājā southwards probably first by sea to Ceylon, later overland to Amarāvati and Māmalla-puram.

For us the kūṭāgarā's characteristic is the horseshoe-shaped front – an external mark, therefore –, but to the Indians it is the kāṇṇika, i.e. the inner ring around the rafters, was just as typical, as emerges from the texts. The comparison to the horseshoe would by the way have been unintelligible to the ancient Indians because to my knowledge they did not shoe their horses. It is remarkable, though, that they did not use a term like mukha-vatī 'horizontal circle, ring; rim of a pot etc.' for the kūṭāgarā's front. We shall return to this point later on.

At least since Jouveau-Dubreuil the kūṭāgarā's singular form has been traced back to an oblong hut with a vaulted roof common in India in pre-Christian times as is shown e.g. by the caitya hall in Kārlī ( \(^1\)-2nd cent. A.D.). Around 1910 the Toda tribe on the Nilgiri plateau on the southwest coast still used this type of hut "at the roof ends of which vertically implanted

A similar shift of meaning is shown by Prākrit sīyā (Sanskrit sībikā); see J. Charpentier, "Die Legende des heiligen Pārśva", ZDMG 69 (1915), p. 337.

The custom of placing the dead in representations of men's houses is found also in China as is proved by the bronze coffin used in the Dian culture (5th cent. B.C.) and now in the Museum of the Yunnan Province in Kunming. The Rietberg Museum in Zürich shows it in an exhibition this summer (catalogue 1986).
pieces of wood can be seen that seem to explain the V shaped part crowning the buddhist horseshoe" — to quote Jouveau-Dubreuil. However, nothing of the kind can be seen in Thurston's photographs in his Castes and Tribes of Southern India; and on the oldest detached stone building, the hall at Cezărla dating from the Gupta period (4th-5th cent. A.D.) the gable end has the shape of a supplementary triangle with a curving hypotenuse.

Previously we mentioned the gable end of the so-called "horseshoe" which often occurs in a V shape, though also as a kind of slim pointed vase, and, on the Gañesaratha at Māmalla-puram, as a trident on a small human head. As is well known, anthropomorphic representations appear later than theriomorphic or symbolic ones. Thus from Bāgh Gumpha to the NW of Bhuvaneśwar (about 100 B.C.) one knows of a tiger's head with wide open muzzle over the cave's entrance; in later styles in the South it is a lion's head and is therefore called simha-mukham. Moreover, in Amarāvatī two centuries later a yaksi was carved in a "horseshoe" on the top of which, and partly covering it, a śṛi-vatse is found (representing prakṛti) which from a distance resembles a face with its tongue stretched out: the roof end.

Now this fact reminded Held, in his thesis on the Mahābhārata, ¹ of southeast Asian gable faces on which Rassers, an ethnologist, had worked.² Neither of them, by the way, used Coomaraswamy's articles any more than the latter, apparently, knew of the former. In his treatise on the Javanese theatre Rassers had shown, by means of sacred men's houses such as those in the region of the river Sepik in New Guinea,³ that their front side with the initiation demon's mask on the gable is identical with the stylised triangular kekayon or hand screen which the operating dalang waves at the beginning and end of
The "Tigre cave" at Saluvankuppam (A. Jaenicke / H. Goetz, Mahabalipuram. Krefeld 1965. Plate 13)


3 In New Guinea, such houses nowadays are community houses.
Javanese kekayon

Gable of a men's house, New Guinea

W.H. Rassers, op. cit.
each scene; in so doing he either reveals or conceals the ritual acts from the point of view of the spectators who as non-initiates sit in front of the white screen (kelir) separating the sacred from the profane world in the shadow play. The leather puppet show (wayang kulit) is old — though we have no textual evidence for it before ca. 1000 A.D. — and clearly bears South Indian influence. Its performances symbolize the cosmos, react-ualize mythical events and connect the spectators with their real and adopted ancestors, i.e. the heroes of the Indian epics, divine beings, just as the Nāṭyaśāstra — the theatre handbook — prescribes a divine comedy as the original piece treating cosmogonic events on a human scale.

Returning now to our point of departure we can say that the kutāgarā originally was a men's house the horseshoe-shaped front of which represents the open mouth — mukha-vāṭṭi — of the initiation demon; in the South it is still called simha-mukha, as we have seen. Now it also becomes clear why the rafter ends — his teeth — are mostly represented vertically. Further, in view of the fact that the religious orders are in the first place men's sodalities, it should not surprise us that the Buddha and his monks live in kutāgaras in the forest, just as the sacred men's houses are usually situated outside the village, and that the doors are guarded, most often by fabulous monsters, against incursion by the uninitiated. The Buddha is also an initiator: the monk Kassapa calls himself his son born from his mouth (Saṃyutta-Nikāya II 221,23).

The Jain rock monument of Rāni Gumphā in Orissa shows that in India, too, there was still a connection between kutāgarā and cult drama, for a long frieze containing dramatical episodes runs along the outer walls of the upper storey. Percy Brown
1 I would not be surprised if the manyheaded nāga sheltering the Buddha, Viṣṇu etc. derived from the mukha-vaṭṭī and perhaps the same holds true of the ring, horseshoe-shaped or circular, of flames around Śiva Naṭa-rāja.

thinks that the courtyard and terraces of Rāni Gumphā consti-
tuted an open air theatre in which during fairs the scenes
mentioned were acted, like the so-called devil dances in Tibetan
monasteries.

Finally, the gods inhabit the sacred men's house behind the
village in the woods with which it is sometimes even identified.
The forest is represented by a tree, the divine tree of life,
the Banaspati in Hindu-javanese art which being the lord of the
forest of initiation is identical with the demon of initiation.
His head appears on the gable of the kuṭâgâra and what goes
back to it as Rāhu- or Kīrtimukha, Garuḍa, Kāla or Nāga – in
Nepal and Burma also on columns in front of temples and monas-
teries. Jungle animals are found on the wayang kekayon as well
as on the gables of buildings. Among these, aquatic creatures
such as shellfish and makaras remind us of Varuṇa, the god of
death and the seas, for to initiation largely belongs enlighten-
ment about the nature of death as a birth to something new.

1 Cf. Bhagavadgītā 11,7ff., esp. 25 where Arjuna compares
 Viṣṇu's mouths with their terrible tusks to the devouring fire
of Time: daṃṣṭrā-karālāni ca te mukhāni / drṣṭvāiva kālānala
-saṃnibhāni and W.D. O'Flaherty's discussion of this passage in
her Dreams, Illusion and other Realities. Chicago, 1984, p. 110 f.
The Golden Gate (Sun dhoka) of the Bhaktapur palace (Nepal) with the Garuḍa on top, then the Nāgas (snake deities living in the sea) and snails and, at the bottom, makaras (fabulous sea animals with a crocodile body and an elephant's trunk) with protruding tongue. In the centre we see Taleju, the 16-armed Šaiva Goddess of the royal family. The Goddess is accompanied by Šrī and Lakkṣmī representing the divine rivers Ganga and Yamuna. The gate opens to Taleju's temple. Copyright W. Bollée.
A more recent development of the traditional type is found in the Dragon temple (Nagayon) at Amarapura in Burma. King Bodaw-paya chose this site to found his capital in 1783. The aquatic animals were replaced by vegetal ornaments; the gable head has become a kālaśa (vase as an auspicious symbol) and the Nāga projects well beyond the roof. W.B. Bollée