this development: “the most venerated shrine in Arabia, which was the first model of a Muhammadan mosque, strongly suggests a Buddhist temple or monastery filled with Mahāyānist images”. Havell argued that when the Buddhist images were removed from the temple, empty niches remained behind, and these were repurposed as mihrab indicating the direction of prayer. Extrapolating from later cases of Islamization of the built environment, he explained that in private homes such empty niches were used as “cupboards or receptacles for the hookah, rose-water vessel, lamp, or other articles of domestic use” (Havell 1920, 107).

The history of Hāritī worship may lend strength to the suggestion that a Hāritī statue ended up in western Arabia. The goddess was popular in Gandharan art and was especially associated with the protection of children from smallpox (Ahuja 2016). A.D.H. Bivar suggested a more specific reason for the flourishing of Hāritī representations in Gandharan art during the empire of the Kuṣāṇas (second century BCE – third century CE) in particular. He related the spread of the cult to the outbreak of the Antonine Plague in the Roman Empire in 165 CE, citing evidence from throughout the Asian continent, including southern Arabia and China. Assuming that the disease in question was smallpox and originated in South Asia, he proposed that “the epidemic was already growing in the reign of Kaniṣka. Within a few years the infection would have been reaching pandemic proportions, and the numerous Hāritī images of Gandhāra would thus reflect the growing desperation of the Buddhist devotees” (Bivar 1970, 21). The Kuṣāṇas are widely recognized as instrumental for the westward expansion of Buddhism.16 If Hāritī was especially popular during the Kuṣāṇa empire, it seems a little more plausible that a stray Hāritī statue or other representation may have ended up in western Arabia. Whether it served as a model for a Kaʿba painting is something else.

The theory of Hāritī in the Kaʿba requires a closer examination of the iconographic tradition in order to substantiate the possibility of a misidentification. Al-Azraqī cites his grandfather for more details. His grandfather transmits a report from Ibn Jurayj, who overheard an exchange between Sulaymān ibn Mūsā al-Shāmī and and ‘Aṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ. The former enquired, “Have you seen in the Kaʿba an image (timthāl) of Maryam/Mary and ʿĪsā/Jesus,” whereupon ‘Ataʾ affirmed, “Yes, I have seen in the Kaʿba an image of the adorned Maryam with her adorned son ʿĪsā sitting in her lap” (Al-Azraqī, [1403] 1983, I, 167; King 2004, 221, slightly modified). King identifies numerous parallels—Christian representations of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus that match this description. The representations of Hāritī surveyed by Ahuja show the Buddhist goddess surrounded by about half a dozen children, mostly around her legs, which

16 For the Kuṣāṇas and the lasting significance of Greek and Hellenism see Halkias 2013. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (ca. 596–664) also describes the worship of Hāritī in Gandhara. See Xuanzang 1884, 110-11.