





WHISPERING OF INSCRIPTIONS

SOUTH INDIAN EPIGRAPHY

AND ART HISTORY

VOLUME II.



Tripurāntaka, north wall of the *vimāna*, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram.

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# WHISPERING OF INSCRIPTIONS

## SOUTH INDIAN EPIGRAPHY AND ART HISTORY

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## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

Ch. X	<i>Sanskrit inscriptions of the Eastern Cālukya, P. Estienne</i>	....	1
X.1	Introduction	.....	1
X.2	Myth and history	.....	3
X.2.1	Birudas	.....	5
X.2.2	The king between men and gods	.....	5
X.2.3	When the king condenses various deities	.....	6
X.2.4	The status of Sanskrit	.....	7
X.3	An epigraphic mahākāvya	.....	9
X.3.1	Intertextuality as a key	.....	9
X.3.2	Ravikīrti's eulogy as a mahākāvya	.....	11
X.3.3	Presence of great mahākāvyas through their topoi	.....	14
X.3.4	Figures of speech	.....	17
X.3.5	Epical background	.....	20
X.4	Conclusion	.....	22
Ch. XI	<i>Exploring inter-textuality between Mediæval Tamil inscriptions and bhakti literature, V. Renganathan</i>	.....	27
XI.1	Introduction	.....	27
XI.2	Mūvāyira Dikṣitarkaḷ and Mūvāyira Vaḷākam	.....	28
XI.3	The three forms of Śiva in the Naṭarāja temple of Chidambaram	.....	30
XI.4	The image of the dancing Śiva	.....	31
XI.5	Tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceytal	.....	34
XI.6	The dance of Śiva in Veḷḷiyampalam	.....	36
XI.7	Music, ōtuvār tradition and search for a method of indigenous worship	.....	39
XI.8	Colonial and post-colonial modes of knowledge production	.....	41
XI.9	Implicit versus explicit: contest over hegemony	..	42
XI.10	Cōḷa temple architecture and the evolution of indigenous South Indian temple culture in the pre-colonial period	.....	44
XI.11	Concluding remarks	.....	45

Ch. XII	<i>Architectural bilingualism in the Cōla kingdom,</i> <i>C. Schmid</i> .....	53
XII.1	Introduction .....	54
XII.2	A puzzling location .....	55
XII.3	A puzzling epigraphy .....	58
XII.4	Praśastis, Rājendracōla and Gangai .....	64
XII.5	Conquest of the Southeastern kingdom of Śrīvijaya	72
XII.6	Sanskrit, Gangai and Kitaram .....	77
XII.7	Bilingualism of Tanjore and Gangai .....	83
XII.8	Iconography of the Gangai temple .....	86
XII.9	Conclusion .....	91
Ch. XIII	<i>Recent archæological discoveries and their impact</i> <i>on South Indian archæology, K. Rajan</i> .....	99
XIII.1	Introduction .....	100
XIII.1.1	Iron Age and its implications .....	101
XIII.1.2	Introduction of iron technology .....	103
XIII.1.3	Introduction of steel .....	106
XIII.1.4	Beginning of the Early Historic Period .....	110
XIII.2	Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions .....	115
XIII.2.1	Cave inscriptions .....	115
XIII.2.2	Inscribed potsherds .....	117
XIII.2.3	Nature of inscribed potsherds .....	120
XIII.2.4	Date of Brāhmī script .....	125
XIII.2.5	Summary .....	127
Ch. XIV	<i>Epigraphy to the rescue of art history? A. Davrinche</i> ...	135
XIV.1	Introduction .....	135
XIV.2	The fortified city of Senji .....	137
XIV.3	Epigraphy of Senji .....	142
XIV.4	The Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple and the use of the past .....	145
XIV.5	Conclusion .....	155
Ch. XV	<i>Vijayanagara iconography, M. Le Sauce-Carnis</i> .....	159
XV.1	Introduction .....	159
XV.2	The Rāmāyaṇa .....	162
XV.3	Kṛṣṇa .....	168
XV.4	Other avatāras of Viṣṇu .....	172
XV.5	The vyūhas .....	175
XV.6	Conclusion .....	177

Ch. XVI	<i>Brahmā and Śiva in Pallava and Cōḷa iconography, V. Olivier</i>	181
Ch. XVII	<i>Jain images, Hindu images, K. Ladrech</i>	209
XVII.1	Introduction	209
XVII.2	Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla	211
XVII.3	Brahmadeva	215
XVII.4	Converted shrines and deities	224
XVII.5	Conclusion	231
Ch. XVIII	<i>Visual arts and epigraphical poetry, É. Parlier-Renault</i>	235
XVIII.1	Introduction	235
XVIII.2	The poem	237
XVIII.3	Gaṅgādhara	252
XVIII.4	Epigraphical poetry and sculpture	254
XVIII.5	Conclusion	261



## TABLES OF VOL. II.

1	Ch. XII Four copper plates of the reign of Rājendracōla	65
2	Ch. XIII List of sites with inscribed potsherds in Tamil Nadu .....	118
3	Ch. XIII Radiometric dates for Tamil-Brāhmī – A ....	123
4	Ch. XIII Radiometric dates for Tamil-Brāhmī – B ....	124





## FIGURES OF VOL. II.

1	Ch. XII The temple of Gangaikondacholapuram, second quarter of the 11th c. ....	57
2	Ch. XII The Bṛhadiśvara of Tanjore, end of the 10th to beginning of the 11th c. ....	57
3	Ch. XII Map indicating the location of the two temples of Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram .....	60
4	Ch. XII Inscription at Gangai: west-northern corner (shrine), second half of the 11th c. ....	62
5	Ch. XII Tanjore: a monument to be written on (western direction, base, shrine), beginning of the 11th c. ....	63
6	Ch. XII One local temple engraved with a <i>Meykkīrtti</i> of Rājarāja (Puḷḷamaṅkai, western direction, shrine, wall), end of the 10th c. ....	66
7	Ch. XII One local temple engraved with a <i>Meykkīrtti</i> of Rājendra (Tirumaṅkalam, western direction, shrine, base), second quarter of the 11th c. .	67
8	Ch. XII 'Leiden Larger' Plates, plate 4a, beginning of the 11th c. ....	70
9	Ch. XII Seal of the Ecālam Plates, 1036 .....	71
10	Ch. XII The Ecālam Plates, 1036 .....	73
11	Ch. XII The populated southern façade of the Gangai temple, second quarter of the 11th c. ....	78
12	Ch. XII The populated western façade of the Gangai temple (shrine) .....	79
13	Ch. XII The destroyer of the three cities, Bṛhadiśvara of Tanjore (western wall, shrine), beginning of the 11th c. ....	82
14	Ch. XII The Brahmā of the northern façade of the temple at Gangai, beginning of the 11th c.? .....	84
15	Ch. XII A Brahmā that follows a typically southern iconography (Puñcai, end of the 10th to beginning of the 11th c.) .....	88
16	Ch. XIII Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from a transepted cist at Kodumanal .....	102
17	Ch. XIII Crucible furnace exposed in Kodumanal excavations .....	105

18	Ch. XIII Thelunganur Steel Sword collected from a grave .....	107
19	Ch. XIII Map showing the Tamil-Brāhmī yielding sites in Tamil Nadu .....	109
20	Ch. XIII Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from Kodumanal – A .....	111
21	Ch. XIII Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from Kodumanal – B .....	113
22	Ch. XIII Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from a transepted cist at Porunthal .....	114
23	Ch. XIV Rājagiri hill and Chettikulam Tank from Chandrayandurgam hill .....	138
24	Ch. XIV Map of Senji Fort and close area .....	141
25	Ch. XIV Plan of Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple; (1) 1391 inscription, (2) 1550 inscription, (3) 1573 inscription .	144
26	Ch. XIV South of Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple from Chandrayandurgam hill .....	146
27	Ch. XIV <i>Garbhagr̥ha</i> in ‘plain style’ of the west sanctuary (left), and north-west face of the <i>rāyagopura</i> in ‘decorated style,’ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple (right) .....	147
28	Ch. XIV Raṅganātha temple, Rājagiri hill .....	148
29	Ch. XIV Bālaraṅganātha temple, Rājagiri hill .....	149
30	Ch. XIV <i>Garbhagr̥ha</i> of the central sanctuary of Paṭṭābhirāma temple with ‘decorated style’ (left), and its small facing Garuḍa shrine in ‘plain style’ on the east end of the platform (right) ...	151
31	Ch. XIV Veṇugopāla temple, Kōṭṭaimalai Mountain, Paḍaivīḍu .....	152
32	Ch. XIV Venkiṭācalapati temple, Kṛṣṇapuram .....	154
33	Ch. XV Map of Rāyālasīma and the sites studied .....	161
34	Ch. XV Cennakeśava temple, Somapālem. Characteristic pillar of Vijayanagara. ....	163
35	Ch. XV Sixteen-pillared <i>maṇḍapa</i> outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobilam. The birth of Daśaratha’s sons. ....	165
36	Ch. XV Cennakeśava temple, Somapālem. Hanumān’s meeting with Kālanemi. ....	167
37	Ch. XV Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, Tāḍpatri. Kṛṣṇa’s childhood. ....	169

38	Ch. XV Kodandarāma temple, Voṇṭmiṭṭa. <i>Arjuna</i> trees episode. ....	171
39	Ch. XV Sixteen-pillared <i>maṇḍapa</i> outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobilam. Viṣṇu's <i>avatāras</i> . ..	173
40	Ch. XV Sixteen-pillared <i>maṇḍapa</i> outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobilam. The <i>avatāra</i> Narasimha. ....	174
41	Ch. XV Kodandarāma temple (Voṇṭmiṭṭa), Cennakeśava temple (Somapālem) and Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple (Tāḍpatri). The <i>avatāra</i> Matsya killing Hiraṇyākṣa. ....	175
42	Ch. XV Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, Tāḍpatri. Nine <i>vyūhas</i> . ....	176
43	Ch. XVI Brahmā, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	183
44	Ch. XVI Śiva cutting off Brahmā's fifth head, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	185
45	Ch. XVI Brahmā grants Rāvaṇa his invincibility, east wall of Brahmā's niche, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	187
46	Ch. XVI Brahmā and a devotee, west wall of Brahmā's niche, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	189
47	Ch. XVI Birth of Skanda, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	192
48	Ch. XVI Wedding of Skanda, northern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram ....	194
49	Ch. XVI Brahmā-Śiva, Centalai ....	198
50	Ch. XVI Brahmā-Śiva, Collector Office, Thanjavur ...	200
51	Ch. XVI Śiva with <i>jaṭā-bhāra</i> , Collector Office, Thanjavur ....	202
52	Ch. XVII Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla. Peramaṇṭur (Viḷuppuram dt, Tiṇṭiṇaṇam tk), Candraprabha temple. ....	212
53	Ch. XVII Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla (detail). Uppuvēlūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Vāṇūr tk), Ādinātha temple. ....	213
54	Ch. XVII Brahmadeva. Brahmastambha in front of the Candraprabha temple in Vijayamaṅgalam (Īrōṭu dt, Peruntuṇṇai tk). ....	216

55	Ch. XVII Brahmadeva. Mēlcittāmūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Ceñci tk), Pārśvanātha temple. ....	217
56	Ch. XVII Inside view of the Bhagavatī Malaiyamman cave-temple in Tiyaḱaturkam (Viḷuppuram dt, Kaḷḷakkuṛicci tk) .....	220
57	Ch. XVII Rock-cut Jina image. Tirumūrttimalai (Tiruppūr dt, Uṭumalaipēṭṭai tk), Amaṇaliṅgeśvara temple. ....	221
58	Ch. XVII Yakṣī Ambikā / Dharmadevī. Nākarkōvil (Kaṇṇiyākumari dt, Akattisvaram tk), Nāgarāja temple. ....	223
59	Ch. XVII Jina worshipped as Murukan. Moṭṭamalai (Tiruccirāppaḷḷi dt, Maṇappārai tk). ....	225
60	Ch. XVII Jina worshipped as Viṣṇu. Puṭuppēr (Kāñcīpuram dt, Śrīperumputūr tk), Ādikeśavaperumāḷ temple. ....	226
61	Ch. XVII Jinas worshipped as the Hindu Trimūrti. Puttūrmalai (Maturai dt, Ucilampaṭṭi tk). ..	228
62	Ch. XVII Jina worshipped as Attāḷi Amman. Āḷiyāru (Kōyamputtūr dt, Vālpārai tk). ....	230
63	Ch. XVIII Gaṅgādharamūrti detail (Śiva), Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, beginning of the 7th c. ....	236
64	Ch. XVIII Gaṅgādharamūrti, Elephanta, ca. 550 ....	240
65	Ch. XVIII Aihole (Rāvaṇa Phaḍi cave), end of the 6th c. ....	242
66	Ch. XVIII Viṣṇu Varāha, Bādāmī, end of the 6th c. ...	244
67	Ch. XVIII Gaṅgādharamūrti, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram, shrine of the enclosure, first quarter of the 8th c. ....	248
68	Ch. XVIII Kṛṣṇa supporting the Govardhana mount, Mahābalipuram, 7th c. ....	251

CH. X  
THE SANSKRIT INSCRIPTIONS OF THE EASTERN  
CĀḤUKYA  
PERRINE ESTIENNE

ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the characteristics of the epigraphic texts belonging to the corpus of the eastern CāḤukya. It will first analyse the historical data provided by the inscriptions on the dynasty of eastern CāḤukya, together with the technical information on the agents and the types of donations. The textual and literary specifications of these inscriptions are also analysed. It will highlight the epigraphs' poetical qualities and the link they have with *kāvya*. Finally, it will show that the use of poetical processes in these texts is part of the legitimisation of the king.

X.1 INTRODUCTION: EPIGRAPHY BETWEEN HISTORY, IDEOLOGY  
AND LITERATURE

AS everybody knows, inscriptions are the main source for historians dealing with Ancient India,<sup>1</sup> since other records such as chronicles are missing, apart from those written by foreign travelers and a few by Indian authors for hagiographic reasons. But the historical information which can be drawn out of epigraphic material, at least as far as macro-history is concerned,<sup>2</sup> is far from being as reliable as one might expect, because the great inscriptions issued by rulers, involving such historical data as dynastic genealogy and succession to the throne, were mainly intended to eulogise the king and his ascendance, or to legitimate his sovereignty through the expression

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<sup>1</sup> According to R. SOLOMON, 80% of our historical knowledge before 1000 CE comes from epigraphy (Solomon, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Inscriptions, be they issued by rulers or by individuals, provide valuable information about what could be termed 'micro-history.' Our knowledge of administrative systems, organisation of water supply, temple management etc., is drawn from numerous epigraphs recording grants of many kinds that were engraved on copper-plates or on the walls of temples.

of his conformity to the norms.<sup>3</sup> Royal charts, in addition to the data which concern the grant they were designed to record, contain panegyrics of the royal donor, and most of these are shaped as pieces of literature, that is to say, as epic poems composed in *kāvya* style (the style of court poetry), referring to myths and idealising their subject-matter. However, for that very reason, inscriptions may provide a kind of information which is not properly historical, in the sense of the history of events, but which is quite valuable for one who deals with ideology and culture.

The present study proposes to highlight the ideological and literary aspects of inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> To this end, it will focus on the epigraphic corpus of a South Indian dynasty, among the most important in the history of the region, the so-called 'Eastern Cālukya,' or 'Cālukya of Veṅgi.' The kings who belonged to this dynasty ruled over a large territory covering a part of present Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, from the 7th up to the 11th century CE, and challenged the Rāṣṭrakūṭa and the Pallava, against whom they sustained wars for the extension or the preservation of the borders of their dominions – until they had to submit to the Cōla and became feudatories of the latter.

Their corpus contains fifty-six inscriptions, which are of two kinds. The first kind consists of fifty-four grants which are engraved on both faces of copper-plates, bound in sets by means of a ring bearing the dynastic seal, i.e. a boar topped with a crescent moon.<sup>5</sup> Most of them are not dated,<sup>6</sup> except for Pulakeśin II's charts, and record the gift of villages, or more accurately of land-revenues provided by these villages, to priests or religious communities. They contain a eulogy of the king, named *praśasti*, followed by a technical portion which provides the necessary information about the gifted lands, its borders, the taxes, and the incomes. They usually end with the author's and scribe's names. The second type

<sup>3</sup> As a result, the history of events and that of dynasties must be based on cross-checking, to a still larger extent than in the case of some other civilisations.

<sup>4</sup> This study is based on: Estienne-Monod, P. (2008) *Les Inscriptions sanskrites des Cālukya orientaux: caractéris-*

*tiques et fonction d'une littérature épigraphique.* (Thèse de doctorat). Université de Provence.

<sup>5</sup> The width of the plates varies from 10 cm to 22 cm.

<sup>6</sup> Which implies that one has to rely on the genealogy to establish a chronological classification.

consists of two inscriptions which are engraved on the stone of a temple, the dedicatory epigraph of the Mēguṭi temple in Aihole, from the time of Pulakeśin II, and the rock-inscription of Yekkeri. All these epigraphs are written entirely in Sanskrit, except for the place-names, which are in Telugu. That feature might seem surprising, since they belong to a region where people used to speak Dravidian languages, and is not usual in South India.<sup>7</sup> The inscriptions of the Cālukya form a consistent corpus which has a strong unity, based on many shared characteristics, among which is their style: all of them more or less exhibit literary features which, at least as far as the eulogy is concerned, are those of refined court poetry (*kāvya*).

The present study will first review a few aspects of the ideology displayed in Eastern Cālukya epigraphs. Then it will deal with their literary character, focusing on the famous dedicatory inscription of the Mēguṭi temple in Aihole.

## X.2 MYTH AND HISTORY: THE IDEOLOGICAL TENSIONS AT WORK THROUGH THE NARRATIVE

The difficulties which the historian has to face in the attempt to construct the history of events from Ancient India's inscriptions reveal the nature of that kind of documentation, and, as a result, their significance as sources for the history of ideas. The main difficulty, besides the frequent lack of dating, is the silence about certain events, or the euphemistic way of mentioning those which are not consistent with the writer's scope, i.e. panegyrising the kingly donor. Such formulas as 'having chased his brother, he became king,' which occur quite frequently in Cālukya genealogies, suggest, without providing any factual detail, some dynastic crisis. Sometimes, they might also disguise some violent seizure of royal power by an outsider. The mystery is still deepened by the use of very stereotyped phrases, which prove to be common to all genealogies. This rhetorical apparatus aims at giving rise to the illusion of a continuous line,

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<sup>7</sup> Most of the Pallava and Cōla grants, including a summary of the donation in the Sanskrit part as well as a short eulogy in the Tamil part). The dedicatory inscriptions of the Pallava, however, are wholly in Sanskrit, as a rule. (which does not prevent the writer from

intended to legitimate the ruler. Many other examples might be mentioned, not only from genealogy, but also from the description of the deeds that the ruler and his ancestors are said to have accomplished; reality, being constantly adapted in order to fit in with the frame of a *praśasti*, fades in favour of a mythical story, which is not intended to provide the kind of information historians are in search of. Such deformations, however, are in themselves precious witnesses, if not of actual events, at least of ideology.

Delineating this particular history requires that the purpose and the means of epigraphic documents be taken into account in the first place. Roughly speaking, epigraphic charts have two purposes: i. recording the gift, by the ruler, of land-revenues to priests or communities of priests, in order to certify the grant, to give the technical data it encompasses, and to make it sustainable – while ensuring to the donor the symbolic benefit he may expect from it, in terms of legitimacy; and ii., attesting the king's superiority and divinity, by making it clear that he does not belong to the history of ordinary mankind, but to the myth. This process implies that all that confines him to ordinary human life be erased: the king's eulogy simultaneously exposes his historical destiny and describes him as the earthly representation of a deity, and the same for his ancestors. Or, more accurately, it exhibits his divinity through the narration of the events of his career. Laudation is idealisation<sup>8</sup> and rests on interpreting the real through the prism of myth.

The means to attain that scope evidently depend on the rhetoric at work throughout the epigraphs, which accounts for their literary character and their systematic recourse to the *kāvya* style. A few features of this rhetoric will be briefly considered: i. the use of royal epithets, called *birudas* (literally 'spreading noise,' 'spreading fame'); ii. the *topos* which places the king between men and gods; iii. the *topos* which makes him condense the virtues of various deities at the same time; and iv., the status of the Sanskrit language.

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<sup>8</sup> Not in a Platonic sense, as may be easily guessed.



## X.2.1 Birudas

In the Tāṇḍikonda copper-plates, King Amma II is named *samastabhuvanāśraya*-, ‘a refuge for the whole universe.’<sup>9</sup> The temple of Maheśvara and Umā referred to in the inscription is named after that *biruda*, which is quite a common practice; naming the temple after one of the king’s *birudas* makes clear that the king himself becomes the place of the ritual.<sup>10</sup> The king thus assumes the function of the divine couple in the temple, being at the same time identified with the deity and associated with him for the worship. This identification, which makes sense in the frame of *bhakti*—the devotee is supposed to become a part of his deity— is also consistent with the old Vedic conception of kingship: J. C. HEESTERMAN<sup>11</sup> shows that during the consecration ceremony the king’s names are recited, in order to perform his identification with Prajāpati.

Another example of a *biruda* used frequently, for example as applied to Amma II,<sup>12</sup> is *parameśvara*, which contains an evident double entendre (*śleṣa*) leading to the same identification: the word *parameśvara*- means ‘supreme lord’ and is applied both to the ruler and to Śiva. The frequent recourse to *śleṣa*, in this context, proves to be significant, since it is the figure *par excellence* of the process of identification, and is particularly suited for disclosing a reality beyond another reality.<sup>13</sup>

## X.2.2 The king between men and gods: the topos of verticality

The Cālukya epigraphs, just like those of other dynasties since the Gupta Era, refer to the cosmic hierarchy, according to which the king manifests the gods on earth. This hierarchy is frequently expressed by means of a vertical organisation, which places the king

<sup>9</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), No. 54 (EI XXIII, No. 25). Amma II’s claim to be such is exemplified by his patronising all religions. For example, one of his inscriptions records a gift to the Kalucumbharu temple, which is a Jain temple: the king protects all religions. Cf. *ibid.*, No. 46 (EI VII, No. 25).

<sup>10</sup> (Hocart, 1970), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> (Heesterman, 1957), p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), Nos 54–6 (IA XII, No. 76; IA XIII, No. 149; EI VII, No. 25).

<sup>13</sup> It is a typical *arthaśleṣa*-, i.e. a word which has only one signified but two referents. On the use of *śleṣa* in epigraphy, cf. (Renou, 1951), pp. 280–5, (Brocquet, 1993–4), pp. 102–5, and (Brocquet, 1996), pp. 469–95.

above men and under gods. He is thus revealed in his role as a mediator between the human and the divine. The following series of compound-epithets, which qualify the Eastern Cālukya kings from Pulakeśin II to Amma II, and which recur in the corpus and reflect a standard in use since the Guptas, clearly exhibit that *topos*:

sa sakala-ripu-nṛpati-makuṭa-taṭa-ghaṭita-maṇikiraṇa-gaṇa-madhupa-  
nikara-paricumḃita-caraṇa-sarasiruha-yugalo'yugo-locana-pada-kama-  
la-vilasan madhupāyamāno mānonnato natoddhatas samasta-bhuvanā-  
śraya-śrī-vijayāditya-mahādhira-ja-parameśvara-parama-bhaṭṭārakaḥ  
parama-māheśvaraḥ

He, whose lotus-feet are both kissed by those swarms of bees that are the numerous gems gathered on the orbs of the crowns of all his enemy kings and who acts as a bee sporting on the lotus-feet of the <god> endowed with an odd number of eyes [Śiva], who is exalted by his pride and has submitted those who were exalted <by their own>, Śrī Vijayāditya, a refuge for the whole universe, the supreme lord of great kings, the illustrious squire, the supreme devotee of the Great Lord [Śiva] ...<sup>14</sup>

This formulaic series is made of couples of complementary qualifiers which, taken together, design a sort of verticality. It is strengthened by the repetition of the same figures (the *rūpakas* [= name of a figure of speech]: *caraṇa-sarasiruha*-, *pada-kamala*-), and of the same words (*unnata*-, *nata*-, *parameśvara*-, *parama*- ... *īśvara*-), which create a constant parallelism and put the three entities, i.e. the feudatory kings, the ruler and Śiva, on the same axis. The epithet *mahārājaparameśvara*-, 'supreme lord of great kings,' is a stereotyped epithet in use since the 4th century CE in Gupta inscriptions.<sup>15</sup> In addition, here applied to Pulakeśin II, it leads to his identification with Śiva, who, in South India, was the archetype of kingship. And it does the same for his successors, who also bear this title.

### X.2.3 When the king condenses various deities

A recurring verse describing Amma II can be found in his inscriptions:

yo rupeṇa manojam vibhavana mahendram ahimakaram uru-mahasā |  
haram ari-pura-dahanena nyakkurvān bhāti vidita-dig-avani-kīrttiḥ ||

<sup>14</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), No. 54 (EI XXIII, No. 25). <sup>15</sup> (Sircar, 1965), pp. 333 & 346.

Humiliating Manoja [Kāma] by his beauty, Mahendra by his strength,  
 the <god> with hot rays [The Sun] by his extended splendour,<sup>16</sup>  
 <And> Hara [Śiva] burning down his enemy Pura when he burns down  
 the cities of his enemies,<sup>17</sup> he [Amma] shines forth, endowed with a  
 glory which is notorious throughout the quarters of the world and the  
 earth.<sup>18</sup>

In this verse, two figures are combined: on the one hand, a *vyatireka*, ‘contrast,’ ‘antithesis,’ in which the superiority of the subject is expressed; and on the other hand, a *māloṇpamā*, literally ‘comparison making a garland,’ in which one and the same subject of comparison is successively compared with several objects of comparison. The latter is fit for describing the ruler as condensing the virtues of different deities who are considered the archetypes of those virtues. The expression of his superiority over each and every god contributes to the idealisation. This example illustrates the fact that the process of idealisation of kings is served by recourse to figures of speech, and consequently, to the *kāvya* style.

#### X.2.4 The status of Sanskrit

From the Vedic period, Sanskrit appears as the language of a dominant group, an elite whose members used to proclaim their social status by their linguistic habits. This elite was of a religious and political nature, and probably also based, at least to a certain extent, on economic assets. Sanskrit was the language of the sacerdotal class, the Brahmins, and of the warrior nobility, the Kṣatriyas,

<sup>16</sup> There is a *śleṣa* which does not need a double translation (it is another case of *arthasleṣa*): *mahas-* means ‘brightness’ when applied to the sun (proper sense), and ‘majesty,’ or ‘power’ when applied to the king (figurative sense). The comparison of the king with the sun is a *topos*.

<sup>17</sup> Here also the comparison relies on a *śleṣa*: *aripurahananena* means ‘by his

destroying the cities of his enemies’ when applied to the king, and ‘by his burning down Pura, his enemy’ when applied to Hara. In that case, it refers to the figure of *Tripurāntaka*.

<sup>18</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), No. 44 (IA XII, No. 16), No. 45 (IA XII, No. 149), No. 50 (JAHRS XX, pp. 195–201), No. 55 (EI IX, No. 16).

within whose ranks kings were recruited.<sup>19</sup> As such, it became the mark of kings, which probably accounts for its use in royal charts: Sanskrit serves to proclaim the issuer's prestige, authority and legitimacy. These charts were intended to record tenures gifted to Brahmins (*agrahāra*) by the ruler, and thus, acted as connection between the two components of the elite. But, according to A. AKLUJAR,<sup>20</sup> economic and political factors alone cannot account for the development of Sanskrit in the Dravidian-speaking countries: the idea of ritual purity which was associated with that language must also be taken into account, as well as its use for religious purposes. The spreading of Sanskrit in the southern part of India must be related to what has been called 'the process of Brahmanisation.'

Therefore it might be assumed that Sanskrit, because of its status as a 'sacred language,' came to serve political purposes. In this regard, the Eastern Cālukyas can serve as test case, since, contrary to other dynasties such as the Pallavas, who were contemporaries, they issued only Sanskrit charts, instead of combining Sanskrit with a Dravidian language. There is no doubt that Sanskrit allowed them to narrate their history in a way that linked it to that of the great northern dynasties, as well as to the Brahmanical myths in which kingship was represented. S. POLLOCK shows that the Deccan was the stage where the creation of a new speech, standardised and homogenous, took place. He referred to that phenomenon as a 'globalisation process.'<sup>21</sup> A process which accounts for the fact that in the operative portions of the Cālukya charts, within the description of the gifted land's limit, which is written in Sanskrit, but in which the place-names are in Telugu,<sup>22</sup> the directions were given in Sanskrit, and arranged in accordance with a *pradakṣiṇā*<sup>23</sup>; the recourse

<sup>19</sup> At least according to *Dharmaśāstras*, for instance *Manusmṛti*, VII, 2: brāhmaṇaṃ prāptena saṃskāraṃ kṣatriyeṇa yathāvidhi / sarvasyāsya yathānyāyaṃ kartavyaṃ parirakṣaṇam, 'All this <world> must be protected in accordance to the law, by a warrior who has undergone the Vedic consecration according to the rules.'

<sup>20</sup> (Aklujar, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> See (Pollock, 2012). The same author develops this idea in his book of 2006, where he uses the expression 'Sanskrit cosmopolis': (Pollock, 2006), Pt I, pp. 39–280.

<sup>22</sup> By 'place-names,' one must understand the toponyms and the words that designate elements of the landscape serving as landmarks.

<sup>23</sup> Except inscription thèse No. 4.

to Sanskrit undoubtedly served as a means for connecting the donation, through the description of the gifted land's borders, to the concept of *digvijaya*, 'conquest of the quarters,' which was closely attached to kingship.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the use of Sanskrit in the epigraphic eulogies of the Eastern Cālukya —not unlike those of others' dynasties— may be thought of as a way to connect the human sphere with the divine, so that the king assumes the function of mediator between the earth and the gods. The very presence of that language, by itself, reveals and proclaims the superior status of the royal issuer.

### X.3 AN EPIGRAPHIC MAHĀKĀVYA: THE EXAMPLE OF RAVIKĪRTI'S EULOGY IN THE INSCRIPTION OF AIHOLE

#### X.3.1 Intertextuality as a key

We have already asserted that the epigraphic eulogies of the Eastern Cālukya dynasty are fashioned like *kāvyas*, more accurately like *mahākāvyas*, except that they are not divided into several *sargas*, which is one of the requisites of the genre<sup>25</sup>: it might be assumed they are 'mahākāvyas in miniature,' despite the contradictory character of that phrase. This will be discussed in this second part of the study, which will focus on one of the most spectacular examples of epigraphic *kāvya* —and one of the most famous, since the remarkable translation and commentary published by F. KIELHORN in *Epigraphia Indica*<sup>26</sup>— the eulogy of Pulakeśin II (610–42) composed by Ravikīrti, and engraved on the eastern wall of the temple of Mēguṭi in Aihole (Karnataka). This epigraph, which consists of thirty-seven verses, contains a genealogy and a *digvijaya* of Pulakeśin II, and records the consecration of the temple to Lord Jina

<sup>24</sup> The king was expected to be —and described in the treatises as— a *viṣṭiṣu*-, 'who is eager to conquer <the earth>.' During the ceremony of consecration, a priest used to make the king take a step in each and every direction of the compass, in order to perform symbolically his future conquest. On the theme of *digvijaya* in royal eulogies and

the poetic reshaping of the king's military campaign, cf. (Brocquet, 2004–5), pp. 73–103.

<sup>25</sup> Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa*, I, 14: *sarga-bandho mahākāvyam ucyate*, 'a composition in *sargas* is called "mahākāvyā"' (cf. *infra*).

<sup>26</sup> (EI VI), pp. 1–12.

by the court poet Ravikīrti, who is also the author of the text (verse 36). It dates from 634 (verse 34: Śaka 556).

In verse 37, the last of the poem, Ravikīrti asserts that he is ‘endowed with a glory equal to that of Kālidāsa and Bhāravi in the field of poetic composition’ (*kavitāśritakālidāsabhāravikīrttiḥ*): this gives a clue to the whole poem which is based, as noticed by KIELHORN, on a complex network of intertextual references and quasi-quotations taken from two major *mahākāvya* composed by these two writers. The first is Kālidāsa’s *Rāghuvaṃśa*, and the second, Bhāravi’s *Kirātārjunīya*.<sup>27</sup> Intertextuality, consequently, appears as one of the main, if not the main, keys to the poetic composition of Ravikīrti’s panegyric. I. V. PETERSON, in her extensive study of the rhetoric at work in the *Kirātārjunīya*,<sup>28</sup> makes a close study of the connections between Bhāravi’s poem and the corresponding episode in the *Mahābhārata*, and shows that the latter is the hypotext<sup>29</sup> of the former. In the case of the epigraph at issue, we must therefore assume that the intertextuality is double: the panegyric is based upon a first hypotext, which consists of the two *mahākāvyas* referred to, while the latter are based upon a second hypotext, which is the epic. It deserves notice that in that particular case, the two great epics are equally referred to: the *Rāmāyaṇa*, through the *Rāghuvaṃśa*; and the *Mahābhārata*, through the *Kirātārjunīya*. Which could be phrased as follows: the epigraphic *praśasti* is connected to its epic background through the mediation of two great *mahākāvyas*. The connection of these three levels, i.e. *praśasti*, *mahākāvya*, and epic, disclose their common function, which is panegyricising the ruler.

In the following paragraphs, four aspects of this arrangement will be at issue: i. the epigraphic poem’s conformity with the main requisites of *mahākāvya*; ii. the intertextuality as based on literary *topoi*; iii. the same as based on figures of speech; and iv., the presence of the epic throughout the narrative.

<sup>27</sup> All these references and quotations are precisely listed by KIELHORN in the footnotes of his translation (*op. cit.*).

<sup>28</sup> (Peterson, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> (Milly, 1992), p. 147: « Ce phénomène de reprise d’un texte antérieur, à l’identique ou avec modification, est ap-

pelé intertextualité. [...] Le texte d’origine est appelé *hypotexte*. » ‘This phenomenon of the take-over of a previous text, identically or with modification, is called intertextuality (...) The original text is called *hypotext*.’

## X.3.2 Ravikīrti's eulogy as a mahākāvya

As suggested above, the poem's last two verses, i.e. verses 36 and 37, which contain the poet's 'signature' and refer to Kālidāsa and Bhāravi, serve as a claim to its recognition as *mahākāvya*. The process of poetic composition of the eulogy is explicitly connected to that of erecting and consecrating the temple, by means of the verb *yuj-*, 'to join' (37), and of the figure *yathāsaṃkhya*, 'relative enumeration' (36), strengthened by recourse to derivatives of one and the same verbal root (*karṭṭ-* and *kārayiṭ-*):

praśaster vvasateś cāsyāḥ jinasya trijagadguroḥ |  
karttā kārayitā cāpi ravikīrttiḥ kṛtī svayam || 36 ||  
yenāyoji nave 'śmasthanam artthavidhau vivekinā jinaveśma |  
sa vijayatām ravikīrttiḥ kavitaśritakālidāsabhāravikīrttiḥ || 37 ||

- 36 Of this panegyric and that abode of Jina, the Master of the three worlds,  
The virtuous [or: skilful] Ravikīrti himself made the first and ordered the  
second to be made.
- 37 He who, full of wisdom, joined a dwelling of Jina made solid by the stone  
with a new arrangement of meanings,  
May he be victorious, Ravikīrti, whose fame in the field of poetic com-  
position is equal to that of Kālidāsa and Bhāravi.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from its length, which is due to not being composed in *sargas*, the poem meets almost all of the requisites of the *mahākāvya* genre, as defined by Daṇḍin in the first chapter of his *Kāvyaadarśa*, verses 14–22:

sargabandho mahākāvyaṃ ucyate tasya lakṣaṇam |  
āśīr namaskriyā vastunirdeśo vāpi tanmukham || 14 ||  
itihāsakathodbhūtam itarad vā sadāśrayam |  
caturvargaphalāyattaṃ caturodāttanāyakam || 15 ||  
nagarārṇavaśailartucandrārṇakodayavarṇanaiḥ |  
udyānasalilakriḍāmadhupānaratotsavaiḥ || 16 ||  
vipralambhair vivāhaiś ca kumārodayavarṇanaiḥ |  
mantradūtaprayāñjināyakābhūdayair api || 17 ||  
alaṃkṛtam asaṃkṣiptam rasabhāvanirantaram |

<sup>30</sup> (Kielhorn, 1900), p. 4–7. All the poem are based on KIELHORN's edition. quotations from Ravikīrti's epigraphic



sargair anativistīrṇaiḥ śravyavṛttaiḥ susaṃdhibhiḥ || 18 ||  
 sarvatra bhinnavṛttāntair upetaṃ lokarañjanam |  
 kāvyaṃ kalpottarasthāyi jāyate sadalamkṛti || 19 ||  
 nyūnam apy atra yaiḥ kaiścid aṅgaiḥ kāvyaṃ na duṣyati |  
 yady upātteṣu saṃpattir ārādhayati tadvidaḥ || 20 ||  
 guṇataḥ prāg upanyasya nāyakaṃ tena vidviṣām |  
 nirākaraṇam ity eṣa mārگاḥ prakṛtisundaraḥ || 21 ||  
 vaṃśavīryaśrutādī nivarṇayitvā ripor api |  
 tajjayān nāyakotkarṣavarṇanaṃ ca dhinoti naḥ || 22 ||

- 14 A *sarga*-composition is called *mahākāvya*. Its definition is the following:  
 A benediction, a homage or a presentation of the subject-matter constitute its first part.
- 15 It is based upon a legendary narrative (*itihāsa*) or a tale (*kathā*), or relies upon real events;  
 It strives to the fruit of the Four Purposes and its hero is a skilful and noble being.
- 16 By depicting cities, oceans, mountains, seasons, sunrise and moonrise,  
 By means of sporting games performed in gardens and in water, of feasts in which liquors are being drunk and love indulged in;
- 17 By means of love-in-separation and marriages, by means of portraying princes who are growing up,  
 And by means of counsels, of ambassadors, of military campaigns, of battles and of the hero's success;
- 18 Ornate, devoid of condensed passages, continuously exhibiting *rasas* and *bhāvas*,  
 Made of *sargas* not too much extended, of meters deserving to be heard, of fine articulations;
- 19 Containing, in all its parts, codas composed in a different meter, this poem charms the universe  
 And lasts long after the end of the *kalpa*, if provided with a fine ornamentation.
- 20 Even if one of these features is missing, a poem does not deserve to be blamed,  
 If the achievement of those which are there obtain the approval of connoisseurs.
- 21 First of all introducing the hero, in accordance to his virtues, and the disarray



- He inflicts on his foes: that is a way which reveals naturally pleasing.
- 22 After his ancestry, his valour, the knowledge he has acquired, etc. have been described, as well as those of his enemy,
- The depiction of the hero's superiority, starting with his victory over the latter, is what delights us.<sup>31</sup>

Ravikīrti's poem, indeed, meets most of these criteria:

1. Its first verse is a benediction addressed to Jina, while the second is a homage paid to the Cālukya lineage, and the third, a laudatory presentation of Satyāśraya, i.e. Pulakeśin II.<sup>32</sup>
2. The hero's genealogy is displayed in a relatively long passage, from verses 4 to 15.
3. The hero is a noble man of high skill, whose valour is constantly depicted throughout the poem.
4. The military campaigns led by the hero, as well as his victories and the disarray he inflicted to his enemies, is the main topic of the eulogy, and the long narrative of his conquests (verses 16–32) repeatedly uplifts them, so that his superiority is conveyed throughout.
5. Consequently, the poem is full of *vīrarasa*.
6. The narrative of his conquests, which is displayed from verse 16 to 31 (it is thus the main part of the poem), is full of descriptions of conquered cities (Vanavāsī in verse 18, Purī in verse 21), while ocean, rivers and mountains are described in a vivid manner (the Vindhya range in verse 24, the Kāverī river in verse 30, and the island of the Revatī in verse 13, which deals with his nephew Maṅgaleśa's military campaign).
7. Counsels and ambassadors are alluded to by the recurrent mention of the three powers called for by the *Arthaśāstra* — *mantra*-, *prabhutva*-, and *utsāha-śakti*— in verses 15 and 32.
8. The text is entirely versified and exhibits the poet's skill in handling prosody, since seventeen different meters are employed in its thirty-seven verses.
9. As for the ornamentation, the poet has recourse to many *alaṃkāra* (figures of speech), as will be seen below.

<sup>31</sup> The quotation from the *Kāvyādarśa* is based on BELVALKAR's edition, (Belvalkar, 1924), p. 2. The translation is ours.

<sup>32</sup> This *biruda*, which means literally 'a refuge for truth,' is repeated in verses 32 and 35.

Therefore Ravikīrti's eulogy of Pulakeśin conforms to the standard of *mahākāvya* in many regards, in such a manner that the *alaṃkāraśāstra*, the 'Science of poetics,' seems to be, in its own way, another hypotext — but the same might be assumed about *kāvya* literature in general.

### X.3.3 Presence of great mahākāvyas through their *topoi*

The recourse to *topoi* is one of the techniques by means of which the writer of a *mahākāvya* weaves a thread between the poem he is composing and the great poems of the past. And this kind of reference, which is a quintessential component of intertextuality, upholds his claim to be one of the 'great poets' (*mahākavi*), whose succession passes through centuries. The literary *topoi* of *mahākāvya*, which can be traced back to their epic archetype, abound in epigraphic eulogies, and Ravikīrti's is no exception. The main *topos* it contains is undoubtedly that of *digvijaya*, 'conquest of the quarters,' which is significant for the legitimation and promotion of the king.

As mentioned above, the theme of *digvijaya* extends from verse 16 to 32. The model of *digvijaya* in Sanskrit literature is *Raghuvamśa*'s fourth canto, in which the conquest of the world by Raghu is narrated: this is why Ravikīrti repeatedly refers to Kālidāsa's poem, directly or indirectly, and not only through its *topoi*. The whole account of Pulakeśin II's military campaigns, regardless of the conflicts which actually occurred during his reign, and their chronological order or results, is fashioned along the model provided by the norm. For example, they are chronologically arranged in such a way that they more or less correspond to a *pradakṣiṇā*.<sup>33</sup> But the recourse to *topoi* does not operate only thematically and on a macrocosmic level, it also occurs on a microcosmic level, in small descriptions and images, in the analogies at each and every step of the narrative.

Two examples will be sufficient. The first is provided by verse 32, which pictures Pulakeśin II (named by his *biruda* Satryāśraya) coming back to Vātāpī, his capital city, after he has allegedly conquered the entire earth:

<sup>33</sup> Other such epigraphic accounts Tiruvālaṅkāṭu copper-plates, verses reflect the same character, such as 89—124. Cf. (Brocquet, 2004-5), pp. that of Rājendracōḷa I's conquests in 89—99.

utsāha-prabhu-mantra-śakti-sahite yasmin samastā diśo  
 jītvā bhūmipatīn viśrjya mahitān ārāddhya deva-dvijān |  
 vātāpīn nagarīm praviśya nagarīm ekām ivorvīm imāṃ  
 cañcan-nīradhi-nīla-nīra-parikhāṃ satyāśraye śāsati || 32 ||

- 32 While, endowed with the powers of energy, sovereignty and good advice,  
 having conquered all the quarters,  
 Having sent away the <other> kings of high renown, having paid homage  
 to gods and Brahmins,  
 Having entered the city of Vātāpī, Satyāśraya ruled this earth just like a  
 single city,  
 The moats of which were filled with the dark-blue water of the restless  
 ocean.

The phrasing and the analogy which it conveys would remind con-  
 noisseurs of the last three verses of Raghu's *digvijaya* (*Raghuvaṃśa*  
 IV, 85–7), in which the hero is said to make the *Viśvajit* sacrifice, in-  
 tended to proclaim the completion of his conquest of the world. At  
 the end of the ceremony, he dismisses all the kings who had come  
 to attend it:

iti jītvā diśo jiṣṇur anvavartata rathoddhatam |  
 rajo viśrāmayan rājñāṃ cchatra-śūnyeṣu mauliṣu || 85 ||  
 sa viśvajitam ājahe yajñam sarva-sva-dakṣiṇam |  
 ādānam hi visargāya satām vārimucām iva || 86 ||  
 satrānte sacivasakhaḥ puraskriyābhir gurvībhiḥ śamita-parājaya-vya-  
 likān |  
 kākutsthaś cira-varihotsukāvarodhān rājanyān sva-pura-nivṛttaye 'nu-  
 mene || 87 ||

- 85 Having thus conquered the quarters, the conqueror returned back  
 home, making the dust  
 Raised by his chariots fall on the crowns of the kings he had deprived of  
 their umbrellas.
- 86 He undertook the sacrifice of *viśvajit*, in which the ritual retribution con-  
 sists of the whole of patron's wealth:  
 The virtuous, like the clouds, use to seize only for giving.
- 87 At the end of the ceremony, Kākutstha, being dear to his ministers, hav-  
 ing assuaged by great honours the kings who were grieving because  
 of their defeat,

Allowed them, whose long absence had caused anguish in their women's apartments, to come back to their own cities.<sup>34</sup>

Many parallels might be drawn between these two excerpts. Pulakeśin II, like Raghu, is a *vijigīṣu* coming back home after he has conquered the quarters (almost the same phrasing occurs in both poems, *diśo jitvā*). His actions are described in the same way and are given the same order: first he makes offerings to gods and bestows liberalities on Brahmins (*ārāddhya deva-dvijān* reflects the whole of verse 86 in Kālidāsa's poem), then he sends away the other kings (*bhūmipatīn viśṛjya* reflects *rājānyān svapurānivr̥ttaye 'numene*).

The second example, which involves a mutual comparison,<sup>35</sup> might be considered spectacular. In verse 21, the poet describes the attack on Purī by Pulakeśin II in such a way that the sky becomes similar to the ocean and vice-versa:

aparajaladher llakṣmīm yasmin purīm purabhitprabhe  
madagajaghaṭākārair nnāvāṃ śatair avamṛdnati |  
jaladapaṭālānīkākīrṇṇan navotpalamecakañ  
jalanidhir iva vyoma vyomnas samo 'bhavad ambudhiḥ || 21 ||

- 21 When, resplendent like Pura's murderer [Śiva], he was besieging Purī,  
the very fortune of the Western ocean, with hundreds of warships  
looking like squadrons of rutting elephants,  
Covered with an army of thick clouds and dark-blue like a young lotus,  
The sky resembled the ocean and the ocean became similar to the  
sky.

<sup>34</sup> The quotations from the *Raghuvaṃśa* are based on DEVEDHAR's edition, (Devadhar, 1985), p. 76. The translation is ours.

<sup>35</sup> This example could be quoted in the next section, which deals with figures of speech, as well. The literary device in use in this stanza and in its model might be defined as an example of *anyonyopamā* or *ubhayopamā* (an

*upamā*, i.e. a simile, in which the subject of comparison is said to be similar to the object, and reversely, the object is said to be similar to the subject): cf. Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa*, II, 18. But in a way, it could also be considered an *utprekṣā*, since the similitude is not actual but the result of a superimposition of an imaginary situation (which is impossible in itself) on a real one.

Everything in this description reminds of *Raghuvaṃśa* IV, 29, in which Kālidāsa gives a picture of Raghu's army marching against the Eastern region:

rajobhiḥ syandanoddhūtair gajāis ca ghana-saṃnibhaiḥ |  
bhuvas talam iva vyoma kurvan vyomeva bhūtalam || 29 ||

29 With the dust raised by his chariots and his elephants resembling clouds,  
He made the sky similar to the surface of the earth and the surface of  
the earth similar to the sky.

The only difference between the two phrasings is that in the first the ocean and the sky are grammatical subjects, while in the second, the earth and the sky are objects. For this reason, Raghu seems still more responsible for the metamorphosis of the elements than Pulakeśin. But for this slight difference, which might well be caused by Ravikīrti's search for variation, the parallel looks quite evident, in such manner that it cannot be merely the result of chance: the poet makes explicit reference to his model, and employs intertextuality as a literary device to provide legitimacy.

#### X.3.4 Figures of speech

There is no literary work without figures of speech, and their presence may be considered one of the main characteristics of *kāvya*. As asserted by Daṇḍin in his *Kāvyaḍarśa* (cf. pp. 11–12, verses 18 and 19), a *kāvya*, let alone a *mahākāvya*, must be ornamented; this can be carried out only by means of figures of speech, called in Sanskrit *alaṃkāras*, literally 'ornaments' or 'embellishments.' Epigraphic poems are no exception, and in this regard Ravikīrti's eulogy of Pulakeśin II may be considered a model. In addition, the use of embellishments lends itself to intertextuality; embellishments witness the author's poetic skill and give him a chance to exhibit skill by means of a constant overbid. The poet alludes to his reknowned predecessors in order to outbid them, to make more and better, to go further in the development of the textual devices which they have in common. Intertextuality, with respect to figures of speech, involves competition.

Ravikīrti's poem contains a good example, in verse 10:

raṇa-parākkrama-labdha-jayaśriyā sapadi yena virugnam aśeṣataḥ |  
nṛpati-gandhagajena mahaujasā  
pṛthu-kadamba-kadamba-kadambakam || 10 ||

- 10 Who [Kīrtivarman, i.e. Pulakeśin II's uncle], having taken hold of the fortune of victory by his valiance in the battle, immediately and entirely broke,  
Being a rutting elephant of a king, endowed with a great strength, the huge multitude of plantain-trees that were the Kadambas.

The compound of *pāda* d, *pr̥thu-kadamba-kadamba-kadambakam*, literally 'the multitude (*kadambaka-*) of plantain-trees (*kadamba-*), namely the Kadambas (*kadamba-*),'<sup>36</sup> carries out the figure of speech called *yamaka*, i.e. repetition, in the same *pāda*, of the same series of syllables. Here the *yamaka* proves to be outstandingly developed, since the sequence *kadamba-*, which constitutes a word with several meanings,<sup>37</sup> is uttered three times, while the sole syllable *-ka-* is uttered four times, due to the suffix added to the last occurrence. Such a repetition would seem more or less awkward, if it was not an evident overbid on Bhāravi's identical but less developed *yamaka* in *Kirātārjunīya*, V, 9, *pāda* a:

pr̥thu-kadamba-kadambaka-rājitaṃ grathita-māla-tamāla-vanākulam |  
laghu-tuṣāra-tuṣāra-jala-scyutaṃ dhṛta-sadāna-sad-ānana-dantinam ||

Resplendent with the huge multitude of plantain-trees,  
Strewn with thickets of *tamāla* arranged in tight rows,  
Dripping with thin drops of cold dew,  
Inhabited by tuskers with handsome faces wet with rutting juice.<sup>38</sup>

It deserves notice that in the verse composed by Bhāravi, *yamaka* is the main figure, on which it is entirely built: this verse looks like an exhibition of *yamakas*, since each and every *pāda* contains one, always at the same place,<sup>39</sup> based either on *anekārthapada*, polysemic words (*pāda* a and c), or double segmentation (*pāda* b and d). For this reason, the development of the figure results more in a kind

<sup>36</sup> The Kadambas were a dynasty ruling in Vanavāsī (Karnataka).

<sup>37</sup> For this reason, one could hesitate about whether the figure is a *yamaka* or a *latānuprāsa*, the latter consisting of the repetition of the same word with different meanings, without reference to the places where it occurs within the verse.

<sup>38</sup> The quotations from the *Kirātārjunīya* are based on PETERSON's edition, (Peterson, 2016), p. 78. The translation is ours.

<sup>39</sup> 3rd, 4th and 5th reiterated in 6th, 7th and 8th syllables in *pāda* of 12; the verse is composed in the *drutavilambita* meter.

of variation —in its musical sense— than in an attempt of enhancement: it is about homage paid to an illustrious predecessor, more than about a boast of superiority. The significance of the figure, which in itself would otherwise be awkward, is a claim of intertextuality.

Another example of a reused figure is provided by verse 18 of the inscription:

varadā-tuṅga-taraṅga-raṅga-vilasad-dhamsāvaḷī-mekhalām  
vanavāsīm avamṛdnatas sura-pura-prasparddhinīm sampadā |  
mahatā yasya balārṇṇavena paritas sañchāditorvvī-talam  
sthala-durggañ jala-durggatām iva gatam tat tat-kṣaṇe paśyatām || 18 ||

- 18 While, wearing as a belt a row of geese sporting on the scene of Varadā's high waves,  
Vanavāsī, which challenged the city of the gods in respect of wealth, was being besieged by him,  
The huge flood of his army, concealing the surface of the earth all around,  
Made, in the eyes of those who were looking at it at that very moment, a fortress built on dry land become a fortress built in the middle of waters.

The *rūpaka* (metaphor) carried out by the nominal compound which spans *pāda* a, 'wearing a belt which was a row of geese sporting ...,' qualifier of *vanavāsīm*, undoubtedly is a reminiscence of *Rāghuvaṃśa* XIX, 40, where the more simple compound *haṃsa-mekhalam* qualifies *śroṇi-bimbam*:

saikatam ca sarayūṃ vivṛṇvatīm śroṇi-bimbam iva haṃsa-mekhalam |  
sva-priyā-vilasitānukāriṇīm saudha-jāla-vivarair vyalokayat || 40 ||

- 40 The Sarayū, revealing her sandy shore similar to the reflect of their hips, with her belt of geese,  
And imitating the sporting games of his beloved, he [Agnivarṇa] was looking at her through a lattice-window of the palace.

In both cases, the *rūpaka* is subservient to a personification: that of the city of Vanavāsī, in the first case, and that of the Sarayū river, in the second. In both cases, a river is present, closely connected with

that row of geese which resembles a belt around a woman's waist.<sup>40</sup> And in both cases, the personification is correlated with the thematic *topos* of the conqueror who is sexually attracted by the goddess who incarnates the land — and ultimately the entire earth. As a result, *śṛṅgārarasa*, as a subordinate *rasa*, is coupled with *vīrarasa*, which remains the primary *rasa*. Ravikīrti develops the figure in the sense that he embeds the sequences *haṃsa-mekhalā-* into a larger *bahuvrīhi* compound which makes the image more complex. But Kālidāsa's verse was more developed as regards the erotic aspect of the scene, which is only alluded to in Ravikīrti's: that time again, it is about variation, more than proper competition.

These various examples, which concern the phrasing, show that intertextuality is expected to bring literary legitimacy to the poem, thus linked to the tradition of *mahākāvya* of which Kālidāsa and Bhāravi have always been considered major representatives. And it is also expected to bring political legitimacy to the eulogised ruler, who deserved to become the subject matter of that kind of poetry. *Mahākāvya* results in promoting at the same time the poet and the prince who is the main character of the poem.

### X.3.5 Epical background

As stated above, intertextuality between epigraphic panegyrics and *mahākāvya* is complementary to intertextuality between the latter and epics. This kind of intertextuality has been much more studied by critics and does not need to be closely investigated in the present study.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the explicit references which eulogies contain and that make them resemble *mahākāvyas* all the more, deserve notice. As for Ravikīrti's poem, the characters of epics are

<sup>40</sup> In both verses, identifying with accuracy the figure(s) at work is no easy task. In Ravikīrti's verse, the personification (helped by the *rūpaka*) seems to serve a *bhrāntimat*, 'illusion,' a figure intended to convey an analogy, in which the object of comparison is mistaken for the subject: the similarity occurs in the eyes of the spectators (*paśyatām*).

The same analysis might be proposed, but with less certainty, about the verse from the *Raghuvamśa*, because of the verb *alokayat*.

<sup>41</sup> Cf., for instance, (Peterson, 2003); she insists that the epics produced a set of figures, images and intrigues that the authors of *mahākāvya* constantly have recourse to.



included in the narrative, most generally with the status of object of comparison. Both epics might thus be conjured.

The following phrases, taken from various inscriptions of the Eastern Cālukya, provide good examples of such epic references. In the first, the *malopamā*, as mentioned above, is used to conjure several epic heroes at the same time, as can be seen in the following comparative compound, which qualifies King Pulakeśin II: manu-nṛga-nahūṣa-yayāti-dhundhumārāmbārīṣa-dilīpa-nābhāga-pratimaḥ, ‘who resembles Manu, Nṛga, Nahūṣa, Yayāti, Dhundhumāra [Kuvalayāśva], Ambarīṣa, Dilīpa and Nābhāga.’<sup>42</sup> In the second example, another figure of speech, the *vyatireka*, provides a variant conveying the same analogy: King Vijayāditya I is said to be: sva-carita-nyakkṛta-nṛga-naḷa-nahuṣāmbārīṣa-yayāteḥ (in the genitive case), ‘having humbled by his own exploits Nṛga, Naḷa, Nahuṣa, Ambarīṣa and Yayāti.’<sup>43</sup> All the characters named in these two examples are ancestors of Rāma and, in the same way, archetypes of kingship.

The heroes of the other great epic, the *Mahābhārata*, are also referred to, with the same result. King Bhima II is compared to Bhīma through a *śleṣopamā* which is recurrent not only in epigraphy but also in literature (the ambiguous sequence is translated twice): dharmmānuja iva duṣṣāsana-kṣaya-karaḥ, ‘who caused the destruction of bad rulers,<sup>44</sup> like Dharmarāja’s young brother caused the destruction of Duṣṣāsana.’<sup>45</sup> The following excerpt carries out a *malopamā* by means of which King Amma II is equated to various characters of the same epic: yudhiṣṭhira iva dharmma-parāyaṇaḥ bṛhaspatir iva naya-jñāḥ manur iva vinaya-jñāḥ airāvata ivānavarata-dānocca-hastaḥ, ‘who is expert in dharma just like Yudhiṣṭhira, who knows politics just as Bṛhaspati, who knows right behaviour just like Manu, whose hand is raised for incessant gift just like Airāvata whose trunk is raised because the continuous flowing of rutting juice’ (the last simile rests on *śleṣa*).<sup>46</sup> Lastly, the following *vyatireka* conveys the superiority of King [who?] over the models of different virtues: kiṃca rūpeṇa manasijaḥ kopena yamaḥ

<sup>42</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), No. 7 (EI XXVII, No. 9). Cf. *ibid.*, No. 43 (EI V, No. 16).

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, No. 30 (IA XX, No. 196).

<sup>44</sup> Literally ‘those of bad leadership.’

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, No. 29 (IA XIII, No. 55, EI V,

No. 16).

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, No. 15 (EI XXXI, No. 20).

śaurryeṇa dhanamjayaḥ sāhasaiḥ śūdrakaḥ, ‘moreover, he is Man-asija [Kāma] as regards beauty, Yama as regards anger, Dhanañjaya as regards valiance, Śūdraka as regards boldness.’<sup>47</sup>

These series of objects of comparison show that names of gods are often interposed between those of heroes, which is not surprising: naming such characters aims at equating the ruler with the archetypes of the virtues he must embody. As we have seen in the first part of this study, the king is frequently compared or identified with archetypal gods. Among these gods, the eight Lokapāla, ‘guardians of the world,’ are frequently named, which makes an explicit reference to the royal consecration, during which the king-to-be is successively made an avatar of those deities. The following example gives a good illustration: vijayāditya ājijanad dharmmendrāgni-trinayana-dhaneśodakeśādi-dharmmaṃ senā-nātham, ‘Vijayāditya [here a biruda of Amma II] begot an army-leader [Viṣṇuvardhana] who was endowed with the nature of Dharma [Yama], Indra, Agni, Trinayana [Soma], Dhaneśa [Kubera], Udaśa [Varuṇa], etc.’<sup>48</sup> Mentioning the series of Lokapāla not only suggests that the king is a conqueror of the entire earth (*vijigīṣu-*), but also reactivates the ritual power of the royal consecration.

#### X.4 CONCLUSION

In his treatise on poetics, Bhāmaha writes:

sargabandho mahākāvyaṃ mahatāṃ ca mahac ca yat |  
agrāmyaśabdam arthyaṃ ca sālaṅkāraṃ sadāśrayam || 19 ||

19 A *mahākāvya* is a composition made of *sargas*, which is great and deals with great things / characters,

Which is devoid of rustic words and rich in meanings, which is provided with embellishments and rests on the good.<sup>49</sup>

This statement summarises what a *Mahākāvya* must be and what many epigraphic eulogies are. *Mahatāṃ ca mahac ca*: in them excess prevails, in the account of events, in the choice of words, in the figures of style. This excess, in a way, reveals the tension constantly

<sup>47</sup> (Estienne-Monod, 2008), No. 38 (EI V, No. 16).

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, No. 41 (IA XIII, No. 148).

<sup>49</sup> *Kāvyaśālaṅkāra*, I, 19; the phrase *mahatāṃ ca mahac ca* is quoted by PETERSON. Cf. (Peterson, 2003), p. 15.

at work. The author of a *praśasti* must work within contradictory constraints, since he has to represent reality in a way that suits the norm. He must relate actual events and picture actual characters through the prism of idealisation. When he deals with the military campaign of his king, he must shape them like a *digvijaya* or, more accurately, in such manner that it really becomes a *digvijaya*: it is no longer about the victories and defeats of Pulakeśin II, but about the conquest of the quarters performed by the universal king. The function of the hypotext is to transform reality, to make it conform to the myth. This accounts for the role of absolute model which is played by the *Raghuvamśa*, which encompasses the most legitimising genealogy and series of conquests, leading to the sovereignty over the world and to the triumph of dharma. Intertextuality aims at the dimension of the myth. It conjures the myth and substitutes it for reality.

What Jean-Pierre VERNANT wrote about Ancient Greece is true also about Ancient India, and is probably universal:

Le mythe a pris valeur de paradigme. Il constitue le modèle de référence qui permet de situer, de comprendre, de juger l'exploit célébré dans le chant. C'est en se réfractant à travers les aventures légendaires des héros ou des dieux que les actes humains, pensés dans la catégorie de l'imitation, peuvent révéler leur sens et se situer dans l'échelle des valeurs.<sup>50</sup>

The purpose of *kāvya* is mainly to carry out intertextuality, which introduces the myth into history, and sets up the network of homologues capable of revealing the adequacy of the king with the archetypes. In that sense, eulogies act as a sort of textual *rājasūya*.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

EI = *Epigraphia Indica and record of the archaeological survey of India: Published under the authority of the Government of India as a supplement to the 'Indian Antiquary.'* Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.

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<sup>50</sup> 'The myth acts as a paradigm. It constitutes the reference model that allows one to situate, understand, judge the feat which the song is celebrating. Refracting themselves through the legendary story of heroes or gods, human deeds, considered in the category of imitation, can reveal their meaning and be located in the scale of values.' (Vernant, 1988), p. 205.

IA = *The Indian antiquary, a journal of oriental research in archaeology, history, literature, languages, folklore, &c., &c.*. Bombay, 1872—. [Delhi: Indological Book Reprint, 1971–7.]

JAHRS = *Journal of The Andhra Historical Research Society*, XX July 1949–April 1950.

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CH. XI  
EXPLORING INTER-TEXTUALITY BETWEEN MEDIÆVAL  
TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS AND BHAKTI LITERATURE  
VASU RENGANATHAN

ABSTRACT

The two important sources of knowledge on South Indian culture and civilisation are the stone inscriptions and the literary texts from the mediæval period. In most of the instances, one might wonder which precedes the other and what originally influenced mostly the religious customs and habits that prevail up to now. Many Tamil religious poems refer to South Indian temples and subsequently such temples came to be known popularly in Tamil as *pēr perṛa talaṅkaḷ* or *pāṭal perṛa talaṅkaḷ* ‘abode which acquired name / songs.’ Similarly, many inscriptions refer to the poems of the mediæval period, both Sanskrit and Tamil, and give indications on the way such poems should be incorporated into the daily rituals of the temples. One common term that we routinely see in many temple inscriptions is *tiruppatiyam pāṭutal* ‘singing of the Tēvāram songs’ (cf. SII 8.44, p. 22). Thus, as a result of this inter-related textual phenomenon, the Sanskrit and Tamil priesthoods emerged as two heterogeneous communities engaging concurrently within the South Indian ritual system. However, the degree of adaptation of these two parallel traditions in the modern period vary considerably, quite in contrast to what is stated in inscriptions. This paper is mainly focused on two points: the inter-textual phenomenon that exists between the literary genres and stone inscriptions, and the continued adaptations of the commands and ordinances made by the kings through stone inscriptions.

XI.1 INTRODUCTION

TAMIL temple ordinances and religious textual representations are tightly interwoven to the extent that one relied upon the other throughout the history of the Tamils during the mediæval period. An enormous part of Tamil religious texts of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious sects deals with the images of the temples. The interrelationship between these two different media can be perceived only when both the literary texts and the temple inscriptions

are carefully studied and correlated. Even though both inscriptions and the literary genre are textual in nature, their styles vary quite considerably, the former being very colloquial and informal, the later tending to be very formal. Literary texts of the mediæval period fully conform to what was then understood as *Centamiḷ*, a style of language the poets adhered to from the Sangam period onwards.<sup>1</sup> Quite contrary to it, the Tamil inscriptions use the language that was spoken at that time, with some exceptions where the poetic style was adapted as well.<sup>2</sup> However, mentions are found in inscriptions as to how the religious literary productions are to be adapted as part of the temple proceedings. To cite one example, the terms *Āryam pāṭuvār* and *Tamiḷ pāṭuvār* are commonly found in inscriptions referring to those who recite poems from Sanskrit and Tamil respectively (cf. SII 2.3, p. 275). The aim of this paper, thus, is to shed light on the inter-relationship that existed between the inscriptions and the religious literary doctrines.

#### XI.2 MŪVĀYIRA DĪKṢITARKAḸ AND MŪVĀYIRA VAḸĀKAM: INTER-TEXTUALITY IN THE CHIDAMBARAM NAṬARĀJA TEMPLE

Religious texts with diverse forms, such as poems composed in praise of God, liturgical texts, *bhakti* songs expressing poet saints' devotion to god and philosophical writings on a set of unique themes from monism, dualism, *meyporul*, the 'doctrine of denotation,' Śaiva Siddhānta, the definitive knowledge of Lord Śiva and

<sup>1</sup> painkamalat taṇ teriyal paṭṭar pirāṇ kōtai / caṅkat tamiḷ mālai muppatum tappāmē coṇṇa, 'the daughter of Paṭṭar pirāṇ and a lotus like girl / composed the thirty songs of *Caṅkat Tamiḷ mālai*' (*Tiruppavai* 503).

<sup>2</sup> Even though some inscriptions are in a literary style, both the transition from spoken to literary style and the purpose of the code-switching still remains obscure. See for example a 13th century inscription in *Tiruvaṇṇāmalai*

which includes a poem in literary style praising the king called *Vēḷṇaṇṇaṇ* and the poet *Peruṅkuṇṇūrp peruṅkaucikaṇār*, who composed the Sangam literary work *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (SII 7.69). Also see SII 4.167 for a poem composed without prosody but written in inscriptional style with a reference to the scribe who wrote the poem as *cirāmalai mē kalpatittāṇ coṇṇa kavi* 'a poem uttered by *kalpatittāṇ* on *cirāmalai*.'



other related theological doctrines, not only shaped a strong community affiliation with divinities, but also created diverse belief systems among religious practitioners, especially in the South Indian religious landscape.

The spiritual and devotional engagement of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Tamil traditions which developed mostly from the 7th to the 9th centuries CE, along with traditions and cult practices belonging to the early Christian era, had very little impact on the process of knowledge production by the British, especially compared with the impact of Sanskrit Āgamic texts. In a more or less analogous way, the Pallava and Cōla kings sought to patronise the *paṭṭars*, Brahman priests, offering them power and scriptural authority. This is apparent from many Tamil stone inscriptions. One such inscription records the Pallava king Peruñciṅka's establishment of an estate called *Mūvāyira Valākam*, '3,000 Regions,' around the *Naṭarāja* temple of Chidambaram, and his designation of the temple as under the sole ownership of its Brahman priests (*paṭṭars*).<sup>3</sup> This inscription may be of particular interest to those seeking to understand how the legendary tradition of *Mūvāyira Dīkṣitarkaḷ*, '3,000 Diksidars,' came to belong to the Chidambaram *Naṭarāja* temple. In parallel with the Sanskrit tradition, those who mastered Tamil religious texts and approached God mainly through praise poems composed in Tamil were variously called *ōtuvārs* (those who chant Tamil hymns), *paṇṭārams* (Tamil priests) and *pūcāris* (priests of the Tamil clan gods). They also positioned themselves as the carriers of religious intellectualism in South India, but with less emphasis than their Sanskrit counterparts on their recognition and authority. *Paṇṭārams*, according to THURSTON,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ṇṇilattukku vantaṇa ūrile eṇṇi iṇṇuk-kavum ṇṇilaṇkaḷ oḷukum maṭakkum piṇakkum iṭattu tillaināyakac carup-petimaṇkalattu kṣasyaṇa paṭṭarkaḷperil tillaimuvāyiraviḷākam eṇṇum perāle eḷutakkaṭavarkaḷākavum ippaṭṭikku tiru-māḷikaiyile kalveṭṭikkolḷakkaṭavarkaḷā-kavum kaṭavataḷakavum conṇom.* 'The proceeds of these lands and other related properties in the town are hereby offered to the *paṭṭars* of the god Tillai

*Nāyakam* of Caruppedimangalam, and this is exclusively presented under the auspicious name of Tillai Muvāyiraviḷākam. The right is hereby granted to document this fact in stone inscriptions' (SII 8.43.6). See also (SII 7.7) for donations offered in conjunction with duties assigned to priests in the Śiva temple at Tirukkivilur, Krishnagiri Taluk, Salem district.

<sup>4</sup> (Thurston, 1975).

were non-Brahman priests recruited largely from the Vellāḷa and Paḷḷi castes; they were Śaivites, vegetarian and celibate.<sup>5</sup>

The *Naṭarāja* temple of Chidambaram, which is believed to have a much longer history than any other Śaiva temple of the Cōḷa period, was centered on an unusual representation of Śiva, in a dancing posture, in contrast with the usual *Liṅga* form. The Bṛhadīśvara temple in Thanjavur, constructed between ca. 995 and 1010 CE by Rājarāja I, offers a representative example of Cōḷa architecture. Here, the *Liṅga* is the main deity, and the subshrines are housed in individual *maṇḍapas*; the dancing image of Śiva is housed in the northeast corner of the courtyard.<sup>6</sup> The Sanskrit term *Naṭarāja*, meaning ‘King of Dancers,’ is frequently referred to in the inscriptions carved on the walls of the temple by the Tamil term *Āḍavallān*, meaning ‘one who is capable of dancing.’<sup>7</sup> This conception of Śiva in His dancing form specifically belongs to the South Indian Śiva temples. This distinctive representation of Śiva is well attested too in the Tamil hymns of the *Tirumantiram* composed by *Tirumūlar*, but nowhere in this work does *Tirumūlar* discuss the worship of *Liṅga*. This is a sufficient reason to believe that Tamil hymnists developed the relevant conceptions and their symbols, and the Tamil kings gave a form to them in temples. They relied heavily upon what was proposed by the poet saints in their texts.

### XI.3 THE THREE FORMS OF ŚIVA IN THE NAṬARĀJA TEMPLE OF CHIDAMBARAM: AN INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXTUALITY, TEMPLES AND INSCRIPTIONS

The dancing image of Śiva is a perceivable ‘form,’ known as *rūpa* in Sanskrit.<sup>8</sup> This image housed in the *Cit-Sabhā* is, as observed by SMITH,<sup>9</sup> the heart of the world and the heart of the individual self –

<sup>5</sup> An account of the traditions of *ōtuvārs* and *paṇṭārams* can be found in (Stein, 1978), (Breckenridge, 1978) and (Thurston, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> (Pichard, 1995), p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> One of the references to *Naṭarāja* as *Āḍavallān* in the inscriptions is as follows: *paṭṭam oṇṇu Āḍavallān eṇṇuñ-kallāl nīrai nānūṛuttōṇṇūṛēṇṇpatiṇ kaḷaṇcu ...*, ‘On the 14th day of the

26th year [of his reign], the lord Śri Rāja Rāja Dēvā gave one sacred diadem (*tiruppaṭṭam*) of gold, weighing 499 *kaḷaṇcu* by the stone called (after) *Āḍavallān*.’ (Hultzsich, 1891), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See (Renganathan, 2008) for a detailed account of the three forms of worship of Lord Śiva in the city of Chidambaram.

*cit* means ‘consciousness’ and *sabhā* means ‘hall’ (thus ‘hall of consciousness’). To the right of Naṭarāja is an empty space called *rahasya*. This space designates the formless nature of Śiva, and is referenced by the Sanskrit term *arūpa*, the opposite of *rūpa*. The *arūpa* form of Śiva is also called *ākāśa*, indicating that ‘space’ is the other manifestation of Śiva in Chidambaram.<sup>10</sup> The ritual of worshipping ‘space’ developed a new architectural vocabulary: that of *Cidambara rahasya* (‘Secret of Chidambaram’).

The third form of worship is the *Liṅga*, which neither conforms to any conceivable object<sup>11</sup> nor represents formlessness. *Liṅga* can thus be understood as *rūpa-arūpa*, ‘form and formless.’ Substantial evidence of the former two types of worship of Śiva in Chidambaram, *rūpa* and *arūpa* respectively, can be drawn from the *Tirumantiram*. In many of his verses, Tirumūlar emphasises that the Lord emerges in Chidambaram as a form (*uru*), as formless (*aru*) and in an all-pervading divine form (*Para Rūpam*).<sup>12</sup> As shown below, textual evidence of the manifestation of Lord Śiva in these distinct forms in Chidambaram can also be found in the works of the much later Śaiva hymnists Appar, Māṇikkavācakar and Cuntarar, who are generally assumed to have lived between the 8th and 9th centuries CE.<sup>13</sup>

#### XI.4 THE IMAGE OF THE DANCING ŚIVA AND THE ORIGIN OF THE EMBLEM OF VICTORY OF TAMIL KINGS

There is evidence that the image of dancing Śiva gained currency in Southern India even earlier than the 8th century CE, during the Sangam period, which fell between ca. the 3rd century BCE and the

<sup>9</sup> (Smith, 1996), p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> See (Smith, 1993), p. 62; (Smith, 1996), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Although the form of the *Liṅga* has been interpreted in various ways, we confine ourselves to its concrete form, which cannot be compared with any perceivable object.

<sup>12</sup> (Tirumantiram 2790), p. 69, ninth tantra. ‘For the Ṛṣi Patanjali and Vyāghrapāda / In the splendid Temple of Chi-

dambaram / He danced as a Form, a Formless and a Cosmic Form, / With the Divine Grace of *Śakti* He danced, / He, the Citta, the Ānanda; gracefully stood and danced.’ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Tamil hymns in this work are rendered by the author based on consultation with (Smith, 1996), (Petersen, 1989) and (Shulman, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> See (Zvelebil, 1998) for the dates and works of the Śaiva hymnists.

5th century CE.<sup>14</sup> One Sangam epic, *Cilappatikāram*, composed in approximately the 5th century CE, makes reference to the dancing form of Śiva in the context of Śiva's celebration of the destruction of demons.<sup>15</sup> Although no mention is made in this work of the city of Chidambaram, the latter reference indicates that the concept of the dancing form of Śiva existed prior to its materialisation in temples. However, the earliest attested statues of the dancing Śiva are found in Śiva temples, mostly in the niches of temple walls in the Cālukya period (ca. 6th to 8th centuries CE), the Pallava period<sup>16</sup> (ca. 6th to 8th centuries CE), and the Cōla period (ca. 9th to 12th centuries CE).<sup>17</sup> The Kāñcīpuram Kailāsanātha temple built during the Pallava dynasty also exhibits icons of the dancing Śiva, but in the pose of *ūrdhva-tāṇḍava*,<sup>18</sup> 'fierce dance' (ca. 700–28 CE), which is believed to have a North Indian origin. The well-known Chidambaram dance *ānanda tāṇḍava*, 'dance of bliss,' is discussed in detail in the Tamil hymns of the Śaiva saints. With the progression from the Pallava dynasty to the Cōla dynasty, many new forms developed in and around the temple complex, resulting in the evolution of complex symbolic vocabularies commensurate with the radically changing rites of patronage and personal devotion.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> By the 3rd century BCE, three of the four great dynasties (*mūvēntars*) were already known. However, the Pallava dynasty was not mentioned in the Sangam literature, and the Cōla dynasty emerged in full strength only from 866 to 1014 CE. (Barrett, 1974), pp. 16–17.

<sup>15</sup> The Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram*, composed in about 450 CE, refers to Śiva's dance to celebrate his destruction of the three cities of demons. (*Cilappatikāram* 6.4.44-5).

<sup>16</sup> (Fergusson, 1899), p. 326, calls the stone-cut temples of *Māmallapuram* 'ratha's, and states that they are the oldest examples of their class known.

<sup>17</sup> See (Kaimal, 1999) for a discussion and examples of the image of dancing Śiva in the Cālukya and Pallava dynasties and early Cōla temples.

<sup>18</sup> KAIMAL's illustrations from Bādāmī temples show Śiva with multiple hands and in a fierce mood, see (Kaimal, 1999), p. 395. Similar gestures are given in pre-Aryan sources to Rudra-Śiva, whose occurrences can be traced back to the Indus Valley and Harappa culture. 'Rudra appears primarily as a fear-inspiring deity whose shafts of lightning slay men and cattle' (*Rgveda* 1.114.10), (Yocum, 1982), p. 16. However, no dancing form was attributed to Śiva at this time.

<sup>19</sup> MEISTER's argument for a complex and evolving symbolic vocabulary of temple architecture reflecting characteristics of the changing dynasties—see (Meister, 1986), pp. 33–50—is substantiated by evidence from Cōla architec-

On the basis of textual and inscriptional evidence, KAIMAL and ZVELEBIL observe that for the later Cōlas, images of the dancing Śiva with a tiger, a skull, a drum, snakes, fire and Apasmara, the demon of ignorance, became emblems of victory over rivals.<sup>20</sup> The use of the image of dancing Śiva as a symbol for victory by the patron Cōla kings may explain the practice —popular from around the 9th to the 10th centuries CE— of attributing to this image the status of the main deity in the *Naṭarāja* temple of Chidambaram. COOMARASWAMY's summary of the essential significance of the image of the dancing Śiva and KAIMAL's account of this image as an object of victory offer evidence of the development of a new practice.<sup>21</sup>

In the *Māṇikkavācakar* (ca. 9th century CE), we find an explicit reference to the idea of the Cidambara *rahasya* of the Chidambaram *Naṭarāja*: ariyāṇē yāvarkkum ambaravā ambalattem periyāṇē ('My majesty! No one knows your Formless Form in *Ambalam* – Chidambaram,' *Tiruvācakam*, *Māṇikkavācakar*, verse 22).<sup>22</sup> Other uses of this vocabulary of formlessness (*arūpa*) can be found in Tirumular's *Tirumantiram*.<sup>23</sup> One is quoted as below.

Uruvinṇi yēniṇṇu uruvam puṇarkkum	Form, there is none; He befits all of the
karuvaṇṇi yēniṇṇu tāṇkaru vākum	forms.
aruvinṇi yēniṇṇa māyap pirāṇaik	Cosmic Egg, there is none; He prevails
karuvinṇi yāvarkkum kūṭaonṇātē.	over all.
(Tiru. 2840:6)	Him, the elusive Lord without a Form,
	Impossible for anyone to reach, with-
	out His quintessence – the <i>karu</i> .

As this verse occurs in a chapter of the *Tirumantiram* entitled *Corūpa utayam*, 'Genesis of the magnificent form' (verses 2835 to 2846), it is reasonable to assume that the conceptualisation of Śiva in the form of Cidambara *rahasya* was in practice from the time of the inception of this temple between the 7th and 9th centuries CE – the period of the Tamil saints Appar, Cuntarar and Campantar.

ture; the *rūpa-arūpa* method of worship is one example.

<sup>20</sup> (Zvelebil, 1998); (Kaimal, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> (Coomaraswamy, 2013), pp. 132–54.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. (Nārāyaṇavēlup Pillai, 1995), *Tirumantiram* verse 886, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> See (Zvelebil, 1998), pp. 40–3, for

the dates between the 7th and 11th centuries CE of important references to both the dancing Śiva and the Cidambaram site by poet saints such as Maṇikkavācakar, Tirumūlar, Nambiyāṇṭār Nambi, Cēkkilār, Appar and Campantar. See also *Tirumantiram*.

Although the dates of these texts are debatable, it cannot be denied that the patterns of belief reflected in images of Śiva had a definite impact on the architecture and sculpture of Śiva temples – mainly on the way in which the image of dancing Śiva, the *sabhā* and the Ether, are manifested and conceived in parallel with their textual representations. It may not be an overstatement to conclude that the Tamil poet saints conceptualised Śiva's new forms in their texts and the kings materialised them in their architectural construction.

The conceptualisation of the image of Śiva in His concrete 'blissful dancing form' instead of the abstract form of the *Liṅga* constitutes an indigenous idea that emerged exclusively from the south, and the hymns that designate it confirm the existence of a unique mode of worship that, as discussed earlier, is nothing else than *bhakti*, and was later attributed to the indigenous worship method of Tamil *arccanai*, principally determined by such processes as *Tirumuṟai pāṭutal* and *Tiruppatiyam ceytal*, praising God through the hymns of the celebrated Tamil poets.

#### XI.5 TIRUPPATIYAM VIṆṆAPPAÑCEYTAL: A TRADITION OF CHANTING ŚAIVA HYMNS IN ŚIVA TEMPLES OF SOUTH INDIA AND EVIDENCE FROM STONE INSCRIPTIONS

The chanting of Śaiva Tirumuṟai hymns in temples as part of rituals is attested in many inscriptions from the Pallava period onwards, confirming that a dialogue between the two contesting methods of religious practice had occurred historically.<sup>24</sup> Although this tradition was in place from the composition of the Śaiva hymns by the sixty-three Nāyanmārs until recent times, references in inscriptions to the establishment of permanent grants by both the Pallava and the Cōḷa kings indicate that the Tamils' method of ritualisation with a community of hymnists involved the use of Tamil texts as well as poet saints' expression of their devotion to God. An inscription made on behalf of Rāja Rājendra Cōḷa, for instance, records the king's order to assign a daily allowance of paddy to each of forty-eight persons (*piṭārarkaḷ*) involved in reciting the *Tiruppatiyam* (*Śaiva hymns of the sixty-three Nāyanmārs*) in the Śiva temple

<sup>24</sup> Tirumuṟai otutaṟkuriya kōyil maṇ- made to temples to chant Tirumuṟai  
ṭapattukku viṭṭanivantam ..., 'Offerings hymns ...' (SII 12.231).



of Thanjavur, along with the two persons providing a drum accompaniment.

... rājarāja tēvarkku yāṇṭu irupattoṇpatāvatu varai uṭaiyār Rājarājisvaram uṭaiyārkkut tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyya uṭaiyār rārājatēvar kuṭutta piṭārarkaḷ nārpatteṇmarum ivarkaḷilē nilaiyāy uṭukkai vācippāṇ oruvaṇum ivarkaḷilē koṭṭimattaḷam vācippāṇ oruvaṇum āka aimpatiṇmarukkuppērāl nīcatam nellu mukkuṟuṇi ... (SII 2.65).

King Rājarāja Devar's order in his 29th regnal year is hereby to perform the *Tiruppatiyam* to Rājarājisvaram Uṭaiyār. All the forty-eight men [*piṭārarkaḷ*] who perform the *Tiruppatiyam*, as well as the one who plays the hand drum and the one who plays the stick drum, totalling fifty people, must be offered three quarters of the paddy.

It is unclear whether the performance of *Tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyṭal*, 'chanting of the hymns,' by a group of people called *piṭārarkaḷ* was meant to be the main event of the temple worship or if it was supplementary to the principal form of ritual carried out in Sanskrit. Yet the subsequent lines in this inscription record the donor's command that this custom be perpetuated down the generations, with donations issued to all who engaged in the process; in the case of a lack of hymnists, according to the inscription, the heir of the tradition should be forced (*āliṭṭut Tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyvittu*) to continue. If the lineage were to end, it would be the utmost responsibility of those who managed (*niyāyattāre*) the ritual process to find an appropriate hymnist (*yogyarāyiruppār*) to maintain the tradition and dispense the donations accordingly.

Ivarkaḷil cettārkkum aṇātēcam poṇārkkuntalaimāru avvavarkku aṭutta muṛai kaṭavār annelluppeṟrut tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyyavum avvavarkku aṭutta muṛai kaṭavār tāntām yogyarī allātu viṭil yogyarāyiruppārai āliṭṭut tiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyvittu annelluppeṟavum avvavarkku aṭutta muṛai kaṭavārinriyoliyil anta niyāyattāre yogyarāyiruppāraitiruppatiyam viṇṇappañceyya iṭṭu iṭṭa avaṇe avvavar peṟumpaṭi nellup peṟavum āka ippaṭi uṭaiyār srīrājarājatēvar tiruvāymoḷintaruḷiṇapaṭi kallil veṭṭiyatu. (ibid.)

Among these, aside from those who are dead and those who have left the town, subsequent generations of people who chant Tamil Śaiva hymns should be offered the aforementioned amount of paddy. In the case of a lack of subsequent generations capable of [chanting Tamil Śaiva hymns], the people in charge should appoint those who are able to chant hymns

and offer them the same amount of paddy. This is the writing made on stone by the order of Udaiyar Sri Rāja Rāja Tevar.

The determined efforts of India's mediæval kings to promote the use of Tamil religious texts can be taken as evidence of the perceived authenticity of Tamil religious poems as part of the Tamils' religious life. However, as can be seen from the following inscription and a number of related others, the kings patronised both Sanskrit and Tamil simultaneously, and hence they became responsible for the continued coexistence of the two competing ritual practices from the mediæval period onwards. This is substantiated by a reference in an inscription made at the order of the same king, Rājarājatevar, on the north wall of the Tirupunturutti temple (Tanjore Taluk). This inscription, part of a very long *Meykkīrtti*, 'praise of God,' mentions the prosperity of the two main religious groups, Tamil and Sanskrit, along with those from diverse other regions, such as the *Kuccarar*, *Āriyar*, *Kōcalar*, *Koṇkaṇar*, *Vaccirar*, *Kāciyar*, *Cōṇakar* and *Vantiyar*.

Nāl vētat tarumaṛaiyo raivvēlvi yāraṅkamuṭaṇ ciṛappa varuntamiḷu māriyamu maṛu camaiyat taṛa neṛiyun tiruntu maṇuṇeṛiyun tīrampātu taḷaittōṅkak kuccararumāriyarum kōcalaruṅ koṇkaṇarum vacciraruṅ kāciyaru mātṭararu ... rumaṇaruṅ cōṇaka vantiyaru mutalāya virunila māmuṭi vēnta riṛaiṅci niṇṛu tīraikāṭṭavum. (SII 5.459.4)

Let the four Vēdas prosper, with all five types of fire ritual (*Vēlvi*) in order; [let] the precious Tamil along with Āryam and other religious doctrines such as Manu's prosper without fail. The kings of the *Kuccarars*, *Āriyars*, *Kōcalars*, *Koṇkaṇars*, *Vaccirars*, *Kāciyars*, *Cōṇakars* and *Vantiyars*, who belong to two regions, should also achieve great prosperity and richness.

It can be inferred from this inscription that the religious rituals of diverse doctrines were treated equally during the mediæval period, with no contest over their relative domination or power. Therefore, conflict between the diverse belief systems must have arisen at a later period, especially during the post-mediæval and colonial periods.

#### XI.6 THE DANCE OF ŚIVA IN VEḷḷIYAMPALAM – MADURAI

Lord Śiva is said to have performed his magnificent dance in five different sacred places called *ampala* in Tamil country, and each one



of these performances possesses historical relevance. One of the chapters of *Tiruvīlaiyāṭar purāṇam* narrates Śiva's dance in *Vellīyam-palam* 'Silver hall' in Madurai, where the Lord Śiva with the name of *Sōmācuntarak kaṭavuḷ* is getting married to the goddess *Mīṇākṣī*. After the marriage, he invites the kings, saints, and other renowned people in the town, for a grand dinner. These eminent people took their holy dip in a sacred pond, worshiped the sacred Lord and got ready for this precious dinner. Two saints among the attendees, named *Viyākkira pātar* and *Patañcali muni*, pleaded with the Lord for a performance of his gracious dance. Accepting their request, *Sōmācuntarak kaṭavuḷ* performed his dance in Madurai.

Śiva, the matchless, with the name of Cuntara Pāṇḍiyan,  
 Arrived on the earth, departing from the divine world!  
 His intention was to stabilise the ultimate wisdom on earth.  
 Married to Umā, a source of light for the moon!  
 Wearing the Crown for the kingdom of earth,  
 Performed his majestic dance  
 for the delight of the saints!  
 We begin to narrate this dance of limitless joy and ecstasy.<sup>25</sup>

Married to virtuous Pirattī, like a thin stake of a flower.  
 With an eye in his forehead the Lord Sōmācuntaran,  
 The one who rules the world,  
 Invites for a dinner  
 the kings, celestials, saints and others,  
 those who were at the gracious wedding.<sup>26</sup>

All who were in the gracious wedding,  
 Had a dip in a sacred pond full of lotus flowers.  
 Performed all their services to god accordingly.  
 Arrived for the dinner in the court of Cuntara Pāṇḍiyan.  
 Saints Viyākkira pātar and Patañcali  
 fell on the feet of the Lord,  
 summoned for a gracious dance,  
 instead of a precious dinner.<sup>27</sup>

Accepting the request from the saints *Viyākkira pātar* and *Patañcali*, the Lord *Sōmācuntaram* prepares himself to exhibit a magnificent dance in Madurai, a place he relates metaphorically to the top of

<sup>25</sup> *Tiruvīlaiyāṭar purāṇam* 456:1.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* 456:3.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* 456:2.

head in his body. *Ponṇampalam* ‘Chidambaram,’ where he performed his other dance earlier, according to him, is his heart. Listening to the Lord’s comparison of his body to sacred places, the saints request him for an explanation of the other parts of his body.<sup>28</sup>

‘We perform that dance,  
in this *Velliyampalam*,’ said the Lord.  
‘The World is nothing but a Human Form!  
Heart is the *Ponṇampalam* (Chidambaram) and  
Top of head is this *Velliyampalam*,’  
proclaimed the Lord gracefully.  
Oh! The Lord! ‘What are the other parts then?’  
asked the Saints.  
The Lord Says!<sup>29</sup>

Above the waist lies the seven world!  
Beneath the waist lies another seven world!  
Worlds are the human body, so to say!  
Exists limitless Sanctorum on this earth!  
To describe them all, impossible it would be!  
We explain some, listen you all!<sup>30</sup>

Historically<sup>31</sup> significant temples (*stāna*) of Śiva in Tamil Nadu include the ones in Tiruvārūr, in Tanjore district, Tiruvāṇaikkōvil in Tiruchi district, *Tiruvaṇṇāmalai* in Salem district, Tirucciṇṇampalam (Chidambaram) in South-Arcot district, Tirukkaḷatti in Pudukkottai district and Kāci in Chengalput district. All these centers of Śiva are united together in the form of his body. Thus, according to the poem, Tiruvārūr is the foot (*mūlam*), Tiruvāṇaikkōvil is assumed to be the reproductive organ (*kuyyam*), *Tiruvaṇṇāmalai* is the waist (*maṇipūraṭṭāṇam*), Chidambaram is the heart (*itayam*), Tirukkaḷatti is the matchless head (*Kaṇṭam*) and finally Kāci is the middle part of the two eyebrows.<sup>32</sup> Having compared his temples

<sup>28</sup> As each one of Śiva’s temples are related to human body parts, the human body here is nothing but the body of the Lord Śiva. In other words, it may be assumed that the Lord’s body is spread in the land of Tamil country in the form of his temples.

<sup>29</sup> *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭar purāṇam* 457:5.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* 458:5.

<sup>31</sup> The temples that are described in many literary works in Tamil are usually assumed historically as prominent places of worship. They are also called *Pāṭal peṇṇa talaiṇkal*, ‘Sacred places that have mentions in poems.’

with the different part of his own body, the Lord thus prepares to dance.

#### XI.7 MUSIC, ŌTUVĀR TRADITION AND SEARCH FOR A METHOD OF INDIGENOUS WORSHIP

Ālvār texts have been passed on from generation to generation with an emphasis on music (*icai*) and mime (*avinayam*) rather than poetry.<sup>33</sup> The *Tiruvāymoli* and similar Tamil religious texts are regularly sung in temples by *ōtuvārs*. It is often believed that their style of singing with rhythm and melody is more appealing than a simple rendering of the texts, and better conveys the texts' spirit than their meaning. The idea of *antāti*,<sup>34</sup> denoted by a Sanskrit term describing a return from the end to the beginning, and regularly found in Ālvār poems, facilitates recitation with an aesthetic appeal.

Another relevant point to be drawn from RAMANUJAN's work on Tamil hymns is his account of 'shifts' that took place during the *bhakti* period. He argues that the compositions of both the Vaiṣṇavas (Ālvārs) and the Śaivas (Nāyanmārs) during the *bhakti* period caused shifts 'from hearing to speaking; watching to dancing; a passive to an active mode; a religion and a poetry of the esoteric few to a religion and a poetry of anyone who can speak ... From the sacrificial-fire rituals (*yajñā* or *hōma*) to worship (*pūjā*).'<sup>35</sup> In addition, the ritual methods of 'singing of the Lord,' dancing and *pūjā* have continued to this day in temples and other sacred places in Tamil Nadu, keeping these changes alive; similarly, *Āṇṭāl Tiruppāvai* rituals continue to be performed with an abundance of mysticism and devotional commitment.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Āgamic manuals became the basis for all of the rituals conducted by Brahman priests, the Śaiva textual canon, the *Tēvāram*, and the Vaiṣṇava textual canon, the *Prabhandams*, became the basis for the traditions of *paṇṭārams* and *ōtuvārs*, respectively.

<sup>32</sup> Note that *Tiruvārūr*, the foot, is far south, and *Kāci*, the forehead, is farther north, thus his body constitutes the whole of Tamil country.

<sup>33</sup> (Ramanujan, 1981), p. 135.

<sup>34</sup> All of the *Tiruvāymoli* poems are sung in a such a way that the last word of each poem becomes the first word of

the next, creating a garland of poems to offer to the Lord.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> See (Renganathan, 2014) for a detailed account of the Tamil rituals performed exclusively on the basis of the Vaiṣṇava text of the *Āṇṭāl Tiruppāvai*.

According to DAVIS, the Brahman priests who perform these rituals claim that they have understood the Sanskrit *Āgamas* either directly from the *Āgamic* texts —composed either in Sanskrit or in Tamil Grantha script— or from a long tradition of *gurus*.<sup>37</sup> The same is true of the co-existing Tamil tradition: saints' devotional experience was originally rendered in *bhakti* poems, and later transmitted orally from generation to generation by *paṇṭārams* and *ōtuvārs*.

Therefore, the output of the mediæval saint poets was delivered by *paṇṭārams* with a shift from composition to recitation, without affecting the texts' original transcendent spirit. This transformation became the foundation for the development of a new method of worship called Tamil *arccanai*, as noted elsewhere. RAMASWAMY states that this revivalism had its origin in 1920, in the then Tamil revivalist movement called neo-Śaivism, whose proponents in turn believed that the practice of using Tamil rather than Sanskrit for divine worship started during the Pallava (ca. 6th to 9th centuries CE) and Cōla (ca. 9th to 11th centuries CE) dynasties.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the two legitimate groups contending for religious hegemony, domination and power were associated with the practice of Tamil *arccanai* rituals as performed by *paṇṭārams* or Tamil *pāṭuvār* and others by chanting songs from the Tamil *bhakti* texts of *Tēvāram*, *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirumantiram*; and correspondingly the Sanskrit rituals were performed by Brahmin priests, otherwise known as *āryap paṭṭarkaḷ* or *Āryam pāṭuvār* and strictly following the rules of the *Āgama* scriptures. However, it is evident from FULLER's account of these two competing traditions in Tamil Nadu that the practice of Tamil *arccanai* had never been successfully implemented in temples in Tamil Nadu, and that the Brahman priests continued to conduct their worship in Sanskrit, disregarding the efforts of the government led by the Dravidian political party.<sup>39</sup>

A popular form of resistance to the proposal for a mode of worship in the Tamil language came from Dakshinamoorthy Bhattar, a Brahman priest who challenged the government's orders on the grounds that the efficacy of ritual depended on the particular sounds of Sanskrit, and that there would be a 'disaster' if he 'dared to perform the *arccanai* in Tamil'.<sup>40</sup> The focus here seems not to be on the relative authority and power of Sanskrit and Tamil priests,

<sup>37</sup> (Davis, 1991); (Ishimatsu, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> (Presler, 1987), p. 117; see also

<sup>38</sup> (Ramaswamy, 1992).

(Harrison, 1960), p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> (Fuller, 2003), p. 116.

but solely on the hegemony of the respective languages and scriptures. Accordingly, the hegemony of the literary genres of both the *bhakti* tradition of the Tamils and the corresponding Āgamic tradition of the proponents of the Sanskrit language continued to develop throughout history in terms of their religious engagement within society.

#### XI.8 COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL MODES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The Brahmanic religious tradition probably took precedence over the Tamil *bhakti* tradition in part because the British chose the Brahmans and their scriptures, such as *Arthaśāstra*, as local agents in their formation of the colonial Indian state. Eugene F. IRSCHICK notes that this behaviour was part of a strategy for establishing a hold on local regions and gaining political legitimacy; accordingly, the British attempted to re-establish and repair religious centres and temples in local areas. He further highlights an attack by the Kallars (a non-Brahmin caste group) on the British armed forces after Colonel Heron took images from the Kallar temple in Kōvilkuṭi in 1755.<sup>41</sup> IRSCHICK goes on to say that the British gave Brahmans the sole jurisdiction over handling images in temples. This clearly suggests that the British implicitly authorised the Brahmans to perform their religious duties, and this authority seems to have remained in place to date. Lloyd L. RUDOLPH and Susanne Hoeber RUDOLPH also confirm that the British completely ignored local customs and habits, depending instead heavily on Brahman *pandits* to make final decisions<sup>42</sup>:

The English began with the clear intention of applying, for most purposes, Indian law to Indians. Governor General Hastings in 1772 had ordered that ‘in all suits regarding marriage, inheritance, and caste and other religious usages and institutions [succession was added in 1781] the laws of the Koran with respect to Mohammedans, and those of *Shaster* [sacred law texts] with respect to the Hindus shall be invariably adhered to Pandits and Shastris [traditional specialists in the sacred

<sup>41</sup> (Irschick, 1994), p. 20.

279–93.

<sup>42</sup> (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967), pp.

texts, almost invariably Brahmans] were assigned to share responsibility for judgments by signing the final document.<sup>43</sup>

The colonial method of knowledge production through the Brahmanic approach obviously closed the door to the customs, habits and cultures of the local *bhakti* tradition of the Tamils for almost two centuries, at least until the evolution of the neo-Śaivite movements formulated by Śaiva saints such as Rāmalinga Aṭikaḷ and Maraimalai Aṭikaḷ in the second half of the 19th century. Therefore, the impetus for the post-colonial mode of knowledge production emerged with the propagation of Dravidian and Tamil nationalism by the neo-Śaivites, followed by the Justice and Dravidian political parties.

#### XI.9 IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT: CONTEST OVER HEGEMONY

From the point of view of the Tamils, the explicit agents in the conflict over the idea of an indigenous mode of knowledge representation were the intelligibility of the ritual text and intimacy with God in one's own language. From the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition, these agents were the sacredness of the sounds of Sanskrit and the authenticity of the Āgamic scriptures. The implicit agent in the conflict was the safeguarding of the indigenous Tamil *bhakti* tradition, which is claimed here to have lost its voice due to the domination of Sanskrit practices.

Social scientists would say that it was precisely these kinds of village and temple contestations that had formed the basis of the previous system – no single group could dispense with any other group. In this structure, consensus and balance were realised through conflict; everyone knew that there were others who would enter the contest.<sup>44</sup>

The origins of this conflict between the indigenous Tamil system and the Brahmanic system of ritual practice can be traced back to the mediæval period, especially between the 6th and 10th centuries CE. Evidence can be found in the songs of Tirumūlar, a Tamil Śaivite who founded the yogic ritual system of worship in a text entitled *Tirumantiram*, 'sacred mantras,' in the 6th century CE. Among the

<sup>43</sup> (Derrett, 1961–2), cited in (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967), p. 282.      <sup>44</sup> (Irschick, 1986), p. 23.

much acclaimed practices of Śiva *bhakti*, according to the *Tirumantiram*, was the exercise of devotion to Śiva by revering Śaiva saints (non-Brahman saints), who were popularly known for their dedicated and untiring performance of worship to Śiva. Many legends tell us how the practices of Śiva *bhakti* were carried out by kings and elite groups simply through the respectful treatment of and admiration for Śaiva saints. Tirumūlar devotes a separate section entitled ‘Mahēśvara Pūjā,’ ‘Pūjā to the great Lord,’ to the significance of Śiva *bhakti* and the importance of admiring Śaiva saints. According to Tirumūlar, making offerings to God in temples has no potential, but making offerings to Śiva *bhākta* is much like offering to the divine directly (verse 1857).<sup>45</sup> The chapter goes on to say that when a Śiva *bhākta* consumes the food offered by a devotee, the pleasure he receives is indistinguishable from that received by any other agent in the three worlds (verse 1858).<sup>46</sup> This idea is very similar to the custom of *annadānā* (offering food to the poor) performed during the ritual of *homa* in Vedic culture. In the latter case, however, offerings are made only to Brahmins; no others, according to custom, are entitled to receive it.

However, Tirumūlar claims that the value of an offering to one Śiva *bhākta* cannot be matched – either by making offerings to 1,000 Brahmins or by building 1,000 temples (verse 1860).<sup>47</sup> Throughout this chapter, Tirumūlar reiterates his claim that the ritual practices of Śaiva devotees and Śiva *bhakti* are far superior to the ritual practices of *hōma* (*vēlvi*) performed by the Brahmins. This clearly indicates that the conflict over religious hegemony between the Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic traditions had begun as early as Tirumūlar’s compositions, in the mediæval period. This conflict continues to date, as discussed earlier in reference to the neo-Śaivite and Dravidian movements.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> (Nārāyaṇavēlup Piḷḷai, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> (Renganathan, 2014). See (Appa-

durai, 1981) & (Dirks, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> See (Appadurai, 1981) & (Dirks, 1987).

<sup>48</sup> See (Ramaswami, 1992), p. 138.



XI.10 CŌLA TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE AND THE EVOLUTION OF  
INDIGENOUS SOUTH INDIAN TEMPLE CULTURE IN THE  
PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

South Indian historiography has always defined a power relationship between temples and the imperial kingdom. Nicholas DIRKS and Arjun APPADURAI discuss the autonomy and sovereignty of temples in the context of pre-colonial India.<sup>49</sup> DIRKS notes that the most significant characteristic of temple culture in pre-colonial India is that sovereignty is essentially procured in temples, where the deity is the paradigmatic sovereign. However, this sovereignty was re-created in colonial and post-colonial India through the establishment, as mentioned earlier, of endowment bodies such as the Hindu Religious Endowment (later the HR&CE Department). As explained by Franklin PRESLER, bureaucracy began to play a major role in determining power. This section shows that unlike the role of bureaucratic context, the earlier mode of procuring sovereignty for a deity protected the indigenous characteristics of texts.

The polarisation of Sanskrit and Tamil rituals and priesthood can be extended further, to the consummation of images in temples in pre-colonial South India. The *Linga* and the dancing form of Śiva represent distinct patterns of worship in Śiva temples, originating in the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions, respectively. It is claimed in this section that this polarisation of images and their co-existence in Śiva temples of South India evolved as a consequence of Sanskritisation. Turning from the few rock-cut examples of the Pallava dynasty (600 to 800 CE),<sup>50</sup> to the structural temples of the Cōla kings (from 866 to 1280 CE),<sup>51</sup> these images show an enormous scope and are extraordinarily complex. One of the notable features of Dravidian temples is the development of outlying elements such as circumambulatory paths and *maṇḍapas* (halls).

After the Pallavas initiated their enterprise of building stone-cut temples, the forms of worship and the perception of God in the Dravidian region underwent a radical transformation with changes in dynasties, kings and patrons. As patrons in different periods made changes and additions to existing temples, the temples' symbolic vocabularies became ever more complex.<sup>52</sup> Tamil hymnists

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<sup>49</sup> See (Appadurai, 1981) & (Dirks, 1987). <sup>51</sup> (Balasubramaniam, 1979); (Barrett, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> (Barrett, 1974), p. 16.



and kings played a significant part in shaping temple architecture and image worship during the Cōla hegemony, which lasted from approximately the 10th to the 13th centuries CE.<sup>53</sup>

Despite some minor differences in their depictions of Hindu mythology, gods and sculptures, the Hindu temples of the Cōla period generally manifest the decorative veneers of *gopuras* (gateways), *maṇḍapas* (halls), *prakaras* (circumambulatory paths) and tanks. The divine space extending from the *garbhagr̥ha* to the urban space through the gateways is attributed the symbolic meaning of a ‘Temple town’ by George MICHELL.<sup>54</sup>

#### XI.11 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The influence of the Sanskrit language on the Tamil tradition and the very frequent use of Āgamic rituals in South Indian temples made the legacy of the mediæval *bhakti* poets and their poems ineffectual in temple worship. Not only priests but also religious scriptures and their hegemony were brought into focus in Tamil nationalist sentiment. Soliciting support from superordinates became inevitable for the contending DMK, resulting in a gradual transformation of extreme superordinate-subordinate relations between the communities into more equal ones.<sup>55</sup> As a result of the weakening of direct conflict with superordinates, Tamil nationalist efforts began to concentrate on the distinguishing features of the textual traditions of the past, rather than on defending their position exclusively based on ritual methods in temples.

Therefore, the failure of attempts to popularise Tamil hymns in temple rituals under the name of Tamil *arccanai*, as FULLER notes, indicates the continued dominance of the colonial and pre-colonial processes of Sanskritisation over the Tamilisation efforts made

<sup>52</sup> ‘None of the present structures in the Naṭarāja’s temple complex can be dated before the later Cōla period (1070–1279 CE). The accession of Kulōttuṅka I to the Cōla throne in 1070 CE seems to have given a new impetus that led to the reconstruction of previous and erection of new structures in the ancient temple site.’ (Mevissen,

2002), p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> See (Balasubrahmanyam, 1971, 1975, 1979) for the chronology of Cōla kings and their efforts to build and renovate temples.

<sup>54</sup> (Michell, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> See (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967), p. 79.

by poet saints. In other words, the weakening of anti-Āgamic rituals reflects not only the failure of Tamil nationalism, but also the continued subalternity of Tamil priests. Therefore, the weakened hegemony of Tamil religious intellectualism can be inferred from the status of mediæval Tamil religious texts and from the folk customs of the ancient past. As already stated, one reason for this state of affairs was the enormous attention paid by the state in developing Āgamic schools to educate more Sanskrit priests in Āgamic texts, without any parallel effort to educate Tamil priests in Tamil religious texts to exercise Tamil *arccanai* and promote the traditional methods of worship, dominated by types of bodily performance such as divine / spiritual ‘possession.’ Therefore, although from FOUCAULT’s standpoint, a discourse was produced by Tamil nationalists (the subordinates), a Tamil hegemony did not evolve due to the continued dominance of superordinates. The emergence of Tamil nationalist sentiment but not Sanskrit nationalism positioned Tamil as subordinate and Sanskrit as superordinate, and the formation of a new method of worship called Tamil *arccanai* in conflict with Sanskrit rituals suggested that although the Tamil religious tradition had gained power, it was still in a thoroughly weakened position.

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CH. XII  
ARCHITECTURAL BILINGUALISM AT WORK IN THE CŌḶA  
KINGDOM: TANJORE, GANGAIKONDACHOLAPURAM  
AND EPIGRAPHICAL ROYAL EULOGIES  
CHARLOTTE SCHMID

Under his orders, they took the Gaṅgā (waters) with hundreds of golden pots, and marched back towards his own kingdom! At that time, for a brief moment, they acquired the nature of a 'Bearer-of-Gaṅgā' (*gaṅgādhara*) superior to Śiva himself, those kings of the earth!

Tiruvintaḷūr charts, st. 34 (1065)<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT

Both the temple of Gangaikondacholapuram and the *Meykkīrtti* (Tamil royal epigraphical praises) of Rājendra I are inspired by the architectural, iconographic and epigraphic achievements of Rājarāja I. The royal epigraphical eulogy not only in Tamil but also in Sanskrit underwent a remarkable development during the reign of Rājendra I in the Tamil country. It is all the more surprising that it has not been engraved on the royal foundation of this king, the temple of Gangaikondacholapuram. But this major monument located in the Tamil country some sixty miles north-west of Tanjore represents an enigma in several respects. If it is on the choice of a site that appears to us today very isolated that it has often been questioned, it is through the enigmatic character of its

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<sup>1</sup> Issued in the 3rd regnal year of Rājendra II, one of the three sons and successors of Rājendra I, but engraved later (in the second year of Virarājendra, 1065), the Tiruvintaḷūr charts presents an epigraphical eulogy of Rājendra II that speaks of his predecessors; for the text, see (Sankaranarayanan *et al.*, 2011), p. 152; *tasyājñayā kanakakumbhaśatairggrhītām gaṅgām [ta]dīyaviṣayam prati dhārayantaḥ | ślāghyaṃ śivena sakutra halamuhyamānaṃ gāṅgādharatvam alabhanta batāvanīndrāḥ ||* ; trans. by the present author. In these plates, the carrying of the Ganges up to the South, the foundation of the city of Gangai, and the conquest of Śrīvijaya by Rājendra I, come one after the other, in a Sanskrit eulogy that borrows from the Tamil ones, as with several other royal charts (see Tab. 1, p. 65). They record a gift to the poet who has composed the Sanskrit part of the Cārāla plates on which see p. 81, n. 49 (and thus the Kanyākumārī inscription).

epigraphy that we will approach this royal foundation. When Rājendra I established his capital in Gangaikondacholapuram, the tradition of the *Meykkīrtti* was well established by his predecessor and father, Rājarāja I, whose royal foundation of Tanjore, the temple of Bṛhadiśvara, is engraved with many copies of the *Meykkīrtti*. It is also found that the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra I itself is so commonly engraved on the local foundations of the Tamil country that it may be the most common epigraphic text encountered in this area. Yet the royal foundation of Rājendra I contains no trace of the *Meykkīrtti* of this king.

In this paper we will expose the elements touching this epigraphic conundrum and propose to solve it by putting back the temple and its epigraphy in the larger ensembles that are the epigraphy of South India, in Sanskrit and in Tamil.

## XII.1 INTRODUCTION

THIS stanza of a Sanskrit panegyric mentions the most legendary deed of the founder of Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuram (Gangaikondacholapuram), ‘the city of the Cōḷa who has taken the Ganges’ (Gangai), established to the north-east of the Kāvēri delta at the beginning of the 11th century by the ‘Cōḷa [who is] king amongst kings,’ Rājendracōḷa.<sup>2</sup> His Tamil title of Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuram alludes to an exploit peculiarly famous in the South of India where sovereigns liked to represent themselves as Śiva Gaṅgādhara, Śiva ‘who bore the Ganges [to the South].’<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The northern campaign of Rājendra, from which his title of Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuram came, is supposed to have ended in 1023; the foundation of Gangai is mentioned in the Ecālam plates, dated to 1036 (see Tab. 1, p. 65).

<sup>3</sup> To recapitulate from the 6th century, this exploit has inspired Sanskrit royal epigraphy, iconography and architectural realisation. The Trichy cave, where the inscription of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I is engraved above the Kāvēri, elevated to the rank of a Ganges of the South, and framing a relief that depicts Śiva Gaṅgādhara, is one of the first known instances of the theme. This is duly stressed in Rājendracōḷa’s eulogies, as in st. 35 of the Tiruvāṅkāṭu plates, where it is said that the daughter of Kavera (Kāvērī) was the first descent of the Ganges onto the South, and then in st. 109, that Rājendracōḷa descended on the South through his military valour. (Brocquet, 2005), pp. 82–4, recapitulates the instances of this theme in Sanskrit epigraphical eulogies of Rājendracōḷa.

In honour of Rājendracōḷa, epigraphical royal praises have been composed and engraved. These panegyrics were either in Tamil or Sanskrit, written on stone or metal. According to such eulogies, called, respectively, *Meykkīrtti* (Tamil) and *Praśasti* (Sanskrit), Rājendracōḷa not only marched up to the Ganges, but conquered a large territory that included the Śrīvijaya kingdom in South East Asia. Using these texts as ‘historical introductions,’ scholars have carefully crossed the events thus recorded with archæological remains, and most of all with the location of the stone inscriptions, to follow a narrative in which Rājendracōḷa plays a major role, after his father, Rājarāja, and before Kulōttuṅka I, in the establishment of the glory of the Tamil country. The connoisseur of Tamil epigraphy who was Noburu KARASHIMA cannot but have been tempted by this master in the use of epigraphy, Rājendracōḷa. In one of his latest papers, KARASHIMA (2009) scrutinised the archæological finds of the site of Gangai to elicit direct contacts with China during Rājendracōḷa’s reign; in the same book where his paper appeared, together with Y. SUBBARAYALU, he directed attention towards Tamil inscriptions that may clarify the links between the Cōḷa kingdom and the Śrīvijaya empire under the same rule.<sup>4</sup>

As a written tribute —a true (*mey*) motive of glory (*kīrtti*)— in honour of Noburu KARASHIMA, we propose to bring to light the key role this foundation of Gangaikondacholapuram played in the discourse Rājendracōḷa addressed not only to his Tamil kingdom but to a pan-Indian audience, and, overseas, to Southeast Asia.

## XII.2 A PUZZLING LOCATION: RĀJENDRACŌḶA'S GANGAIKONDACHOLAPURAM

As with several other authors we could ponder if the Tamil *Meykkīrttis* are ‘true glory’ or not, but what can be ascertained right now is that the temple of Gangaikondacholapuram is a gem of the Tamil country (Fig. 1, p. 57), while the Cōḷa dynasty is more than a matter of pride for Tamil people. ‘Cōḷa’ is close to an affirmation of identity in Tamil Nadu and an object of nationalist conceit. As such, the temple of Gangai can be a crowded place today. Still, most of the time it is visited only by tourists, and even those are less numerous than the ones who go and visit the Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore (Fig. 2, p. 57),

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<sup>4</sup> (Karashima, 2009), pp. 271–91.

built by the predecessor and father of Rājendracōḷa, Rājarāja, the king of kings.

There seems to be an obvious reason for this poor attendance: Gangai is today situated in the middle of nowhere, while the Bṛhadīśvara temple stands inside the bustling and old city of Tanjore (Fig. 3, p. 60). Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain the choice of what appears today a puzzlingly isolated location for a royal temple. This was the area from where Rājendra started to conquer the Ganges.<sup>5</sup> This was an area that allows for a better defense of the kingdom and the royal foundation.<sup>6</sup> This was a neutral area in contradistinction with the antique Tanjore, where intrigues at the court may have interfered with the smooth running of a king's rule.<sup>7</sup>

We propose focusing on the less famous but no less puzzling enigma of the inscriptions at Gangai to solve the conundrum of the location of the city established by Rājendra. It is our contention that deciphering the epigraphical enigma of its famous temple may elucidate the choice of the location of Gangai – among many other things. In fact such decoding reveals how much the royal temples of the Bṛhadīśvara and Gangai were paired on the one hand, and how the temple of Gangai was conceived as a magnificent complement to the many local foundations scattered in the Cōḷa territory when it was built, on the other. The temple of Gangai communicates the grandeur of two most famous Cōḷa sovereigns, Rājarāja and Rājendracōḷa, and hints at the development of Tamil identity under their rule. Finally, it demonstrates how much epigraphy, architecture and iconography were tied together in the fundamentally bilingual discourse that Rājendracōḷa addressed to an audience as large as possible, far beyond the frontiers of 'his own kingdom' (*[ta]dīyaviṣayaṃ*).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See (Nagaswamy, 1970), p. 30; (Thyagarajan, 1994), pp. 182–4.

<sup>6</sup> On this hypothesis, see (Pichard, 1994), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 114–15.

<sup>8</sup> Tiruvintaḷūr charts, st. 34b.

*Figure 1:* The temple of Gangaikondacholapuram, second quarter of the 11th c.



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*Figure 2:* The Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore, end of the 10th to beginning of the 11th c.



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### XII.3 A PUZZLING EPIGRAPHY: RĀJENDRACŌLA'S MEYKKĪRTTIS AND GANGAI

As often in India, the fame of a site does not mean it is properly known. To appreciate the perplexing characteristics of the surviving epigraphical corpus of the Gangai temple, we refer our reader to the article Daud ALI devoted to the 'epigraphical legacy of Gangai.'<sup>9</sup> It is not possible nowadays to locate any epigraph engraved there under the rule of Rājendra, while several inscriptions were written after his reign that attest that Gangai was a living site of the Cōla kingdom and kept prestige later on (Fig. 4, p. 62).<sup>10</sup> To our view the epigraphical corpus of Gangai appears even more baffling when confronted with the development of Tamil epigraphy under Rājendracōla's rule, and more specifically, with the contemporary expansion of the genre of royal epigraphical praises in Tamil and Sanskrit.<sup>11</sup> Let us start with the *Meykkīrttis*, composed in honour of a king in metrical and ornate Tamil that contain the 'description of the entire true fame of a king; description of his career up to its end.'<sup>12</sup> Such royal eulogies are part of a sentence that gives a date to an inscription, and thus, usually intervene at the beginning of an epigraph. To give an accurate correspondence with a date, Tamil panegyrics were gradually enlarged in the course of the career of a given king.

*Meykkīrttis* have been developed under Rājarāja I, immediate predecessor and father of Rājendra. Several examples of the latest version of Rājarāja's *Meykkīrtti* were engraved on the Bṛhadīśvara

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<sup>9</sup> (Ali, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Daud ALI (2012) managed to discover four unreported epigraphs in 2008 and stressed that fourteen of the epigraphs copied between 1806 and 1818 by the team gathered under the Colonel Mackenzie (first Surveyor General in India) cannot be seen today (only one mentions Rājendracōla, and it was too fragmentary to be sure that it dates from the time of this king). This author states that most of the inscriptions found in Gangai are in fragments. Ibid. has shown that the collection of inscriptions at this site by the Mackenzie team and the Archaeological Survey of India are so different that it seems that they did not go to the same site.

<sup>11</sup> On the definition, birth and development of this genre with a peculiar accent on Rājendracōla I, see (Francis & Schmid, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. viii–ix, for translation and commentary of this passage of the *Paṇṇirupāṭṭiyal*, a grammatical (that is partly poetological) treatise contemporary to the rise of the genre in the 11th century.



of Tanjore, whose base is so highly engraved as to suggest that the royal foundation was primarily conceived as a monument on which to write (Fig. 5, p. 63). But many other examples of the Tamil praise of Rājarāja I, including earlier and shorter versions than the ones inscribed at Tanjore, were engraved on local foundations – these numerous temples not founded by a Cōla king but built through local agencies in the already rather large Cōla kingdom of Rājarāja I (Fig. 6, p. 66).<sup>13</sup> It is our contention that once the temple of Tanjore was finished, the *Meykkīrtti*s with which the local foundations were provided became echoes of the final version of a royal praise delivered in all its glory at the royal temple of which the Śiva has been named after the king ‘Rājarājēśvaram.’ Such diffusion –and concentration– of glory arose at the very end of the reign of Rājarāja I, as the Bṛhadīśvara took years to complete, and did not seem to be finished before the end of Rājarāja I himself. But when this time came, the royal temple was linked to all the local foundations where the *Meykkīrtti* had already been written. It became the devotional and political apex of a devotional net that took centuries to be created, in a territory in which a text praising the king gave to Cōla’s kingdom an unprecedented unity.<sup>14</sup>

At Gangai the situation is entirely different. As no inscription engraved there during the reign of Rājendracōla has ever been found, not a single epigraphical eulogy of his can be encountered on this monument to the glory of the ‘Cōla who has taken the Ganges,’ a title first encountered at Tanjore.<sup>15</sup> The strangeness of such a lack

<sup>13</sup> To thoroughly define ‘local’ several pages would be necessary. We use here this adjective to indicate a temple whose founder(s) are not affiliated with the Cōla clan and / or another dynastic lineage. See (Schmid, 2007) for a study of one of them (at Puḷḷamaṅkai).

<sup>14</sup> The building of the royal temple at Tanjore creates a net by uniting sacred places that already had a long existence. Lack of space prevents us from saying more about the link of the net then created with the two devotional corpora we know were already in existence, the *Tēvāram* and the *Tivyapirapantam*. These anthologies present their own nets with hymns gathered dedicated to the Śiva / Viṣṇu of such and such place that link the local temples, one to the other. But we assume it cannot be by chance that the legend attached to the anthologisation process of the *Tēvāram* gives the time of the king Rājarāja the main role.

<sup>15</sup> (SII 2.20).





of epigraphs at the time of the founder of the temple takes more relief when one is aware that many more inscriptions were engraved under Rājendracōḷa's rule than under Rājarāja's. Nearly all these epigraphs were prefaced with the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendracōḷa, of which hundreds of examples were then inscribed, in a large part of Rājendracōḷa's kingdom, including sites in today's Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Sri Lanka (Fig. 7, p. 67). By comparison, the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja is known over a more reduced area. Finally, Rājendracōḷa's *Meykkīrtti* was incised not only on stone but on metal, as four copper-plates –royal charts recording royal grants– have been found that were made during the reign of Rājendracōḷa, amongst which three were engraved with a *Meykkīrtti* of his (Fig. 8, p. 70, & Fig. 10, p. 73). By contrast, there is only one set of copper plates engraved with a *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja – and it is found on one of these four charts of Rājendracōḷa's reign, the so-called larger Leiden grant, where the association between the father (Rājarāja) and the son (Rājendracōḷa) is remarkable (Fig. 8).

The link with the previous reign as designed in the Leiden larger chart is a striking characteristic of the development of epigraphy under Rājendracōḷa. The eulogy of Rājarāja is the core of his son's eulogy, the latter being but a developed version of a panegyric introducing the association with the goddesses, then the conquest of the quarters that appeared with Rājarāja.<sup>16</sup> Elaboration in architecture echoes this complementarity. As has been amply demonstrated by scholars, and still strikes visitors, the temple of Gangai is deeply inspired by the Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore (Fig. 1, p. 57, & Fig. 2, p. 57) – the room given to inscriptions in these two temples constitutes their major difference. At Tanjore, the impressive epigraphical corpus contains inscriptions prefaced with the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra, including one that mentions the site of Gangaikondacholapuram – contrasting all the more with the epigraphical silence of Rājendracōḷa at Gangai.

Two temples and two *Meykkīrttis* came one after the other in time and space, and it is clear that Rājendracōḷa wanted to continue a tradition illustrated by his father, in epigraphy and in architecture. We are left with the conundrum of a royal temple so

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<sup>16</sup> The whole structure of the two praises is the same; the way epithets devoted to the goddesses have been composed is the same, likewise the enumeration of place names to which one or several epithets are attached, etc.

Figure 4: Inscription at Gangai: west-northern corner (shrine), second half of the 11th c.



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much inspired by the previous royal foundations of Tamil Nadu, but whose epigraphical ‘programme’ is so different. From the Pallava Kailāsanātha of Kāñcīpuram up to the Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore, the previous royal temples were clearly linked with their founder through their epigraphy.<sup>17</sup> Gangai does not seem to be so at all.

Shall we think that this monument was left unfinished? But inscriptions engraved there from the reign of the successors of Rājendracōḷa as well as other documents provide evidence that the temple was in use from the time of Rājendracōḷa himself and a place of importance until the end of the Cōḷa dynasty.<sup>18</sup> In the *Meykkīrti*-

<sup>17</sup> The architectural realisations commissioned by the Pallava kings were engraved with foundation inscriptions that are different from the donative inscriptions engraved at the Bṛhadīśvara. However, the latter temple is marked by the ‘epigraphical stamp’ of the royal patron through the records of gifts prefaced with his *Meykkīrtti*.

<sup>18</sup> For a list of inscriptions that can be linked to Gangai see (Thyagarajan, 1994), pp. 179–81; for inscriptions engraved at Gangai itself (Ali, 2012). Inscriptions dated in regnal years of Rājādhiraḷa I, Vīrarājendra, Rājendra II, Adhirājendra mention the palace of the king in Gangai, see for instance (SII 3.20), dated the

Figure 5: Tanjore: a monument to be written on (western direction, base, shrine), beginning of the 11th c.



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*tis* of his sons and successors, Gangai is the city where the kings go after they have proved their valour on the battle-fields.<sup>19</sup> The mys-

4th regnal year of Vīrarājendra (that is 1067, one year before the first inscription written on the Gangai temple), lns 11–12 (*keṅkaikkonṭa-coḷa-purattuk koyil uḷḷāl tirumaṇṇa-cālaiyil eḷuntaruḷiy irunta utakam paṇṇiyaruḷiṉ atirājarāja-maṇṭalattu*) and p. 70, n. 32, for some of the *Meykkīrttis* where it is mentioned; an inscription of Kulōttuṅka I's reign (regnal year 49, 1120), engraved at Gangai itself also mentions several elements of the palace (SII 4.527), (ARE 1892.80). The *Kalīṅkattuparaṇi* says Kulōttuṅka I was crowned in 'Kaṅkāpuri,' while *ulās* ('processions'), hagiographic accounts of great characters touring cities while women overboard with admiration, speak of the temple of Gangai as in use from the time of Rājendracōḷa until the end of the Cōḷa dynasty. The *Kulōttuṅkacōḷaṇulā* (59) evokes a city whose riches dazzle the visitors; in the *Rājarājacōḷaṇulā* (79–81) numerous elements appear, the palace of the king, the doors, the pavilions ...

<sup>19</sup> See the *Meykkīrttis* 2 of Vīrarājendra in (Cuppiramaṇiyam, 1983); Rājendra II also goes back to Gangai to perform the anointment of victory after having seized war-trophies such as women and treasures, see (SII 3.55). See English translations in (Vijayavenugopal, 2010).

tery deepens when we switch to the epigraphical royal praises in Sanskrit, commonly called *Praśastis*.

#### XII.4 PRAŚASTIS, RĀJENDRACŌĻA AND GANGAI

Contrary to the Tamil *Meykkīrttis*, the Sanskrit *Praśastis*, ‘songs of fame,’ are unique pieces. In the Cōḷa kingdom from Parāntaka I, who reigns during the first half of the 10th century, *Praśastis* composed in honour of Cōḷa kings are found engraved on metal, in the royal charts that are sets of copper plates imitating a manuscript’s oblong format (Fig. 8, p. 70, & Fig. 10, p. 73).<sup>20</sup> These sets were originally closed by a seal imprinted on a metal circle representing the string that holds together palm-leaf manuscripts. On the Cōḷa rounded seals, a Sanskrit verse circles the emblems of the three main dynasties of the Tamil country, the bow of the Cēras, the fishes of the Pāṇḍyas and the tiger of the Cōḷas (Fig. 9, p. 71, & Fig. 10). Could the message be clearer? These inscriptions are of a bilingual type where Sanskrit flies around the symbols of the three Tamil-speaking dynasties of the most ancient corpus of Tamil literature, the Caṅkam, to diffuse Tamil’s fame.<sup>21</sup> The content of the Sanskrit verses engraved on such seals, where it is always said that the order of the Cōḷa king rest on the crowns of the other kings, reinforces the iconographic message.

The royal praises composed in metrical Sanskrit are followed by Tamil passages recording the technical details of the gifts. These later Tamil prose renderings of practical pieces of information can include poetical *Meykkīrttis*, used as a means to date what is recorded. Four such royal charts made during Rājendra’s rule, presented in Table 1, have been found in distant places of the Tamil country.

*Praśastis* come first in the charts, and the literary tradition of Sanskrit royal eulogies, whose characteristics are different from *Meykkīrttis*, was well established when it appeared in the Tamil

<sup>20</sup> An unpublished stone inscription found in the Bṛhadiśvara of Rājārāja is a rare example of a Sanskrit stone inscription under Rājārāja’s rule. See (Brocquet, 1994), p. 101, for text and translation of some stanzas of this epigraph.

<sup>21</sup> See (Ali, 2000), pp. 202–3, for an analysis of the parasol of the Cōḷa seals, symbolising the protection but also the brilliance emitted by a paramount king.

Table 1: Four copper plates of the reign of Rājendracōḷa

<i>Charts</i>	<i>Praśasti</i>	<i>Meykkīrtti</i>
Leiden larger (after 1006) <sup>a</sup>	Rājarāja (after the 29th year = 1014) Rājendracōḷa (after 1011)	Rājarāja I (of the 21st year = 1006)
Tiruvālaṅkāṭu AR 6 (1018) <sup>a</sup>	Rājendracōḷa (after the 13th year = 1024–25)	Rājendracōḷa
Karantai AR 8 (1020)	Rājendracōḷa	Rājendracōḷa
Ecālam AR 24 (1036)	Rājarāja Rājendracōḷa	Rājendracōḷa

<sup>a</sup> The dates mentioned in the above table for the Leiden and the Tiruvālaṅkāṭu plates are not the only ones attached to documents whose making implied many agents at different times, but are given as an indication of the complexity of the manufacture of these artefacts.

country with the Pallava dynasty.<sup>22</sup> However, three at least of the Sanskrit eulogies of the charts made during Rājendra's reign—Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, Karantai and Ecālam (Figures 8 & 10)—were composed after the Tamil *Meykkīrttis* of this king, and have drawn from them. Such interaction between Tamil and Sanskrit has not yet been explored, but it was probably rather common, and the Tiruvintaḷūr charts cited at the beginning of this paper are another example of this practice. The dates given in the charts to the gifts they record do not correspond to the career of the king related in these *Praśastis*, while this career that can be followed year after year with the help of Tamil *Meykkīrttis*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, if the date of the composition

<sup>22</sup> For the tradition of *Praśastis* in Tamil Nadu, see (Brocquet, 1994 & 2005); for the Pallava ones which inspired the Cōḷa pieces, (Francis, 2017), pp. 323–9, 482–6, 607–16, and 676–9, where this author stresses that contrary to the Sanskrit eulogies of other South Indian dynasties (Cāḷukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas ...) the Pallava *Praśastis* are always new compositions.

<sup>23</sup> It has long been asserted, by those who published the plates of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu for instance, see V. VENKAYYA's note in (Marshall, 1906) and KRISHNA SASTRI in (SII 3), and stressed by the great historian K. NILAKANTA SASTRI, (Sastri, 1955), p. 195, that these Sanskrit literary pieces were made after the *Meykkīrttis* have been composed, because of the complicated chronology of the facts registered in the



Figure 6: One local temple engraved with a *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja (Puḷḷamaṅkai, western direction, shrine, wall), end of the 10th c.



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of the three *Praśastis* of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, Karantai and Ecālam, authored by a same Nārāyaṇa son of Śaṅkara, is not known with precision, it is clear these texts were made after the 13th regnal year of Rājendra as they mention the conquest of the Śrīvijaya kingdom that appears from then only in Tamil stone epigraphy. The same

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charts. The discovery of the Ecālam set, (Nagaswamy, 1987), confirmed it. Many more questions can then be asked, not only about the precise date, but about the function of such heavy, ornate, and unique artefacts disseminated in the whole kingdom.

Figure 7: One local temple engraved with a *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra (Tirumaṅkalam, western direction, shrine, base), second quarter of the 11th c.



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three charts include a *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendracōla that is similar to the many examples of the same text dated in various years that are found engraved on stone in local foundations. The same *Meykkīrtti* is also found, in its longest version, on one ‘local’ set of copper-plates.<sup>24</sup>

These Sanskrit *Praśastis* of the charts composed by Nārāyaṇa allude to the foundation of Gangai, while the Tamil *Meykkīrttis* of Rājendra never mention it, a fact that is not surprising given the rules of the latter genre. However the city appeared in the *Meykkīrttis* of Rājendra’s successors, and it seems to us that this is one more sign that the foundation was started once the composition of Rājendra’s *Meykkīrttis* was over and the time for Sanskrit texts had come.<sup>25</sup> In the three *Praśastis*, the establishment of a site that com-

<sup>24</sup> The Tirukkaḷar set is constituted of five donations strung together, starting with one dated in the reign of Rājendra I (AR 18), and ending with one dated to Kulōttuṅka III’s rule. When the details have been conserved, the donations do not concern the royal family and this is why we call it a ‘local’ set, see (SII 3.207–11).

<sup>25</sup> We know of stone *Meykkīrttis* where ‘Kaṅkaipuri’ is cited with the role of the city to celebrate a *digvijaya*, see p. 62, n. 18.

prises a tank, a city, a king's palace and a temple for Śiva is documented as follows.

In the Tiruvāḷaṅkāṭu plates (dated the 6th and 7th regnal year, 1018–19 CE) a tank, called Cōḷagaṅga, is mentioned:

- ś. 116      Then having robbed Raṇaśūra of his prosperity he entered the extensive dominions of Dharmapāla. (And) conquering him too, this General of the king of Śibis (i.e. of Rājendra-Chōla) reached the celestial river (Gaṅgā).
- ś. 117      The *daṇḍanāyaka* then immediately got the most sacred waters of that (river) carried to his master Madhurāntaka by the subjugated chiefs on the banks of that (Gaṅgā river).<sup>26</sup>

Then the king, having entered his own town (ś. 122), and having conquered Kaṭāha (ś. 123):

- ś. 124      (This) lord constructed in his own dominions as a pillar of victory (a tank) known by repute as Chōḷagaṅgam which was composed of the waters of the Ganges.<sup>27</sup>

This tank that actualises the victory of the king was located on the site and can still be seen today (see Fig. 3, p. 60). It rooted the sacred landscape of northern origin into Tamil soil. At that time, the king still resides in the city (*nagarī, puri*) of 'Śrīmuṭikoṇṭacolaṭapuri' (ś. 125), whose orthography mixes Grantha script and Tamil letters for a Sanskrit-Tamil compound (*Śrī, colaṭapuri; muṭikoṇṭa*), 'the holy city of the Cōḷa who has taken the crown.'<sup>28</sup> To say it in other words,

<sup>26</sup> *apahr̥ta-raṇaśūra-samupaducāir atha niviveśa sa dha[r̥mma]pāla-pr̥thvī[m] | [ta]m api vijitavān sura-sṛvantim agamad asau śibi-rāja-daṇḍanāthaḥ || vijitais tadiyataṭa-bhūmi-nāyakais alilantadiyam atha pāvanam param | vijanāyakā[ya] mathurāntakāya tat samanīnayat sapadi daṇḍanāyakaḥ ||* (SII 3.205), trans. (Kriishna Sastri, 1920), pp. 424–5.

<sup>27</sup> *cola(m)gaṅgam iti khyātyā pratithan nija-maṇḍale | gaṅgā-jalam ayan devo jaya-stambhaṃ vyadhata saḥ ||* (SII 3.205), trans. *ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>28</sup> On the *biruda* 'Muṭikoṇṭacōḷa' of Rājendra, applied to several buildings and places, including the city mentioned here and a branch of the Kāvēri river, see (Sastri, 1955), p. 227, n. 173; this cannot be an earlier name for the city of Gangai but was a name of Paḷaiyāru situated not far from Kumbakonam. No inscription dated in a regnal year of Rājendra has been found there: were inscriptions (directly or more indirectly) commissioned by Rājendra concentrated in the Bṛhadiśvara of Tanjore?



there is no trace of a ‘Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuri’ in a chart whose bilingual characteristics appear under several forms.

In the Karantai plates, made, theoretically, two years later (ry. 8, 1020), one verse is devoted to the descent of the Ganges up to the south of the peninsula:

st. 64      Having heard that Bhagīratha was emaciated due to the vow he has taken to fast for the Ganges to come down to earth, this so virtuous king, that torch of all the other kings, obliged the sovereigns leaving on its banks to carry the river themselves on their crowns up to his kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

Nothing is said here of the destiny of this water but that it was carried up to Rājendra’s kingdom, and the previous inscription leads us to think it records the same process. As the author of these two Sanskrit texts is the same, we venture that it was clear for him, and for his readers / listeners, that he mentions something narrated with more detail elsewhere, possibly in (an)other text(s), like the Tiruvāṅkāṭu plates.

Finally, in the Ecālam plates, dated fourteen years later (ry. 24, 1036), the city and the temple are mentioned together with the title of the king when the foundation of the Śaiva temple is celebrated in a city, Gaṅgaikoṇṭacōlapuri, previously established:

st. 18      Rājendra, this treasure of true virtues, established in Gaṅgaikoṇṭacōlapuri/ī, [a city] that he has founded by himself an excellent palace in his name for Maheśvara, he (this king) who is a bee for the Pārijāta tree that the (Lord)’s pair of feet are.<sup>30</sup>

The foundation of Gangai is also referred to in charts made under successors of Rājendracōḷa, like the already cited Tiruvintaḷūr plates, composed some thirty years after the Ecālam charts, in 1065, in which the Sanskrit *Praśasti* says Rājendracōḷa established the city Gaṅgaikoṇṭachōlapuram, a glorious place in the entire earth and on the top of which celestial women dance (ś. 36).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> gaṃgāvatāra-niyama-vrata-karṣitāṃgam | śrutvā bhagīratham analpa-guṇas svayam saḥ | tat-tīrvarti-nṛpa-maulibhir eva tāṃ svām | bhūmiṃ samānayad aśeṣa-nṛpa-pradīpaḥ | (Krishnan, 1984), p. 74, trans. by the present author.

<sup>30</sup> rājendro vyadhita sa gaṅgaikoṇṭacōlapu[r]jyām | sadguṇanidhir ātmanā kṛtāyām tan-nāma-vara-bhavanam maheśvarasya bhaktyā tat[tan?]-pada-yuga-pārijāta-bhṛṃgaḥ || (Nagaswamy, 1987), p. 32, trans. by the present author.

<sup>31</sup> Text (Sankaranarayanan *et al.*, 2011), p. 152; English gloss, *ibid.*, p. 32.

Figure 8: 'Leiden Larger' Plates, plate 4a, beginning of the 11th c.



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These pieces of information are complemented by Tamil stone inscriptions engraved in different sites, including the Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore. One dated the 19th regnal year (1031–2) records that Rājendracōla emitted a royal order while he was in the northern verandah of his palace of Gangaikondacholapuram (Kaṅkaikoṇṭa-cōlapuramkōvil).<sup>32</sup> Once again the difference of treatment of these two places in the epigraphical corpus is astonishing. Was there a place, Tanjore, where you write, and a second one where you do not?

According to these inscriptions of various types and dates, the building of the temple of Gangai was one of the latest architectural achievements at a site which may have started with a tank that has finally given its name to the whole, formed by a tank, a city with

<sup>32</sup> (SII 2.20) mentions a place for studies (*kallūri*), a garden (*āram*), a sacred hall (*tirumālikai*) called Muṭikoṇṭacōlaṇ, all situated in the *kōvil* of Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuram. A *śaivasiddhāntin* priest of the temple has disciples who came from north, centre and Gauḍadeśa. See also (SII 3.20), dated to the 4th year of Virarājendra (one year before the first inscription engraved at Gangai (Ins 11–12 keṅkaikkōṇṭa-coḷa-purattuk koyil uḷlāl tirumaṅcaṇa-cālaiyil eḷuntaruḷiy irunta utakam paṇṇiyaruḷiṇ atirājarāja-maṇṭalattu ...); this inscription is the only one where the king was the donee but is part of a whole composed of epigraphs dated to the reign of Rājendra I engraved on the south wall of the Bṛhadīśvara, (SII 2.9–19), in continuity with what was first recorded during the reign of Rājarāja (donees and donations). For inscriptions that mention the site dated in the regnal years of Rājādhirāja I, Virarājendra, Rājendra II, Adhirājendra and Kulōttuṅka I (AR 49, 1120, (SII 4.527) [ARE 1892.80], where stairs and a stepped building or a pavilion are cited), see (Thyagarajan, 1994), pp. 179–81.

Figure 9: Seal of the Ecālam Plates, 1036



Diameter, 13.5 cm. After: (Nagaswamy, 1987), ph. 17. © 1987 École française d'Extrême-Orient & R. NAGASWAMY. Courtesy of Tamil Nadu State Archaeological Department & École française d'Extrême-Orient.

a king's palace and a temple.<sup>33</sup> The god who inhabits the temple is the lord of the city of the Cōḷa who has taken the Ganges. Does such chronology explain the relation between the epigraphical corpora of the two kings, Rājarāja and his son Rājendra, like the relation between the inscriptions of their two temples? In the royal charts, the relation between father and son is an enduring one, so that the earliest plates composed in the reign of Rājendra (Leiden plates, Fig. 8, p. 70) and the last ones (Ecālam plates, Fig. 10, p. 73) include

<sup>33</sup> For this name see p. 69, n. 30; it also appears in the long inscription engraved on the basis of the temple of Gangai, dated to the reign of Vīrarājendra, the 3rd of the successors of Rājendra I, (SII 4.529), lns 19, 23 ...; this is the first known inscription engraved on the building; it presents a retrospective of an order given previously by Rājendra I to relocate resources in Gangai; for precise details see (Ali, 2012).

*Praśastis* in honour of Rājarāja. The Leiden plates even contain one example of the latest version of the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja.

It will appear that the relation between the two kings throws light on the foundation of Gaṅgai, as a key element of a nationalist bilingualism, especially visible through the treatment given in Tamil or in Sanskrit to a major element of the Tamil *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra, the conquest of the Southeastern kingdom of Śrīvijaya.

#### XII.5 THE CONQUEST OF THE SOUTHEASTERN KINGDOM OF ŚRĪVIJAYA AS A MOTIF IN CŌLA EULOGIES

To consider the conquest of the Southeastern kingdom of Śrīvijaya in the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra a few preliminary remarks are necessary. First, a naval expedition of the Cōla army that reached Śrīvijaya's kingdom is commonly examined from one inscription only, one of those commissioned by Rājendra to be engraved at the Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjore. But this is only one among the many inscriptions prefaced by the *Meykkīrtti* of this king<sup>34</sup>; there are numerous similar engraved texts (see Fig. 7, p. 67). What is called 'the' *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra is written on many monuments, most of them being local foundations that were not directly linked to any royal patronage. Second, this *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra can be considered as a textual source, or as an archæological document, and each example participates in the same ambiguous nature. Third, the fame of the Bṛhadīśvara plays a role in the dominance of the copies of Rājendra's *Meykkīrtti* engraved at Tanjore over other epigraphs prefaced by the same text, distributed all over the Cōla kingdom. Such dominance may appear as a product of historiography because the inscriptions of the Bṛhadīśvara (Fig. 5, p. 63) were among the first Tamil epigraphs to have attracted the attention of scholars; these Tamil epigraphs were the first to be edited and translated. However, we would suggest this is also a result of a conscious work led by the Cōla kings themselves, with the royal Bṛhadīśvara being backed in a certain sense by the local temples which inspired it.

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<sup>34</sup> See (Kulke, 2009), pp. xiv–xv. '[...] the conundrum of the naval expedition of the Cholas has been and is still caused primarily by the scarcity of archæological and literary sources. In fact, details of the expedition are known only from a single source, viz. the often quoted and, in this volume, also frequently referred to Tamil *Praśasti* (here used in the sense of eulogy) of Rājendra's inscriptions.'



Once the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja has been written on his temple, it became a model for future generations, including the scholars of the 19th and 20th century, and has thus eclipsed the work done previously in the local temples during the Cōla period.

Figure 10: The Ecālam Plates, 1036



After: (Nagaswamy, 1987), ph. 16. © 1987 École française d'Extrême-Orient & R. NAGASWAMY. Courtesy of Tamil Nadu State Archaeological Department & École française d'Extrême-Orient.

Fourth, if it is true that the details like trophies, battles, place-names, etc. of what may have been one more raid onto the Malay peninsula are enumerated in this long version of the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra engraved at Tanjore, among other sites, the conquest of the Śrīvijaya's kingdom is also mentioned in much less studied passages of the Sanskrit epigraphical eulogies and in little-known shorter versions of Rājendra's *Meykkīrtti*. To confront these three types of documents allows one to better understand the relations between Śrīvijaya and the Cōla kingdom. It also illustrates the bilingualism at work in the Cōla royal discourse and the complementary nature of the two sites of Tanjore and Gangai. These are three major issues whose interweaving is largely overlooked.

In the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra, composed from the 13th regnal year of the king and repeated from one inscription to the other, from stone to metal and metal to stone, thirteen place names that

belong to Śrīvijaya are enumerated.<sup>35</sup> Shorter versions of this panegyric are also found. Written only after this crucial 13th year, they show that, from then, the conquest of the South Asian ‘Kiṭāram’ was as critical in the Tamil praise as the takeover of the Ganges:

In the 23rd regnal year of śrī Rājendracōḷa, the Lord known as a lion  
for his enemies, the one who has taken the Pūrvadeśa, the Gaṅgā and  
Kiṭāram ...<sup>36</sup>

Such praises in which the most significant events of the reign are brought together have been found as far away as Sri Lanka.<sup>37</sup> They recapitulate the extensive *Meykkīrtti* divided along with three campaigns, modeled after a classical *digvijaya*, the conquest of the quarters by an Indian king who goes to the eastern direction. The South Indian Rājendra starts from the west, the Deccan (*pūrvatēcam*, a Tamil transliteration of *pūrvadēśa*), moves ahead to the north (*kaṅkai*), and then proceeds to the east, to Kedah (*kiṭāram*), whose conquest appears as the jewel on his crown. Rājendra’s military career stopped hereafter and the *Meykkīrtti*, which has been regularly enlarged from the 3rd up to this 13th regnal year, is no longer modified after what is said to be a conquest (*koṇṭa*, ‘has taken’) of ‘Kiṭāram.’ The tale itself of this invasion is carefully organised. Kadaram / Kiṭāram is the leading catch. It starts and ends the twenty-lined narrative:

... having dispatched many ships in the midst of the rolling sea and  
having caught Samgramavijayottungavarman, the king of Kadaram  
(ln. 47) ...

And Kadaram, of fierce strength which was protected by the neighboring sea (ln. 67) ...<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See “The Meykkīrtti of Rājendracōḷa I, extract”, p. 93, where Śrīvijaya’s place-names have been underlined in the relevant passage given after (Cuppiramaṇiyam, 1983).

<sup>36</sup> (SII 17.310), p. 134. svasti śrī/pūrvatēcamum kaṅkaiyum kiṭāramum koṇṭa kōppara-kēcari vaṇmarāṇa /°uṭaiyār śrī °irācēntira-cōḷa-tēvarkku yāṇṭu 23°āvatu ... Trans. by the present author.

<sup>37</sup> This contracted form is found, for instance, at the beginning of the stela of the guild of the ‘Five thousand’ at Ataragala, see (Pathmanathan, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> See “The Meykkīrtti of Rājendracōḷa I, extract”, p. 93, for the text; trans. here by the present author.

The first mention of Kiṭāram spans several lines, in contrast with the other places, to which only one line is devoted. In between these two mentions of Kedah, many other places, including ‘Vijaya,’ are enumerated, accompanied by epic formulas often linked with the water close to which these city-states were settled. Comparing the Tamil narrative with what is said in the Sanskrit *Praśastis* underlines the strongly marked literary nature of these texts.

The victory over Kadaram is mentioned in the three *Praśastis* of the poet Nārāyaṇa (Tiruvāḷaṅkāṭu, Karantai, Ecālam) but in half of a verse only, where only Kaṭāha / Kaḍāha, the ‘Kadaram / kiṭāramum’ of the *Meykkīrtti*, makes an appearance.<sup>39</sup> No other Southeast Asian place has been mentioned in these Sanskrit poems.

Here is what is said in the Tiruvāḷaṅkāṭu plates:

- st. 123      When he has vanquished Kaṭāha thanks to his exalted troops who had  
crossed the wavy sea,  
He governed the whole land for a long time, while all the kings bow in  
front of him.<sup>40</sup>

Another allusion to this conquest can be detected in its st. 101, with the help of the Karantai plates where it is said:

- st. 62      That the fire of his power violently consumed the descendants of Taila  
(an oil puddle), that is not a surprise.

<sup>39</sup> It is not mentioned in the first known plates, the Leiden plates, where the renewal is made of a gift made in a coastal site of the Tamil country by a king of Śrīvijaya to a Buddhist establishment during Rājārāja’s rule. These plates include a *Meykkīrtti* of Rājārāja, corresponding to the time of the original gift. They say they were engraved at the initiative of the Śrīvijaya king, successor of his father, as Rājendra was the successor of Rājārāja. The two sons, of the Śrīvijaya king and the Tamil king, renew the donation of their fathers at the beginning of the reign of Rājendra, before, it can be surmised, the raid on Kedah, which thus would have intervened between the 6th and the 13th regnal year. Did it come from Bengal, after the ‘conquest’ of the Ganges?

<sup>40</sup> avajitya kaṭāham unnatair nija-daṇḍair abhilaṃghitārṇavaiḥ | sakalām avanin natākhila-kṣitipo rakṣitavān ayaṅ ciram || (SII 3.205), trans. (Krishna Sastri, 1920), p. 427.

But this other fact is really astonishing: that after having crossed the ocean, he burned Kaḍāha!<sup>41</sup>

Here it appears that the poet used a formula already employed in the Tiruvālaṅkāṭu plates but in connection there with the victory over the Cālukya:

st. 101 It may be no wonder that the fire of his anger burst into a flame as it came into contact with the descendant of Taila. This (more) strange that it consumed the enemy-fuel, having crossed the great waters of the ocean.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in the Ecālam plates, the conquest of Śrīvijaya is attributed to Rājarāja and not to Rājendra, in a verse that converts the Tamil *Meykkīrtti* of Rājarāja into Sanskrit, but with the addition of the Śrīvijaya kingdom to the Tamil list of this king's conquests (underlined in this translation):

st. 13 Arumolivarman[...] conquered the Gaṅgas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, Magadhas, Mālavas, Siṃhalas, Andhras, Raṭṭas, Oḍḍas, Kaṭāhas, Keralas, Gauḍas, and Pāṇḍyas.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Meykkīrttis* of Rājarāja engraved on stone (Fig. 5, p. 63, & Fig. 6, p. 66), Gaṅgas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, Siṃhalas, and Raṭṭas are dynastic names that come one after the other<sup>44</sup> to designate the dynasties thus subdued. However, Kiṭāram, a place name in the Tamil records, has been shaped in Sanskrit after the model of geographical areas that provide a name for those who inhabit them (people from Magadha are the Magadhas and so on). The name of the city-state became the name given to those of Kaṭāḥa (*kaṭāhān*). This

<sup>41</sup> tat-pratāpa-dahano'dahad uccais | taila-santatim itīdam acitram | citram anyad atilaṃghya samudran | dagdhavān yad uta sādhu kaḍāham || Trans. (Krishnan, 1984), p. 200.

<sup>42</sup> tailasya santatim avāpya tadiya-kopa- | vahnīs samujjvalitavān iti naiva citram | citran tu idam bhavati sarva-samudra-vārīṇy | ullaṃghya yan niradahad dviṣad-indhanāni || (SII 3.205), trans. (Krishna Sastri, 1920), p. 423.

<sup>43</sup> This stanza is very similar to the st. 27 of the Karantai plates which is also a translation into Sanskrit of elements found in the *Meykkīrttis* of Rājarāja and Rājendra-cōla.

<sup>44</sup> vēṅkai nāṭum kaṅka pāṭiyum | nuḷampa pāṭiyum taṭikai pāṭiyum | kuṭāmalai nāṭum kollamum kaliṅkamum | muraṭṭolil ciṅkaḷar ilamaṇ ṭalamum | iratṭa pāṭi ēḷarai ilakkamum | munnīrp paḷantīvu paṇṇīrā yiramum | tiṇṭīral venṇit taṇṭār koṇṭatan |



plural betrays the cobbling-together that has presided at the creation of this new Sanskrit version of a eulogy for the deceased king and indicates that a whole area with its inhabitants has been conquered. In the Tamil eulogies, the name of a king is given, but not in Sanskrit. The vagueness of the Sanskrit record confers on the subjugation of the Malay Peninsula a timelessness, or rather, an antiquity of a certain kind by rooting it into a past – that is nonetheless presented very differently in the Leiden plates, the first plates made under Rājendra. Far from telling of a conquest, the Leiden charts record the renewal of an alliance between Rājarāja and the king of Śrīvijaya.

The difference of the treatment of the conquest of Śrīvijaya in Tamil and in Sanskrit, but also inside the Sanskrit corpus of the royal epigraphical eulogies, highlights the reworking of the past. The use of Tamil texts in the Sanskrit praise of Rājarāja engraved at the beginning of the Ecālam plates, when the rule of his son Rājendra came to one end, points towards the same. Such rewriting—or writing, because what is here in question is a certain conception of History, different from the heavily westernised idea of what is History with which we work today— was common indeed in the royal eulogies, but its dimension is difficult to evaluate in the state of the documentation and research. Still, we can say that it may prove more important than expected regarding the conquest of the South Asian kingdom, and the foundation of the city and temple of Gangai.

## XII.6 SANSKRIT, GANGAI AND KITARAM

If we take into account the chronology of the making of the corpus of royal eulogies as a whole, including both Tamil and Sanskrit texts, during the first part of the reign of Rājendra an alliance between the two kingdoms of the Cōlas and of Śrīvijaya, started under Rājarāja's rule, was continued (Leiden plates, Sanskrit). Then Śrīvijaya was brought under the control of Rājendra (Tamil *Meykkīrttis*). Recorded from the 13th year of this king's reign, engraved everywhere in the Cōla kingdom, on stone and copper, in unilingual and bilingual inscriptions, in longer or shorter versions, the Tamil account inspired the Sanskrit *Praśastis* of three copper-plates made after the 13th regnal year of Rājendra – even if two of them are dated in Tamil of the 6th and the 8th regnal year.

*Figure 11:* The populated southern façade of the Gangai temple, second quarter of the 11th c.



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This historical sketch seems confirmed by archæology at the place of origin of the Leiden plates, Nagapattinam (Nākapattṇam). Vestiges of the Buddhist establishment mentioned in the plates survived on this coastal settlement, where many Buddhist bronzes dated between the 11th and 13th centuries have been unearthed (as well as stone artefacts). But it is no less remarkable, even if

Figure 12: The populated western façade of the Gangai temple (shrine)



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commonly unnoticed, that inscriptions recording gifts of the Śrīvijaya king's agent (*śrīviṣaiyattaraiyarkaṇṇi*) to a local Śiva (*tiruk-kāroṇamuṭaiyamahādevar*) have been engraved in Tamil at Nagapat-tinam. These records are dated of the beginning of Rājendracōla's reign (3rd and 7th regnal year), that is, at a time when the alliance between Cōla and Śrīvijaya sanctioned by the Leiden plates may



have been in force.<sup>45</sup> At least the dates to which the Leiden plates have been assigned correspond with this period of time to which the Tamil inscriptions refer.

N. KARASHIMA and Y. SUBBARAYALU published the text and translation of the Tamil inscriptions already noticed in the fifties.<sup>46</sup> Not only under the impulse of the Cōla kings, but also under the authority of the Śrīvijaya one, Tamil and / or Sanskrit were used to record the circumstances and the donee of a gift. Tamil emerges as an option in an international dialogue between gods and their devotees, usually considered as having to be expressed in Sanskrit, as it is in the *Praśasti* of the Leiden plates that states this chart has been commissioned by the king of Śrīvijaya<sup>47</sup>: Buddha speaks Sanskrit but Śiva speaks Tamil.

So often mentioned through the hundreds of engraved *Meykkīrtis* of Rājendracōla I, and elaborated in the two retroactive Sanskrit *Praśastis* of Tiruvāṇkāṭu and Karantai, Śrīvijaya's conquest is finally attributed to Rājarāja in the last known copper plates issued during Rājendracōla's reign (Ecālam). But this is not our last chance to meet with the conquest of Śrīvijaya in *Meykkīrtis* or *Praśastis*, as it is also one element of the epigraphical eulogies of the third of the sons and successors of Rājendracōla, Vīrarājendracōla. In Vīrarājendracōla's eulogies the conquest of Kaḍaram is attributed to Rājendracōla or to Vīrarājendracōla, and this, sometimes in a same artefact; the idea may be to record several campaigns on Śrīvijaya, but it is striking that only the name of 'Kaḍaram' remains, while the numerous place-names that have emerged with the long version

<sup>45</sup> (ARE 1956–7), nos 161, 164 & 166. These record donations of a gateway, of jewels like ruby and emerald ... These are very similar to the war-trophies taken in the Śrīvijaya kingdom according to the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendracōla.

<sup>46</sup> (Karashima & Subbarayalu, 2009), pp. 275–8.

<sup>47</sup> Even if it is said that the edict has been made 'at the direction of that lord of Kaṭāha' (v. 43), it is clearly stated that in the plates the engravers (who are different from the scribes) are from Kāñcīpuram (and several of them are also responsible for the engravings of the other plates); the names of those contributing to the plates are Tamil. The passage in Sanskrit prose (lns 73–86) inside the Sanskrit metrical *Praśasti* may mark the insertion of a text more directly commissioned for the king of Śrīvijaya. The prose is dedicated to the genealogy and feats of this king, while records that concern Tamil kings are composed in verse. The making of the whole artefact seems, anyway, to have been peculiarly complex.

of the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendracōḷa have disappeared. In the Tiruvintaḷūr plates, issued in the 2nd regnal year of Vīrarājendracōḷa (1065), the Sanskrit part mentions the conquest of Kaṭāha by Rājendracōḷa (st. 37); the Sanskrit part of the bilingual stone inscription of Kanyākumāri, dated of the 7th regnal year of Vīrarājendracōḷa (1069), says the same,<sup>48</sup> while the corresponding Tamil part of the same inscription, where there is an abbreviated version of Vīrarājendracōḷa's eulogy, does not say a word on Kaṭāha. In some of the other known Tamil *Meykkīrttis* of Vīrarājendracōḷa engraved on stone, and also on the metal of one set of copper-plates (the Cārāla copper-plates), the conquest of Kaṭāha does make its appearance – to be attributed to Vīrarājendracōḷa.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in this cluster of inscriptions, commissioned or inspired by the career of Rājarāja, Rājendracōḷa and Vīrarājendracōḷa, the conquest of Śrīvijaya appears as a literary element from which variants were used by the poets composing royal praises in Tamil or in Sanskrit in the Tamil land, and this, from what can be called the second period of the reign of Rājendracōḷa, when this king was no longer acting as a conqueror.<sup>50</sup> This poetic usage of 'facts' leads us to question their historicity, in stressing the part played by intertextuality of Tamil and Sanskrit in Rājendracōḷa's kingdom. Gangai comes to the forefront then.

<sup>48</sup> st. 72: ln. 364 ... || ullamghit-āmbu(365)dhibhir u[ddha]ta-bāhu-vīryair nirddhūta-(366)[vairi]-nara-nātha-[bala]-prapañcai-(367)s sai[nyaiḥ:\*] kaṭāham ada[ha]yam anyai rājendra-(368) coḷanṛpa[teḥ] kim asādhyam asya || 'He made his powerful army, which uprooted several hostile kings, cross the sea and set fire to Kaṭāha, which it was not possible for other kings to conquer. What act was impossible for this monarch Rājendra-Chōḷa?' (EI 18.4), p. 54.

<sup>49</sup> For a stone unilingual inscription see (SII 3.84) for instance, and (EI 25.25) for the Cārāla plates, bilingual, on metal (dated of 1069); the text is very similar to the one of the Kanyākumāri inscription, given p. 75, n. 40.

<sup>50</sup> It is probable that once his *digvijaya* has been completed, Rājendra delegated the military campaigns to his three sons, see N. SASTRI, (Sastri, 1955), pp. 221–5. The conquest also appears in texts composed in the 12th century in honour of Vikramacōḷa and his successor Kulōttuṅkacōḷa I (*Kaliṅkattuparaṇi*, ln. 25; *Vikṛamacōḷaṇulā*, lns 34–6; *Kulōttuṅkacōḷaṇulā*, lns 49–50).

*Figure 13:* The destroyer of the three cities, Bṛhadiśvara of Tanjore (western wall, shrine), beginning of the 11th c.



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XII.7 THE BILINGUALISM OF TANJORE AND GANGAI: TAMIL,  
SANSKRIT

The first part of Rājendracōḷa's reign is said to be the one of a warring lord. Whether he conquered territories one after the other, or not, his Tamil eulogy depicts him in this role; there is no Tamil account of the second part of the reign, while Rājendracōḷa was busy founding Gangai and patronising Sanskrit: the evolution of the Tamil praise stops with the end of the conquests. Borrowing from the Tamil praises, the Sanskrit panegyrics made thereafter, in a second part of Rājendracōḷa's rule, are one substantial addition to the debate of Sanskrit as a starting point for the development of regional literatures. In the Tamil country where a strong and ancient literary tradition was already developed when Sanskrit came into use, the relation between Tamil and Sanskrit eulogies composed from Rājendracōḷa's time provides an alternative perspective, by pointing out the role of 'vernaculars' as inspiration for Sanskrit literature.

But the use of Sanskrit during the reign of Rājendracōḷa was introduced in connection with a southeastern kingdom, whose kings made gifts to a Buddhist monastery established on the Cōḷa territory, before, if we follow the Leiden plates and archaeological data, any conquest has been undertaken. Sanskrit appears then as the language common to the kings of Śrīvijaya and the Tamil land, as a language suitable for subcontinental communication, as well as overseas messages, in a cosmopolitan *koine* as described by S. POLLOCK. Kings of Śrīvijaya and of the Cōḷa kingdom chose Sanskrit for their agreements to be publicly recorded. At the same time, the gifts of the agent of the Śrīvijaya king to a local Hindu deity are recorded in Tamil – but on inscriptions whose local character is guaranteed by the stone on which they were written. The question is not only to manifest his devotion but to deliver a public royal discourse, addressed to kings as well as to deities. In the Tamil country, the 'language for the gods,' to transform the title given by POLLOCK to his book, is Tamil as well as Sanskrit, but the one of an international board of kings is Sanskrit.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> (Pollock, 2006).



*Figure 14:* The Brahmā of the northern façade of the temple at Gangai, beginning of the 11th c.?



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This Sanskrit is also the language in which the establishment of the Gangaikondacholapuram tank, city and temple, located to the north-western direction of Tanjore, is recorded. Would the foundation of Gangai be linked to a message to be delivered beyond the frontiers of a Tamil kingdom? Today the temple can still be seen from far away, more specifically in the north and western direction, as it was when it was built by the natural challengers of Rājendracōla on the Indian subcontinent like the Rattas, Cālukyas, Odas kings mentioned in the eulogies, but most of all by the ones situated on the west (*pūrvadeśa*) and north (*kaṅkai*) of Tanjore, where the first foundations of the imperial Cōlas stand.

In fact, in our view, the location of the Gangai foundation is explained by the epigraphical records. Its concrete presence corresponds indeed with the structure of the Tamil *Meykkīrtti*, a conquest of west, north and south-east, once it is placed in the architectural, epigraphical and iconographical context of its time. While the Bṛhadiśvara of Tanjore, covered with Tamil epigraphs, performs inside the Tamil kingdom, the Gangai settlement and its temple were conceived to operate within a larger, cosmopolitan *koine*, right in the middle of these three directions towards which the son of Rājarāja acted as a conqueror if you start from Tanjore. The chronological and literary relations between Sanskrit and Tamil royal eulogies of Rājarāja I and Rājendra I indicate how much the roles of texts composed in this or that language were different. Tamil panegyrics root the king's rule in his territory, Sanskrit panegyrics were a message for the kings of the other dynasties. Tanjore is the Tamil section of a two part, bilingual structure, where Gangai constitutes the second, Sanskrit, part. The foundation of Gangai is mentioned in the Sanskrit messages; there are reasons to think that this city and its temple were not engraved with Tamil during the rule of its founder because they were likewise associated with a message to be delivered beyond the frontiers of a Tamil kingdom.

Gangai's temple is one evidence of a larger architectural and ideological project conceived within the net already created by the Tanjore temple of Rājarāja and the local foundations, active and actively built when the temple of Gangai was erected.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> We do not think that the construction of the royal temples at Tanjore and Gangai caused a substantial slowdown of building activities for the local temples. The volume of material for these two royal foundations is approximately equivalent to

## XII.8 THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE GANGAI TEMPLE, A TAMIL MESSAGE TO AN INDIC AUDIENCE

The variety of deities and figures at the Gangai temple seems to defy any principles of iconographical organisation. Is this a kind of catalogue of the existing iconography of Hindu deities of the time and space ruled by Rājendracōḷa I?<sup>53</sup> There are indeed many more sculptures carved at this temple than at any earlier temple in the Kāvēri region. In our view, such diversity was planned for this grand temple so that it would appear to be a local foundation, on a larger scale. The recesses of the façades of the Gangai temple are endowed with the same deities as the village temple; the main icons that adorn their exterior walls are the same as those from the smaller village shrines to the larger Gangai temple (Fig. 11, p. 78, & Fig. 12, p. 79).<sup>54</sup> On the southern exterior wall, starting from the east, we encounter Gaṇeśa, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, and a dancing Śiva (Fig. 11) – exactly the same deities represented on the southern façades of local foundations, where similarly Gaṇeśa is placed on the *maṇḍapa*, while Dakṣiṇāmūrti occupies the central niche of the shrine.<sup>55</sup> On the west (or rear of the temple) the composition of Gangai is structured by a central Viṣṇu (Fig. 12), and entails one *liṅodbhava*, a structural organisation and two representations which are more than common on the local temples at the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century; a Brahmā (Fig. 14, p. 84) and a goddess appear on the northern exterior wall, as they do in a nearly all village temples (see a Brahmā from a local temple in Fig. 15, p. 88), and this from the 9th century.

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one of forty village temples, and this is also about the number that can be thought to have been built in the period when those two royal foundations were erected. L. ORR stresses how little impact the royal foundations had for the local foundations and contests the archetypal status given to these impressive buildings. We totally agree with such a view as we hope to demonstrate these royal temples were modeled after the local foundations. (Orr, 2007), pp. 92–7.

<sup>53</sup> See (L'Hernault, 1994), pp. 127–8, for whom it is impossible to discern any principle in the choice and placement of the images and who considers the comparison between Tanjore and Gangai 'perplexing.'

<sup>54</sup> See the schemes given in *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> (Schmid, 2011), pp. 249–72, presents a more developed analysis of the way village temples have inspired Royal foundations.

By contrast, the choice of the figures and their positioning are different from the carvings that adorn the *Bṛhadiśvara* where a large proportion of the sculpture (and painting) is devoted to Śiva *Tripurāntaka* (Fig. 13, p. 82). This representation of Śiva as the one who fights against the demons of the three cities makes the latter temple radically distinct from the village foundations made before it or at the same time, on which the destroyer of the three cities very rarely stands.<sup>56</sup>

The development of the narrative carvings that take place around the niches of the external walls at Gangai is another original feature in comparison with Tanjore, but one more influence to have been taken from local foundations, where this type of representation was first used more than fifty years before Gangai started to be made.<sup>57</sup> The iconographic configuration of Gangai empowers the local foundations' icons with a royal dimension, projecting them in a more impressive scale, as Gangai carvings are about three times the dimensions of the village images, and on a much larger territory – towards the quarters that have been conquered by the king.

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<sup>56</sup> See (Pichard, 1994), fig. 36, p. 134, for a scheme of the deities represented on the exterior wall at Tanjore on the first level where *Tripurāntaka* is not yet dominant, contrary to the storeys of the sanctuary tower. These deities have to be compared with Gangai to see the difference between the two temples: they are exclusively Śiva-oriented in contrast with Gangai where the shrine is structured by a *Trimūrti* scheme that has been developed in Tamil Nadu from the end of the Pallava period, see (Schmid, 2011), pp. 115–23. Such a Śiva-oriented scheme is typical of the Southern bank of the *Kāvēri*: it can be seen as one feature of a regional style developed in connection with an *Irukkuvēḷ* patronage as has been demonstrated by (Kaimal, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> The narrative so present in Gangai is one more iconographic feature to put to the credit of the local foundations. In addition to the figures common in niche-sculptures of that time others made their appearance there, inspired by the small-sized narrative panels that were included on the bases of earlier temples, such as Śiva reducing the god of love to ashes or binding a garland around the head of *Caṇḍeśa* on the northern and north-eastern walls. Moreover, a greater volume of relief sculpture adorns the temple in between the niches and at their feet, allowing 'secondary' characters to emerge, such as *Kāraikkāl Ammayār* playing music just below the dancing Śiva.

*Figure 15:* A Brahmā that follows a typically southern iconography (Puñcai, end of the 10th to beginning of the 11th c.)



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This projecting aspect of the Gangai temple is emphasised by the figures of the deities symbolising space directions that are represented on the first storey of the sanctum tower. If the iconographic structure of the tower follows a scheme similar to the ground level—with Dakṣiṇāmūrti on the south, a *lingodbhava* on the west, and a Brahmā on the north—those deities are now accompanied with the deities of the orients. The latter express a spatial ambition that has not been recorded in the same way at the Tanjore temple, while it is found on some of the village temples.<sup>58</sup>

To summarise, the Gangai temple is a village temple that expands in space. It grows in width, length and height. It also goes further, as demonstrated by the specificities of the Brahmā of the northern façade of the temple (Fig. 14, p. 84).

For a long time this representation of a bearded Brahmā has been noticed as unusual in a Tamil country where Brahmā is commonly represented as a beautiful, unbearded, youth. The bristly sage of Gangai follows what has then become the central and northern iconographic tradition to represent Brahmā, ascetic and grandfather, thus bearded, in contradistinction with the Tanjore temple, whereas 'young' Brahmā follows the typically southern iconography encountered in the local temples (Fig. 15, p. 88). It seems to us that the 'northern' Brahmā of Gangai occupies his usual position in a Tamil temple to translate the iconography practiced in Tamil foundations into an iconographical language accessible to a pan-Indian audience. The division of iconographical schemes between the two royal foundations of Tanjore and Gangai, one oriented towards the Tamil country, the other taking into account models outside of that area, strengthens the division between a Tamil engraved temple and one which is not. In addition, it has to be underlined that the numerous Tripurāntakas of Tanjore have been carved according to an iconography that is not found outside the Tamil country (Fig. 13, p. 82).<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, a temple of a unique, repeated

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<sup>58</sup> It seems possible that this category of deities were positioned in some of the subshrines incorporated in the enclosure wall at Tanjore, but the disappearance of the images precludes a firm identification: see (Pichard, 1995), p. 106. The space directions deities are regularly found on the first storey of the sanctum towers of the local foundations.

<sup>59</sup> The Tripurāntakas of Tanjore are of an iconography similar to a representation of Rāma with a bow. It would be impossible to distinguish one from the other

and Tamilised iconography, Tanjore, on the other, deities organised in the Tamil way and including a northern iconography to be located on the northern direction, Gangai.<sup>60</sup>

Such iconographic partition reminds us of the division at work in the royal copper-plates between Sanskrit and Tamil. It leads us to propose that the temple of Tanjore is an illustration of the power of the King destined to the Tamil country itself, while the temple of Gangai was conceived to be an illustration of the power of the king destined to the other dynasties. As such, in our view, it corresponds with the Sanskrit part of the royal charts that made their appearance under Rājendra, those inscriptions in which, precisely, the foundation of Gangai is mentioned.

As Sanskrit *Praśastis* were made after Tamil royal eulogies, the Gangai temple was made after the Tamil local temples, up to the point of being able to ‘translate’ their characteristics into a northern iconographic language. The construction of the temple of Gangai, and the making of the three copper-plates where it is mentioned, were chronologically parallel, being fashioned in what we call the second part of the reign of Rājendra, once this king has ceased to be a conqueror and has devoted his time to other activities, building Gangai and patronising the making of Sanskrit poetical eulogies to be engraved on copper-plates. At the same time, he was also implicated as a king linked to Tamil, we think, by other people, at Tanjore itself and at local foundations as well, the latter being places where Tamil was written.

When he has vanquished Kaṭāha thanks to his exalted troops who had  
crossed the wavy sea,

He governed the whole land for a long time, while all the kings bow in  
front of him.

Tiruvāṅkāṭu plates, st. 123<sup>61</sup>

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without the iconographic context. The Śaiva oriented context at Tanjore ensures the identification of the image as Tripurāntakas. Outside of Tamil Nadu this ambiguity between a Śaiva and a Vaiṣṇava representation is not met.

<sup>60</sup> Brahmā is not the only god depicted at Gangai in terms of an iconography common in the northern regions of the Peninsula but not in the southern: the god of the north-eastern direction, Agni, is also depicted with a beard, terribly unusual in the Tamil south.

<sup>61</sup> (SII 3.205), trans. by the present author.

## XII.9 CONCLUSION

In his paper about the epigraphy of the temple of Gangai, D. ALI pointed out that the rounded mouldings of its base do not seem to be destined to be engraved, in contrast with the pedestal of the Bṛhadiśvara whose flat surfaces were ideal to write inscriptions.<sup>62</sup> We propose to move forward on this basis. As an architectural commitment, built after the conquests of Rājendracōḷa were over, the temple of Gangai was conceived as a complement to the two architectural achievements of the Tamil country of that time, the temple of the old capital-city of Tanjore, and the local foundations of the Cōḷa realm. Gangai's temple has been shaped so as to give the local shrines a larger audience and to diffuse the glory of the Tamil king illustrated in the Bṛhadiśvara and in the copper-plates. On the northern half of the Kāvēri delta —while Tanjore was on the southern bank— and in an area void of temples as a kind of 'colony,'<sup>63</sup> it can be seen from far away, from this north-western direction from which Sanskrit came and was used. Gangai appeared as a ritual centre to celebrate the king's career, and was used as such by the successors of Rājendra. But at the time it was established, Tamil inscriptions were not necessary on a temple delivering a message for international contenders that was reinforced by war-trophies.

The area where Gangai stands was named after the conquest of Southeast Asia 'Kaṭahakoṇṭaṇcōḷavaḷanāṭu,' the 'region of the Cōḷa who has taken Kaṭaha' to actualise a victory whose trophies are enumerated in the *Meykkīrtti* of Rājendra.<sup>64</sup> Numerous *Kalinga*, *cāḷukya* and *noḷamba* statues were brought to attest the hegemony of the Cōḷa power over neighboring dynasties,<sup>65</sup> and 'women speaking for-

<sup>62</sup> (Ali, 2012), p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> See (Pichard, 1994), p. 22, to whom it appears as a colonial foundation.

<sup>64</sup> On this *vāḷanāṭu*, see the map of 'Kāṭaramkōṇṭavaḷanāṭu,' in *ibid.*, vol. 1, fig. 50, p. 201, and (Thyagarajan, 1994), pp. 198–200; the process echoes the creation of the Cōḷa *gaṅgā* that actualises a conquest by consecrating an element of the landscape as a representation of a conquered land.

<sup>65</sup> These carvings (many of them can still be seen today in the premises of the temple) were brought there after the campaigns of Rājendra's sons as well as during the time of Rājendra himself, see (L'Hernault, 1994), pp. 151–5. They are parallel to the enumeration of war-trophies from Southeast Asia in the Tamil *Meykkīrtti* of the king ('rutting elephants; large heap of treasures, the (arch called) Vidyadhara-torana; the "jewel-gate," adorned with great splendour; the "gate of large jew-

eign languages’ were gathered there,<sup>66</sup> or living trophies, to match the women coming from the whole Tamil land, who have been ‘collected’ in Tanjore by Rājarāja I. There was a temple celebrated by Tamil voices, Tanjore, and a temple standing in the tune of many tongues, Gangai.<sup>67</sup>

Tightly associated with the Cōla power it was made to express, Gangai became less active when this dynasty disappeared, in contrast with the longevity of occupation of Tanjore, similar to the durability of other sacred sites in the Tamil land.<sup>68</sup> But at the time it was built, the temple of Kaṅkaikoṇṭacōlapuram stood as a royal praise in stone, working as a unique Sanskrit *Praśasti*, prefacing the many local foundations engraved with Tamil royal praises that have nourished it; it was erected as an expression of the glory of a Tamil king destined to dynasties he vanquished – and foreign tourists as well as researchers who go there nowadays demonstrate that, after all, the temple may have met the objectives of its fundamentally bilingual and hegemonic founder.

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els”,’ see “The Meykkīrtti of Rājendracōla I, extract”, p. 93) which is our only source for these: once again archæology –the carvings gathered in Gangai– and texts –the Tamil *Meykkīrtti*– are complementary, one with the other.

<sup>66</sup> See *Kaliṅkattuparaṇi*, cited by (Thyagarajan, 1994), p. 188; these women have to be paralleled with the ones appearing in the inscriptions of Tanjore, (SII 2.66), said to come from the whole Tamil kingdom. This parallel is reinforced by the first inscription engraved in Gangai that refers to an order given by Rājendra to relocate some of the resources previously attributed to Tanjore in Gangai (in the 24th regnal year, at the time of the Ecālam plates that attest that the temple of Gangai became a living one): once Gangai was active, according to our view, the two temples share resources while each has its own sphere of action.

<sup>67</sup> See the danced praise of the celestial Amarāṅganā in the city of Gangai of the Tiruvintaḷūr charts (*amarāṅganā-pravṛtta-ṇṛtta-saṁstuti*, st. 36b, references p. 70, n. 32).

<sup>68</sup> In the 17th century under the Tanjore Nāyakas a few additions were made that attest to a revival of the temple, see (Mitchell-Peterson, 2010), pp. 31–9, (Orr, 2007), p. 93.



## THE MEYKKĪRTTI OF RĀJENDRACŌLA I, EXTRACT

alaikaṭaḷ naṭuvuḷ palakalam celuttic  
 caṅkirāma vicaiyōt tuṅka vaṇmaṇ  
 ākiya kaṭārattu aracaṇai vākayam  
 porukaṭaḷ kumpak kariyoṭum  
 akappaṭuttu –50  
 urimaiyil piṇakkiya peruniti piṇakka-  
 mum  
 ārttavaṇ akanakarp pōrt toḷil vācalil  
 viccā taratō raṇamum muttolir  
 puṇaimaṇi putavamum kaṇamaṇik  
 katavamum  
 niraicir vicayamum tuṇaiṇirp  
 paṇnaiyum –55  
 naṇmalai yūreyil tonmalai yūrum  
 āḷkaṭaḷ akaḷcūḷ māyiru tiṅkamum  
 kalaṅkā valviṇai ilaṅkā acōkamum  
 kāppuru niraipuṇal māppap pālamum  
 kāval puricai mēvilim paṅkamum –60  
 viḷaiṇṇan tūruṭai valaiṇṇan tūrum  
 kalāmutir kaṭuntirāl ilāmuri tēcamum  
 tāitamar valviṇai mātamā liṅka-  
mumtēṇak  
 kalarpōḷil mānakka vāramum –65  
 toṭukaṭar kāval kaṭumuraṇ kaṭāramum  
 māpporu taṇṭar koṇṭa  
 kōp parakēcari paṇmarāṇa  
 uṭayār śrīrācēntira cōḷa tēvarkku  
 yāṇṭu  
 muppatāvatu –70<sup>69</sup>

[15] [*and (who)*], – having despatched many ships in the midst of the rolling sea and having caught Caṅkiramavi-jayōttuṅkavarmaṇ, (Samgramavijay-ottuṅavarman), the king of Kāṭaram, along with (his) vehicles, (*viz.*) rutting elephants, (which were as impetuous as) the sea in fighting, – (took) the large heap of treasures, [16] which (that king) had rightfully accumulated; the (arch called) Vittiyātaratōraṇam (Vidyādhara-toraṇa) at the ‘war-gate’ of the extensive city of the enemy; the ‘jewel-gate,’ adorned with great splendor; the ‘gate of large jewels’; Vijayam, of great fame; Paṇnai, watered by the river; the ancient Malaiyūr (with) a fort situated on a high hill; Māyirutiṅkam, surrounded by the deep sea (as) a moat; Ilaṅkācōkamga-sogam (i.e., Laṅkāśoka), undaunted (in) fierce battles; Māppappālam, having abundant high waters as defense; Mēvilampaṅkam, having fine walls as defense; Valaippantū, possessing (both) cultivated land (?) and jungle; Talaitakkōlam, praised by great men (versed in) the sciences; Mātamāliṅkam, firm in great and fierce battles; Ilāmuriṭēcam, whose fierce strength was subdued by a vehement (attack); Mānakavāram, whose flower-gardens (resembled) the girdle (of the nymph) of the southern region; and Kāṭaram, of fierce strength, which was protected by the neighboring sea;<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> (Cuppiramaṇiyam, 1983), pp. 27–8.

<sup>70</sup> Trans. (Vijayavenugopal, 2010), PI 23, p. 11.

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CH. XIII  
RECENT ARCHÆOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AND THEIR  
IMPACT ON SOUTH INDIAN ARCHÆOLOGY  
K. RAJAN

ABSTRACT

The emergence of the Early Historic period in South India, after the Iron Age, is an important issue that needs to be reassessed on the basis of recent evidences that have arisen in the field of archæology, epigraphy, numismatics, literature and historical linguistics. It has become increasingly complex to draw a chronological demarcation line between the Iron Age and the Early Historic period. The introduction of iron, the appearance of megalithic monuments and the availability of black-and-red ware are generally the three elements taken into account to determine the beginning of the Iron Age. However, the recent evidences suggest that each of these cultural components has its own independent origin and evolution: they emerged and evolved in South India in different times and converged as a homogenous cultural synthesis only in the course of time. In the same way, the introduction of Brāhmī is usually seen as the main cultural marker for the beginning of Early History, a view that needs also to be reassessed. The occurrences of iron, black-and-red ware, megalithic monuments, graffiti and Brāhmī script are not uniformly datable throughout the South Indian cultural landscape and the beginning or termination of the cultural phases may be different depending on the various contexts and data examined. The radiometric dates obtained from Thelunganur and Mangadu for iron pushed the beginning of the Iron Age to the 15th century BCE. Likewise, the Porunthal and Kodumanal radiometric dates pushed the beginning of the Brāhmī writing system to the 6th century BCE, thereby pushing back also the commencement of Early History in South India to the 6th century BCE. The present article attempts to re-examine the question of the beginning of Early History in South India in relation to primary sources based on recent investigations.

## XIII.1 INTRODUCTION

IN South India, the culture that precedes the Early Historic period is designated with different terms: proto-historic culture, black-and-red ware culture, Iron Age culture, Megalithic culture, the latter being mostly used in the South Indian context. There is hardly any specific chronological demarcation line, neither between Iron Age and Megalithic culture, nor between Iron Age and Early Historic. The terms Iron Age or Megalithic culture are interchangeably used concerning a type of mortuary practice which prevailed in this region prior to Early History, though the sepulchral monuments continued to exist until the end of Early Historic times. The synchronisation of megalithic monuments with Iron Age complicated the issue. The ritual of erecting megalithic monuments has been practiced during Iron Age times as well as in the Early Historic period. For instance, the occurrence of inscribed potsherds with Brāhmī script from a transepted cist excavated at Kodumanal<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 16, p. 102) and Porunthal,<sup>2</sup> and from an urn burial at Marungur near Vadalur,<sup>3</sup> are the finest indicators of its continuity in Early Historic times.<sup>4</sup> The survival of this mortuary practice through different levels of sepulchral monuments for more than a millennium in various social and environmental contexts should not be simply summarised as megalithic. The time has perhaps come to differentiate the Iron Age megalithic monuments from the Early Historic megalithic ones, and to further differentiate the early, middle and late Iron Age megalithic monuments in their given cultural context. A number of questions related to Iron Age still remain unanswered. The non-availability of radiometric dates, particularly from the graves, prevented us for a long time from fixing an acceptable chronological frame. In recent years, the radiometric dates obtained for the samples collected at Watgal and Bukkasagara in Karnataka, Gachibowli in Andhra Pradesh, Thelunganur and Mangadu in Tamil Nadu, all in South India, placed the introduction of iron in

<sup>1</sup> (Subbarayalu, 2008c), pp. 209–49.

<sup>2</sup> (Rajan, 2009), pp. 109–15.

<sup>3</sup> (Sivaramakrishnan & Kalaiselvan, 2010), pp. 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> Recently a Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed ring with the words *tēvan-cāttan* was re-

covered from a cist burial near Chinnathadagam near Coimbatore and the term *īmattāli* meaning urn was found engraved on an urn piece collected from a disturbed urn at Vēḍapaṭṭi near Coimbatore, according to the explorers.



South India around the 2nd millennium BCE. The twenty-seven radiometric dates obtained from Porunthal, Keeladi, Kodumanal and Alagankulam clearly placed the beginning of Early Historic period around the 6th century BCE. Thus, these scientific dates help us to place the Iron Age between the 2nd millennium BCE and 6th century BCE.

#### XIII.1.1 Iron Age and its implications

The general conclusions drawn from specific available data prevented us from understanding the changing cultural pattern that took place between the introductory and the terminal phases of the Iron Age. The Early, Middle and Late Iron Age phases are hardly identified in the cultural material of South India. The introduction of iron into society transformed the subsistence pattern drastically. However, it is very difficult to accept the view that this metal held its technological sway with the same intensity over a thousand years. The subsequent developments that took place after the introduction of iron —enhanced agricultural production and craft specialisation with associated trade— had also a significant impact on the society of the time. Therefore, we should rather try to understand the different aspects of this culture in a given context than draw general conclusions from data based on specific cultural material.

The three important characteristics of this culture are the existence of black-and-red ware, the use of iron, and the practice of erecting sepulchral monuments. These three components, both individually and collectively, played a crucial role in the formation of that culture. In the majority of the archaeological reports, these three cultural traits were seen as a package. General conclusions were drawn out of archaeological data, on the basis of the presence of one or two of the above components. These three components have not been examined independently. This situation led to enormous discrepancies in understanding this culture.

Even today, scholars do not designate this cultural phase with a single name, on account of its cultural diversity. They call it Black-and-Red Ware culture, Iron Age culture or Megalithic culture according to the impact or prominence of one of the cultural traits namely black-and-red ware, iron, or burial monuments. In some of the excavations, the mere presence of black-and-red ware was considered sufficient to link them with the Iron Age culture, as

Figure 16: Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from a transepted cist at Kodumanal



shown by the examples of sites like Mangudi,<sup>5</sup> Mangadu,<sup>6</sup> Perur,<sup>7</sup> Vallam<sup>8</sup> and Adichchanallur.<sup>9</sup> The site Mangudi yielded data pertaining to three cultural phases and the excavators designated them as microlithic, megalithic and Early Historic. The availability of microlithic tools led them to designate the first phase as microlithic. The second phase is designated as megalithic merely on account of the presence of black-and-red ware, although no megalithic burials were reported at that site. The urn burial site Adichchanallur has been designated as belonging to megalithic culture merely on the basis of the presence of urn burials associated with black-and-red ware. Actually, several urn burial sites do not carry any massive lithic appendage as one observes in the cairn circles or stone circles of northern and western Tamil Nadu. The fact that the graves were without any lithic association still did not prevent the archaeologists from labelling them as belonging to megalithic culture.

### XIII.1.2 Introduction of iron technology

The introduction of iron is to be seen as a technological transfer that increased economic production and led to a change in society. It is generally believed that iron technology was introduced from the West. The analysis of the earliest iron pieces encountered in the oldest world civilisations, in Western Asia, Iran, China, etc., has shown that they are mostly meteoritic in origin, whereas the ones observed in the Indian subcontinent are metallic, a fact that demonstrates the absence of technological connections between these different cultural zones. It is mostly believed today that there were several centres of production. Although the dates suggested for the introduction of iron vary, depending on the zones concerned, there is a broad convergence among scholars on this vexing subject due to the emergence of new radiometric dates. Dates such as ca. 1300 BCE at Ahar,<sup>10</sup> ca. 1200 BCE at Nagda, cal. 885–580 BCE at Noh and cal. 1265–1100 BCE at Atranjikhhera<sup>11</sup> and ca. 1100 BCE at Hallur,<sup>12</sup> led scholars to place the origin of iron somewhere between

<sup>5</sup> (Shetty, 2003a).

<sup>6</sup> (Satyamurthy, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> (Shetty, 2003b).

<sup>8</sup> (Subbarayalu, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> (Satyamurthy, 2007), pp. 55–66.

<sup>10</sup> (Sahi, 1979), pp. 367–9.

<sup>11</sup> (Agrawal, 2003); (Tewari, 2003), pp. 536–44; (Chakrabarti, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> (Nagaraja Rao, Mitre, & Alur, 1971).

1300 and 1100 BCE, on the basis of the radiometric dates assigned to the context in which the iron was recovered.

The TL-dating of Kumaranahalli pushed the date a little back to 1300 BCE.<sup>13</sup> Recent investigations further push the origin of iron in India somewhere around 1500-1400 BCE, or much earlier in heartland and peninsular India.<sup>14</sup> Four radiometric dates obtained for the three samples of wood charcoal taken from the forge, and the one from the ashy dung deposits, at Bukkasagara,<sup>15</sup> placed the earliest iron production to 1620 BCE.<sup>16</sup> The iron smelting sites like Raja Nala-Ka-Tila, Malhar, and Lahuradewa, located in the iron rich mineral zone of the Mid-Ganga valley, push the origin of iron further back around 1800-1700 BCE.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent investigations in sites like Malhar near Banaras,<sup>18</sup> and Watgal in North Karnataka, pushed the date to around the 2nd millennium BCE.<sup>19</sup> The series of dates obtained from different ecological zones clearly placed the introduction of iron in India to 1800 BCE.<sup>20</sup> The TL and SAR-OSL ages of two pottery samples (GBLD-3, GBLD-4) from the excavated Megalithic burial pits within the campus of Hyderabad University at Gachibowli are 4150 and 4800 years BP and 4000 and 4510 years BP, respectively. With respect to the datum year (2005) in which the luminescence dating was carried out, these ages correspond to 2145 BCE, 2795 BCE (TL), 1995 BCE and 2505 BCE (SAR-OSL), respectively.<sup>21</sup> The series of dates obtained from different ecological zones clearly placed the introduction of iron in India somewhere around the 2nd millennium BCE.

<sup>13</sup> (Agrawal & Joshi, 1990), pp. 219–34.

<sup>14</sup> (Tripathi, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> (Johansen, 2014), pp. 256–75.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Peter G. JOHANSEN intended to report the date range between 1300-1000 BCE on the basis of their given context. However, he firmly believes that the Iron Age begins much earlier than 1200 BCE.

<sup>17</sup> (Tewari, 2003), pp. 536–44; (Tewari, Srivastava, Saraswat & Singh, 2002), pp. 54–62.

<sup>18</sup> (Tewari, Srivastava & Sinha, 2000), pp. 69–98.

<sup>19</sup> (Devaraj, Shaffer, Patil & Balasubramaniya, 1995), pp. 57–74.

<sup>20</sup> (Tewari, 2010), pp. 81–97.

<sup>21</sup> (Thomas, Nagabhushanam & Reddy, 2008), pp. 781–90.



Figure 17: Crucible furnace exposed in Kodumanal excavations



## XIII.1.3 Introduction of steel

The introduction of steel is considered a technological advancement on the use of iron. Iron is extracted from iron ore through smelting in a furnace, whereas the steel is produced by melting iron along with a flux material placed in a crucible so as to get a required optimum temperature. Recent re-investigations of the Indian wootz process have been concentrated on material from the known sites of Konasamudram, Nizamabad district, Andhra Pradesh,<sup>22</sup> and Gatihosahalli in the Chitradurga district of Karnataka.<sup>23</sup> These investigations have shown the existence of specialised, standardised and semi-industrial production techniques dating from at least the late mediæval period. During the course of field investigations of copper mining and smelting in South India, JAIKISHAN came across several sites in northern Telangana,<sup>24</sup> and Sharada SRINIVASAN came across a previously unrecorded archæometallurgical site at Mel-Siruvalur, South Arcot district, Tamil Nadu.<sup>25</sup> She identified high carbon steel at Kodumanal, and finally from Kadebakele, and dated it to 880–440 BCE.<sup>26</sup>

The identification of these production centres supports the idea that wootz steel production was relatively widespread in South India and extends the known horizons of this technology further. In addition, PARK and SHINDE found some high carbon steel products among the iron artefacts excavated from the 2nd century BCE to 1st century CE site at Junnar in Maharashtra.<sup>27</sup> The available evidence suggests that the transfer of steel technology was quick and wide spread. However, the date of the introduction of steel in the different parts of South India is yet to be clearly established. The crucible furnace unearthed at Kodumanal was firmly dated to 5–6th century BCE on the basis of radiometric dates. At Kodumanal, the main oval-shaped crucible furnace surrounded by twelve small furnaces was found in the natural soil at the depth of 125 cm (Fig. 17, p. 105). This crucible furnace meant for the manufacture of steel could be securely dated to the 5–6th century BCE.<sup>28</sup> It is presumed

<sup>22</sup> (Lowe, 1990), pp. 237–50; (Voysey, 1932), pp. 245–7. (Srinivasan, 2017, pp. 909–15.

<sup>23</sup> (Freestone & Tite, 1986), pp. 35–63;

(Rao, 1989), pp. 1–6.

<sup>24</sup> (Jaikishan, 2007), pp. 445–60.

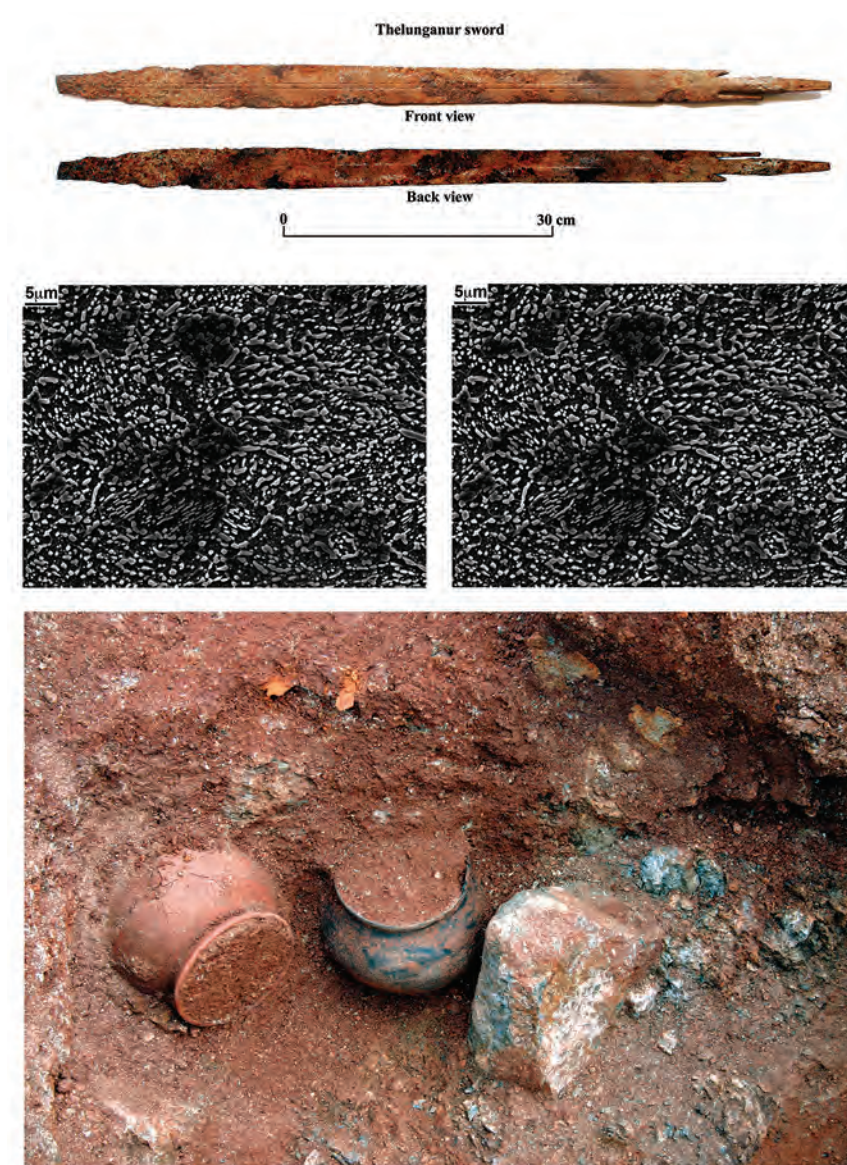
<sup>25</sup> (Srinivasan, 2007), pp. 673–96;

<sup>26</sup> (Srinivasan, Sinopoli, Morrison, Gopal & Ranganathan, 2009), pp. 116–21.

<sup>27</sup> (Park & Shinde, 2013), pp. 3811–21.



Figure 18: Thelunganur Steel Sword collected from a grave



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that on the basis of the most recent dates given for the introduction of iron, the use of steel could be dated beyond the 1st millennium BCE, however radiometric dates are lacking for the steel till date.

Above all, the metallographic analysis carried out in 2013 on the sword collected from Thelunganur in Mettur taluk of Salem

<sup>28</sup> (Rajan, 2015), pp. 399–416.

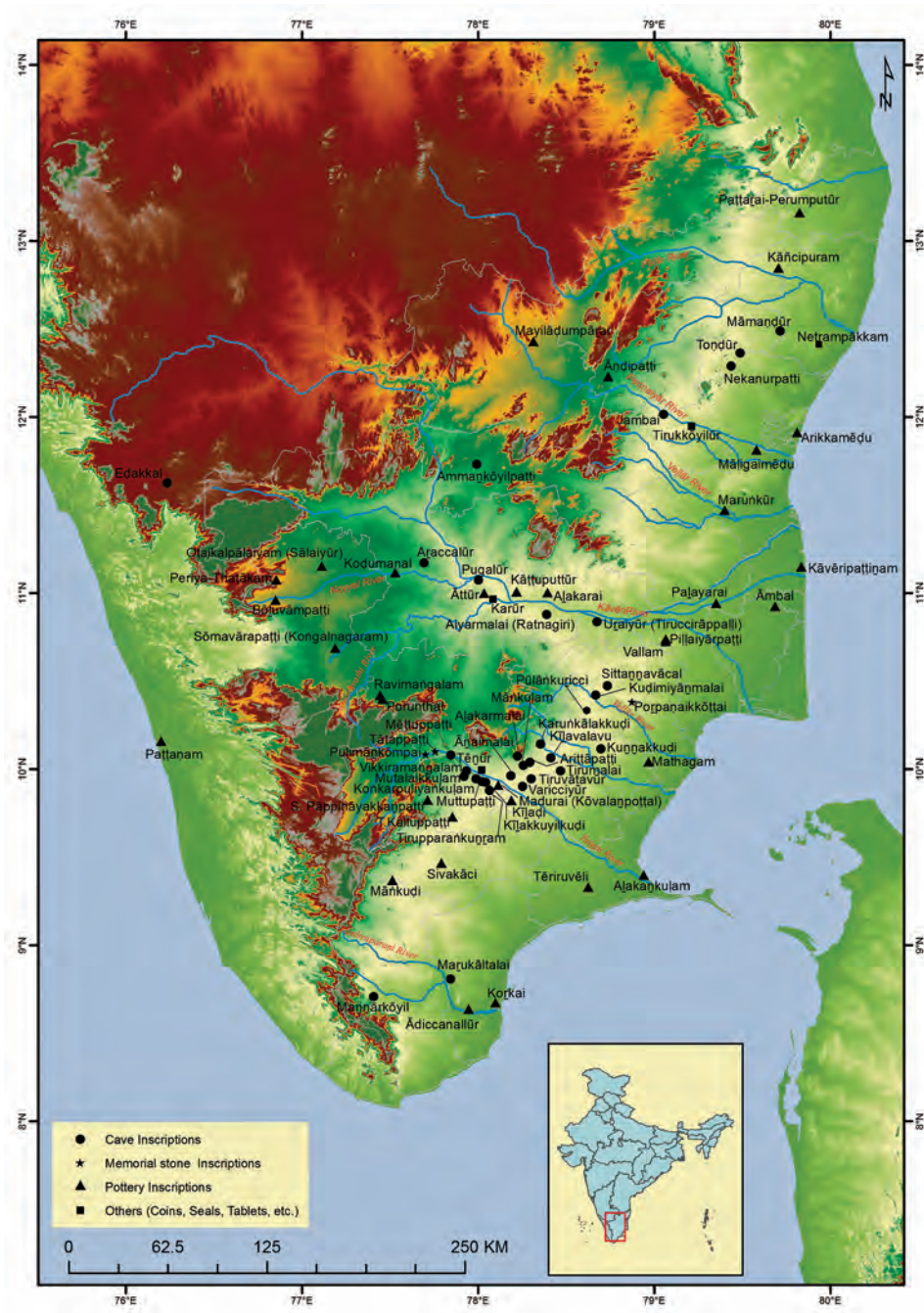


district throws a fresh light on the origin of high carbon steel in South India (Fig. 18, p. 107). The metallographic analysis of the sword and the AMS date obtained from the carbon extracted from the sword provide interesting informations. Carbon samples were extracted directly from two different parts of the sword in the University of Arizona's NSF-Arizona AMS Facility for  $^{14}\text{C}$  analysis. The  $1\sigma$   $^{14}\text{C}$  ages, given in years before present (yr BP) in relation to 1950, were  $3089\pm40$  (AA99857) and  $4208\pm35$  (AA104832), which, when calibrated, gives the calendar dates of approximately the mid-2nd and early 3rd millennium BCE, respectively. Both dates, which are inconsistent with, and deviate significantly from, archaeological contexts, cannot at the moment have any practical value for a tentative periodisation. Still, the results show that technologies needed to facilitate both the production and processing of crucible steel were largely established in the Thelunganur region of Tamil Nadu by the time that the sword was made, approximately the mid-1st millennium BCE.

Although still unique, this dating is very significant in the South Indian context from a cultural, chronological and technical point of view. At the cultural level, an attempt could be made to understand the origin, evolution and assimilation of various types of graves as the grave sites located in and around Thelunganur yielded urn burial, pit burial and chamber tombs, all placed in a cairn circle. At the chronological level, the sword is the earliest datable object of steel so far obtained in Tamil Nadu. At the technical level, the analysis has shown that the sword was made of ultrahigh carbon steel with a controlled microstructure consisting mostly of particles of iron carbide in the ferrite background, which is almost free of non-metallic inclusions. The making of high carbon steel is a highly developed skill. If one considers the lowermost date of mid-1st millennium BCE as the possible date of the introduction of steel, there is a possibility of getting earlier dates for iron as it normally precedes the production of steel.

The recent AMS dates obtained for samples collected from sites such as Raja Nala-Ka-Tila, Malhar, Lahuradewa, Watgal, Gachibowli, Bukkasagara, Thelunganur and Mangadu placed the manufacture of the iron in India somewhere around the 2nd millennium BCE. Thus, the Iron Age culture might have begun in South India around the 2nd millennium BCE, or still earlier. Keeping these recent developments in mind, we should consider separately

Figure 19: Map showing the Tamil-Brāhmī yielding sites in Tamil Nadu



the other cultural components like black-and-red ware and megalithism, and date them independently in order to understand their origin, evolution and assimilation. The question that remains also to be answered is the date of the beginning of Early Historic times, if we want to reassess the time span of the Iron Age culture.

#### XIII.1.4 The beginning of the Early Historic period

The usage of the expression 'Early Historic' in archæological context is not uniform and on several occasions it has been used loosely. There is no agreement among archæologists in designating a cultural phase as Early Historic. Each group of scholars has its own interpretation with regard to this question. In some cases, the term Early Historic is substituted with other designations: Mauryan culture, Sunga culture, Satavahana culture, etc., with overtones of political authority rather than cultural process. In a few cases, the occurrence of potsherd like NBP, rouletted ware or Brāhmī inscribed potsherds suffice to designate the culture as Early Historic. For some scholars, the historicity of great personalities like Mahāvīra and Buddha are sufficient to designate the culture to which they belonged as Early Historic.<sup>29</sup> In certain cases, domestic architecture, city planning, construction of secular and religious monuments, use of writing, coinage, introduction of Buddhism or Jainism and external maritime contacts are considered as valid criteria for the beginning of Early History. Due to the application of different criteria, fixing the beginning of Early History in South India became thus particularly complex. There is actually no consensus among the archæologists, nor among historians, as rightly pointed out by B. D. CHATTOPADHYAYA.<sup>30</sup> However, recent evidences encountered in the field of epigraphy, numismatics and archæology reflecting the development observed in all fields—namely social, economic, cultural and religious—provide an important clue on the beginning of Early History in Tamil Nadu.

These evidences clearly point to the emergence of a new social order henceforth unnoticed in the previous Iron Age culture. The occurrence of bronze objects, carnelian and agate beads in the Iron Age context, well before the traces of NBP and Punch Marked coins, suggests that long distance trade existed in South India well before

<sup>29</sup> (Dhavalikar, 1999).

(Chattopadhyaya, 1987), pp. 227–32.

<sup>30</sup> (Chattopadhyaya, 2008), pp. 3–14;



Figure 20: Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from Kodumanal – A



the so called Mauryan incursion in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Irrespective of this emerging scenario, the majority of the sites in South India have been dated to the 3rd century BCE. This would imply that the whole of South India was urbanised in a very short span of time, of two or three decades, which is quite unlikely. The reason for assigning all the sites to the 3rd century BCE is the assumption that the Brāhmī script was introduced in South India after Aśoka. Unless we get a pre-Aśokan inscription in Deccan, we are not likely to push the date back beyond the firmly anchored date of the 3rd century BCE.

It is quite clearly established now that Aśoka did not develop the Brāhmī script. The origin or evolution of a script is a social process and it can not be associated with a particular individual or dynasty. The present opinion is that the pre-Aśokan script cannot have existed in the south unless it was obtained from the north. The one-way southbound cultural movement is the accepted norm in archæological interpretation. With this view, all the archæological sites, irrespective of their cultural deposit, have been dated to the 3rd century BCE. Thus, fixing the dates of the Early Historic period on the basis of the availability of Brāhmī script alone is unwarranted. In the same way, the concept of one culture following the other in chronological order needs also to be reconsidered. For example, in southern Tamil Nadu sites, the Microlithic culture is succeeded directly by the Iron Age culture, and there is no trace of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures.

Although several parameters —trade, technology, architecture, political authority, territorial integrity, urbanisation, etc.— are available to designate a culture as Early Historic, the occurrence of the Brāhmī script is still considered the final criterion for the beginning of the Early Historic period in India. We were thus encouraged to assume that the date of Brāhmī is crucial in understanding the context.

We will try to throw here some light on the various issues involved in the question of the script. This does not mean that all other parameters are irrelevant. I am fully aware that all the categories of evidence are equally important. However, for the purpose of clarity, I will focus here on the Tamil-Brāhmī script.



Figure 21: Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from Kodumanal – B





Figure 22: Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds collected from a transepted cist at Porunthal



## XIII.2 TAMIL-BRĀHMĪ INSCRIPTIONS

Unlike Prakrit-Brāhmī inscriptions of India, the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions occupied a unique position in the writing system of Early Historic India. While in the entire Indian subcontinent, as well as Sri Lanka, the epigraphical records show the dominance of Prakrit, in the epigraphical records of the small territory located in the southernmost part of India, Tamil dominated. In the whole of India, except in the Tamil Nadu zone, the early records are mostly Aśokan edicts, and we hardly get any other inscription issued by the common man. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the epigraphical records were issued by people belonging to different segments of the society: rulers, artisans, and traders. Moreover, the number of early stone inscriptions with Brāhmī script available in the entire territory of India is less than the number of Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed stone records available in Tamil Nadu. Likewise, the total number of inscribed potsherds available in archaeological excavations in Tamil Nadu is more than one thousand, while less than a hundred inscribed potsherds have been hitherto unearthed in the whole of India. Similarly, a handful of early Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed coins were unearthed in Tamil Nadu, whereas we hardly get any early Brāhmī inscribed coins, including the early PMC of the Mauryan dynasty. Thus, understanding Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions in their given context is fundamental if we want to understand the emergence of the Early Historic period in South India.

## XIII.2.1 Cave inscriptions

Since the first discovery of a Tamil-Brāhmī cave inscription at Mangulam in 1882 by Robert SEWELL,<sup>31</sup> nearly ninety-six cave inscriptions have been documented from thirty-four sites datable between the 5th century BCE and the 1st century CE<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 19, p. 109). Of the ninety-six inscriptions, nearly sixty inscriptions, constituting about 60%, were recorded from thirty-two sites belonging to the Early Historical period. Except five memorial stone inscriptions found at Pulimankombai (three), Thathapatti (one) and Porpanakottai (one), the major part of the inscriptions are cave inscriptions, mostly dedicated to Jain monks. Besides stone inscriptions, Tamil-Brāhmī

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<sup>31</sup> (Sewell, 1882), p. 294.

<sup>32</sup> (Mahadevan, 2003).

scripts are found in large numbers on pottery, and a limited number of Tamil-Brāhmī legends are noticed on coins, seals, rings, terracotta pieces and touch stone. Besides, Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds are also witnessed in Egypt, Oman, Sri Lanka and Thailand, forcing archæologists and epigraphists to have a fresh look at the origin, evolution, context and chronology of Tamil-Brāhmī.

Initially, understanding these inscriptions was a very complex issue. However, the development that took place in other disciplines such as language, literature, history and archæology has helped us to understand the cultural context of these inscriptions. Reconstruction of the history of early dynasties on the basis of Sangam literature has further helped in understanding the historical figures mentioned in Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions. The identification of the Pāṇḍya king Neduncheliyan, mentioned in Mangu-lam inscriptions, could be cited as one such example. In November 1965, Iravatham MAHADEVAN<sup>33</sup> identified the Chera kings mentioned in the Pugalur inscriptions copied in 1906.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the Jambai inscription used the term *Satiyaputo*, a term encountered in Aśokan edicts for one of the dynasties who ruled in South India beyond the Mauryan Empire.<sup>35</sup> It induced a greater interest in the field of epigraphy. The cave inscriptions received the attention of scholars due to the mention of the above dynastic names. Irrespective of the suggested identifications, the date of the inscriptions eluded the scholars; the cave inscriptions are engraved on an inorganic material, and one cannot get any associated organic material to date them. Thus, the scholars squarely rest on palæography, orthography and linguistic style to determine their date. The study of inscribed potsherds collected from excavated sites faces the same problem. However, one added advantage in excavation is that the occurrence of associated organic material available in a well-stratified layer provides an opportunity to date the material scientifically. This date is applied to the associated inscribed potsherds. This methodology was followed for the Kodumanal inscribed potsherds and five radiometric dates were obtained.

<sup>33</sup> (Mahadevan, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> (Mahadevan, 2003), p. 588.

<sup>34</sup> (ARE 465/1906).

## XIII.2.2 Inscribed potsherds

The excavations conducted in Tamil Nadu yielded a considerable number of inscribed potsherds in a well-defined archæological stratigraphy. Due to their stratigraphical context, the inscribed potsherds received a special treatment. The first proper stratigraphical documentation of Brāhmī inscribed potsherds was made at Arikamedu by PATTABIRAMIN<sup>36</sup> on the basis of WHEELER's excavation.<sup>37</sup> Since then, M. J. FILLIOZAT,<sup>38</sup> CASAL and CASAL,<sup>39</sup> and Vimala BEGLEY<sup>40</sup> have studied inscribed potsherds. Finally, Iravatham MAHADEVAN consolidated the study of Arikamedu inscribed potsherds.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, the findings of Tamil Nadu State Archaeology were studied by researchers like Natana KASINATHAN,<sup>42</sup> S. RAJAGOPAL,<sup>43</sup> and S. VASANTHI.<sup>44</sup> Among them, the major contribution came from Y. SUBBARAYALU. In 2008, SUBBARAYALU examined all the available 473 inscribed potsherds recovered from sixteen sites of which nearly 250 came from Kodumanal. He made a comparative study of these inscribed potsherds and spelt out their significance in terms of palæography, orthography and chronology, and he analysed the content of the inscriptions with respect to their socio-economic context. His careful and thought-provoking studies are one of the most significant contributions of the recent years.<sup>45</sup>

Since then, more inscribed potsherds were recovered from Kodumanal and other sites, up to a total of 848, coming from more than thirty-five sites distributed all over ancient *Tamīlakam* (Tab. 2).<sup>46</sup> Of these inscribed potsherds nearly 763 come from five sites, namely, Kodumanal (551), Alagankulam (73), Arikamedu (66),

<sup>36</sup> (Pattabiramin, 1946). 2008c), pp. 209–48; (Subbarayalu,

<sup>37</sup> (Wheeler, 1946). 2010), pp. 134–48; (Subbarayalu, 2014),

<sup>38</sup> (Filliozat, 1947), pp. 107–18; (Fuss-

man, 2011). <sup>46</sup> pp. 118ff. The subsequent excava-

<sup>39</sup> (Casal & Casal, 1956). tions conducted at Kodumanal (2018),

<sup>40</sup> (Begley & Jouveau-Dubreuil, 1996). Keeladi (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018) and

<sup>41</sup> (Mahadevan, 1996), pp. 287–316. Alagankulam (2017) yielded a substan-

<sup>42</sup> (Kasinathan, 1977), pp. 69–72. tial number of inscribed potsherds. We

<sup>43</sup> (Rajagopal, 2002). learnt that more than 320 inscribed pot-

<sup>44</sup> (Vasanthi, 2002), pp. 4–6. sherds were unearthed over and above

<sup>45</sup> (Subbarayalu, 2008a), pp. 189–221; the reported 848 inscribed potsherds.  
(Subbarayalu, 2008b); (Subbarayalu,

Keeladi (53), and Uraiur (20), and constituting nearly 90% of the total discovery. Among them, the occurrence of 551 inscribed sherds at Kodumanal stands first with 72% of the total. These inscribed potsherds, nearly 99%, were collected from stratigraphical contexts of the excavated sites, providing a relative chronological frame. Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds were also recovered outside India in sites like at Quesir-al-Qadim (Egypt), Berenike (Egypt), Khor Rori (Oman), Phu Khao Thong (Thailand), and at Anuradhapura, Kalmunai, Kantarodai, Tissamaharama, Mannitalai, Poonagari and Vettukkadu in Sri Lanka. Outside India, Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds were reported from thirteen sites in Egypt (four), Oman (one), Thailand (one) and Sri Lanka (seven). The excavations carried out between 1990 and 2010 at Tissamaharama, locally known as Akurugoda or Akurugodalla, in the Ruhuna region of southern Sri Lanka yielded 125 inscribed potsherds.<sup>47</sup> Many of the sherds are Buddhist and carry Brāhmī script with a dominance of Prakrit, except for a few written in Tamil. The inscribed potsherds obtained from the Indian Ocean Rim countries like Sri Lanka, Egypt, Oman, and Thailand, played a great role in our understanding of the various dimensions of maritime trade. Among them, the Sri Lankan cave inscriptions and inscribed potsherds received special attention due to their close geographical proximity. In addition to the cave inscriptions and inscribed potsherds, the discovery of memorial stone inscriptions, inscribed coins, seals and rings identified after six decades of proper decipherment of Tamil-Brāhmī further contributed to the study of Tamil-Brāhmī.

Table 2: List of sites with inscribed potsherds in Tamil Nadu

<i>Site no.</i>	<i>Excavated site</i>	<i>District / State</i>	<i>No. of sherds</i>
1	Alagankulam	Ramanathapuram	73
2	Alagarai	Tiruchirappalli	3
3	Ambal	Nagapattinam	1
4	Andipatti	Tiruvannamalai	3
5	Arikamedu	Puducherry	66
6	Attur	Karur	1

<sup>47</sup> (Falk, 2014), pp. 45–94.

Table 2: List of sites with inscribed potsherds in Tamil Nadu

<i>Site no.</i>	<i>Excavated site</i>	<i>District / State</i>	<i>No. of sherds</i>
7	Bolvampatti	Coimbatore	1
8	Jambai	Villupuram	1
9	Kanchipuram	Kanchipuram	1
10	Karur	Karur	15
11	Kattupudur	Tiruchirappalli	1
12	Kaveripattinam	Nagapattinam	1
13	Keeladi	Sivagangai	53 <sup>a</sup>
14	Kodumanal	Erode	551 <sup>b</sup>
15	Korkai	Tuttukudi	8
16	Madurai (Kovalanpottal)	Madurai	2
17	Maligaimeedu	Cuddalore	8
18	Mangudi	Tirunelveli	9
19	Marungur	Chidamparam	3
20	Mathagam	Pudukottai	1
21	Mayiladumparai	Dharmapuri	2
22	Otaikalpalayam	Coimbatore	1
23	Palayarai	Thanjavur	1
24	Pattanam	Thrissur	3
25	Pillaiyarpatti	Thanjavur	1
26	Porunthal	Dindugal	1
27	S. Pappinayakanpatti	Madurai	1
28	Salaiyur	Coimbatore	1
29	Sivakasi	Virudhunagar	1
30	Somavarapatti (Kongalnagaram)	Erode	1
31	T. Kallupatti	Madurai	1



Table 2: List of sites with inscribed potsherds in Tamil Nadu

Site no.	Excavated site	District / State	No. of sherds
32	Teriruvveli	Ramanathapuram	7
33	Uraiur	Tiruchirappalli	20
34	Vallam	Thanjavur	4
35	Virapandipudur	Coimbatore	1
Total			848

<sup>a</sup> The excavation at Keeladi is in progress. The number of inscribed potsherds unearthed till 2015 is given and the number may change in the course of excavation. We learned that till July 2017, more than 120 inscribed potsherds were recovered.

<sup>b</sup> The Archaeological Survey of India initiated the excavation at Kodumanal in the month of December 2017 and the excavation was continued till July 2018. We learned that more than 200 inscribed potsherds were recovered in the excavation.

### XIII.2.3 The nature of inscribed potsherds

Among all the inscribed material, and compared to cave inscriptions and coins, the inscribed potsherds provide certain vital information due to their inherent nature. Unlike cave inscriptions, the inscriptions on potsherds are secular, and, most importantly, they were engraved by the owner themselves. The inscribed coins generally carry the names of the king, whereas the inscribed potsherds carry the personal names of the common man – traders, artisans and farmers. Unlike the stone inscriptions, the pottery inscriptions are very short, and therefore the content of these inscriptions is limited. It is also limited as it is often fragmentary; most of the inscriptions were obtained from broken potsherds, from pots which were worn out from long use. Irrespective of these deficiencies, the personal names inscribed on the potsherds provide altogether a different dimension to our knowledge of contemporary society. The majority of the names encountered in inscribed potsherds did not find their place either in cave inscriptions or in literature, coins and seals. Therefore, these personal names serve as a new input to the existing ones.

Thus, the study of 505<sup>48</sup> inscribed potsherds from Kodumanal sheds light on some interesting facts. Most of the potsherds are fragmentary in nature, carrying one or two letters which do not form any meaningful words. However, these potsherds, in certain cases, help one to understand palaeographic features, and in some cases the single letters located at the end or beginning of the word provide a clue to the nature of the word. One may also reconstruct certain repetitive names like *ātan*, *kuviran*, *campan*, *sumanan*, *tissan*, etc., from the fragments through comparative study. One frequent clue in these inscriptions to recognise the end of a word is the occurrence of the alveolar *n*, which is a familiar termination for male names in Tamil. Thus, the alveolar *n* occurring at the end in the broken potsherd generally suggests that the word is, in most cases, the personal name of a male.

There are nearly 136 inscribed potsherds that carry the alveolar *n*-ending words. One hardly comes across any female name, which is really intriguing. The few occurrences of female names raises an imperative question concerning the society of the time. Whether it was a male dominated society and whether property rights lay mainly with the male descendants is yet to be ascertained. Although it is premature to draw definite conclusions, the available evidence suggests that it was indeed a male dominated society. FALK, who examined the Tissamaharama findings in Sri Lanka, found several female names, but mostly of Buddhist nuns (*bikini*).<sup>49</sup> It is rather difficult to determine their status outside of the Buddhist monastery.

The maximum number of letters available from a potsherd is thirteen (*kūla-antaiy-campan-akal*). Concerning the potsherds with full text, one may presume that nearly 99% of them are personal names. The remaining 1% of potsherds also carry personal names along with certain attributes prefixed or suffixed to the main personal name such as *capā-makatai* in *capā-makatai-pammāta*, *kūla-antaiy* in *kūla-antaiy-campan-akal* and *akal* in *vārunīy-akal* (Fig. 20, p. 111). The occurrences of exclusive non-personal names like *nikama* are very rare and constitute a negligible percentage.

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<sup>48</sup> The surface and grave findings are excluded from our analysis. Likewise, State Archaeology Department findings are also excluded. The 505 inscribed

potsherds recovered in the excavation carried out by the author alone are taken into account for the analysis.  
<sup>49</sup> (Falk, 2014), pp. 45–94.

Such similarities are also observed at Tissamaharama (Sri Lanka), Salihundam (Andhra Pradesh), Kara-Tape (Old Termez), Termez (Uzbekistan), and in nearly 99% of the sites in Tamil Nadu.<sup>50</sup>

There are several names of North Indian origin, which are in Prakrit proper. A few are in hybrid form too. The Prakrit names can be recognised by the occurrence of non-Tamil graphemes (aspirants, soft letters, and sibilants) and the genitive case endings like *śa*, *sa*, *ha*, *ya*. There are several names in pure Tamil like *campan*, *valikan*, *kaṇṇan*, *antavan*, *cuḷantai*, *māttan*, *pākan*, in Prakrit like *nikama*, and in Tamilised-Prakrit like *kuviran*, *silikan* and *makatai*. There are certain names like *ātan*-*asaṭan*, *campan*-*sumanan* (Fig. 21, p. 113) and *periyān*-*sātan*, in which one segment is in Tamil and another in Prakrit or in Tamilised-Prakrit. Another interesting feature is that certain names are written differently. For instance, the Prakrit names *sāta* and *tisa* are Tamilised by adding alveolar *ṇ* at the end, making the word *sātan* and *tissan* respectively. In another instance, the initial *sa* in the word *sātan* is converted into Tamil *ca*. Likewise, the name *tisa* is written as *tīssaṇ* / *tissaṇ* as well as *tissan* (the alveolar ending *ṇ* is replaced with dental *n*). Writing in both ways, such as *cātan* or *sātan*, clearly suggests that the residents of Kodumanal were familiar with both languages.

SUBBARAYALU, who examined the personal names in Prakrit, both in their original or adapted form, felt that it was the result of the influence of the Prakrit-speaking immigrants. These Prakrit-speaking traders must have introduced Brāhmī script into the south and in Tamil Nadu. According to him, this process must have happened soon after the Brāhmī script achieved its full form in the Magadha region, during the Mauryan rule in the early part of the 3rd century BCE.<sup>51</sup> Although we have a considerable number of Tamilised-Prakrit names in inscribed potsherds, we hardly have any evidence of the mutual influence of both languages in verbs and place names.

There are two main issues involved in the study of the language. One is the language of the inscription and another is the structure of the language. In general, the vocabulary part of the language changes quickly with the mere contact of two communities speaking two different languages. However, the contact must prevail for

<sup>50</sup> (Fussman, 2011); (Hinüber, 1991), <sup>51</sup> (Subbarayalu, 2010), pp. 134–48; pp. 120–4. (Subbarayalu, 2014), pp. 115–27.

Table 3: Radiometric dates for Tamil-Brāhmī – A

S. no.	Laboratory and Sample no.	Site name and Trench no.	Depth (cm)	AMS date (BCE)	Conventional age (uncalibrated) (BCE)	Calibrated date	2 sigma calibration
1	Beta Analytic Lab. 351053	Kodumanal KDL-ZD20	15	2150±30 BP	200	200	cal. BC 350 to 290 (cal. BP 2300 to 2240) / cal. BC 230 to 220 (cal. BP 2180 to 2170) / cal. BC 210 to 110 (cal. BP 2160 to 2060)
2	AMS Laboratory, University of Arizona AA99856	Kodumanal KDL-ZE10	60	2225±41BP	275	380	cal. 389 to 199 BCE (cal. BP 2339 to 2149)
3	Beta Analytic Lab. 349958	Kodumanal KDL-ZD20	65	2250±30 BP	300	370	cal. BC 390 to 350 (cal. BP 2340 to 2300) / cal. BC 320 to 210 (cal. BP 2270 to 2160)
4	Beta Analytic Lab. 330303	Kodumanal KDL-ZD10	80	2280±30 BP	330	380	cal. BC 400 to 350 (cal. BP 2350 to 2300) / cal. BC 290 to 230 (cal. BP 2240 to 2180)

Table 4: Radiometric dates for Tamil-Brāhmī – B

S. no.	Laboratory and Sample no.	Site name and Trench no.	Depth (cm)	AMS date (BCE)	Conventional age (uncalibrated) (BCE)	Calibrated date	2 sigma calibration
5	AMS Laboratory, University of Arizona AA99855	Kodumanal KDL-ZE9	120	2358±40 BP	408	480	cal. BC 731 to 691 (cal. BP 2681 to 2641) / BC 661 to 651 (cal. BP 2611 to 2601) / cal. BC 545 to 368 (cal. BP 2495 to 2318)
6	Beta Analytic Lab. 305904	Porunthal PTL-MEG-IV	Grave	2400±30 BP	450	410	cal. BC 720 to 700 (cal. BP 2670 to 2650) / cal. BC 540 to 400 (cal. BP 2490 to 2350)
7	Beta Analytic Lab. 302854	Porunthal PTL-MEG-I	Grave	2440±30 BP	490	520	cal. BC 750 to 680 (cal. BP 2700 to 2630) / cal. BC 670 to 610 (cal. BP 2620 to 2560) / cal. BC 600 to 410 (cal. BP 2560 to 2360)

a longer period in order to result in changes in the grammatical structure. This change takes place when one of the communities remains bilingual. The mere presence of borrowed lexical items, like personal names or professional names or religious terms, does not determine the language of inscriptions.<sup>52</sup> As per this proposition, the cave inscriptions do not borrow verbs and adjectives. The presence of borrowed lexical items such as nouns could not lead us to assign the language under investigation to the family of the donor. Thus, the influence of Prakrit-speaking at lexical and structural levels needs to be studied very closely. However, there is not much room for such structural analysis in Kodumanal inscribed potsherds as 99% of them are very short and mostly carry personal names. We hardly have any evidence of Prakritised Tamil, probably unwarranted in a Tamil speaking area. The occurrence of Prakrit names from the lowermost layers of the habitation cuttings suggests that the adaptation process might have taken place well before the 6th century BCE.

#### XIII.2.4 Date of Brāhmī script

In India, the origin and evolution of Brāhmī script received a special treatment as it is one of the earliest deciphered scripts of India. The date of Brāhmī script is generally determined on the basis of stratigraphy, palaeography, orthography, linguistic features, cultural contacts, and, in rare cases, through scientific methods. The application of scientific dates is mostly used in an archaeological context, and it depends on two major factors: first, one must obtain a sufficient number of inscribed potsherds in different stratigraphical contexts; second, one should also secure organic material in association with inscribed material in a well-defined stratigraphical context. In the case of Kodumanal, both parameters were met.

#### Radiometric dates

The two radiometric dates received for the samples collected from the grave at Porunthal, and the five radiometric dates for the samples at Kodumanal, provided ample scope to validate the date of Brāhmī script. The transepted cist (MEG. I) excavated in the year

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<sup>52</sup> (Rangan, 2004).



2009 at Porunthal yielded a ring stand with writing reading *va-y-ra* in Brāhmī script (Fig. 22, p. 114). The paddy grains collected from a four-legged jar placed close to this inscribed ring stand were dated to  $2440 \pm 30$  BP i.e. 490 BCE (cal. 520 BCE). This date takes the antiquity of an Early Historic megalithic grave to 490 BCE (cal. 520 BCE) and it has great significance in the history of India.<sup>53</sup> For the first time, an AMS date is obtained for a grave that is associated with Brāhmī script. Until this date, the Brāhmī script was generally dated on the basis of palæographical, orthographical, linguistic and stratigraphical parameters in Tamil Nadu. The present AMS date has pushed back the origin of Brāhmī two hundred years earlier than Aśoka. Subsequently, paddy grains recovered from another grave, MEG-IV (a double cist) opened in the year 2010, were also dated to  $2400 \pm 30$  BP (450 BCE). The two AMS dates of 490 BCE (cal. 520 BCE) and 450 BCE (cal. 410 BCE) require one to reassess the dates of Kodumanal.<sup>54</sup>

In light of the Porunthal findings, five samples were collected at the depth of 15 cm, 60 cm, 65 cm, 85 cm and 120 cm in a well-established archæological stratigraphy associated with a large number of inscribed potsherds in excavations conducted during the field seasons of 2012 and 2013, and it yielded uncalibrated dates of 200 BCE (cal. 200 BCE), 275 BCE (cal. 380 BCE), 300 BCE (cal. 370 BCE), 330 BCE (cal. 380 BCE) and 408 BCE (cal. 480 BCE) respectively (Tables 3 & 4).<sup>55</sup> The time range lies between 200 and 408 BCE (cal. 200 and 480 BCE) assigned to the cultural deposit that falls between 15 cm and 120 cm. At Kodumanal, the total deposit yielding more than 500 Tamil-Brāhmī inscribed potsherds measures 185 cm. There is still a 65 cm thick deposit containing inscribed potsherds below this dated level. Therefore, we may be able to push the date of Prakrit-Brāhmī and Tamil-Brāhmī further back to the 5–6th century BCE. A word of caution is also required at this juncture. Irrespective of these scientific dates, we should not jump to a conclusion that Brāhmī script developed in Tamil-Nadu, or in Sri Lanka, and moved over to North India; we are obtaining Prakrit influenced inscribed potsherds in association with Tamil-Brāhmī from the bottom-most level of the

<sup>53</sup> (Rajan & Yathees Kumar, 2014), Selvakumar, 2014), pp. 62–85; (Rajan & Yathees Kumar, 2014), pp. 271–6; (Rajan & Yathees Kumar, 2014), pp. 271–6; (Rajan & Yathees Kumar, 2014), pp. 271–6.

<sup>54</sup> (Rajan & Yathees Kumar, 2013), jan, 2015), pp. 399–416.

pp. 279–95; (Rajan, Yathees Kumar & <sup>55</sup> pp. 123 & 124.

cultural deposit at Kodumanal. Therefore, the date of the 6th century BCE goes for both systems of writing, namely Prakrit-Brāhmī and Tamil-Brāhmī.

To draw a final conclusion on the origin of Brāhmī script, we would need a deposit having Tamil-Brāhmī script without any influence of Prakrit or *vice versa*. The Brāhmī scripts and the writing system of the 6th century BCE are in a well advanced, highly structured and greatly developed stage. It would have taken a few more centuries to attain this matured stage. Therefore, the avenues are still open to push back the origin of Brāhmī script and the commencement of Early Historic South India a few more centuries.

#### XIII.2.5 Summary

Although the beginning of the Early Historic period is placed somewhere around the 6th century BCE in Tamil Nadu on the basis of radiometric dates obtained for the Brāhmī script, one still should not rely only on the availability of a writing system. In the major part of India, we do not come across any written material before the 3rd century BCE although the Early Historic period can still be considered as starting much earlier. Other parameters, like state formation, development of technology, trade, size of the settlements, political establishment and various such factors are to be considered in order to date the beginning of Early History. In the same way, one should not expect a uniform development in the whole of India. The overlapping between the Iron Age and the Early Historic period needs to be reconsidered and reassessed in each cultural zone. As witnessed in southern Tamil Nadu, where society directly entered from the Microlithic phase into the Iron Age phase without undergoing the Neolithic or Chalcolithic phase, some cultural zones may have entered directly into the Early Historic phase, in different time scales. The time has come to look into the cultural transformation from one phase to another in relation to the particular cultural zones. Future micro level study alone will provide an answer to these complex issues. Still, keeping in view the available evidences in multiple interdisciplinary areas, one could safely say today that the beginning of the Early Historic period in Tamil Nadu falls somewhere around the 6th century BCE.

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CH. XIV  
EPIGRAPHY TO THE RESCUE OF ART HISTORY?: THE  
INSCRIPTION OF SENJI FORT IN TAMIL NADU AS A CASE  
STUDY  
ANNE DAVRINCHE

ABSTRACT

In the north of Tamil Nadu stands the fortress of Senji, Villupuram district, essentially known for its impressive military architecture and its romantic ruins. Expanded during the 15th–17th centuries under the reign of the Nāyakas, the history of the dynastic capital of Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam remains mostly obscure and shows a critical lack of sources, both archæological and textual. Hence, the analysis of the epigraphy of the site proves to be essential; however, the inscriptions of Senji are in fact raising more questions than solving issues, especially regarding the religious monuments and places of worship. Very few in number, often incomplete or illegible, their interpretation has consequences for temple dating and the appreciation of the patrons' ambition. The objective of the present work is to examine the difficulties associated with the use of epigraphy as a method for relative dating and to understand the historical value that can be attributed to the elements —inscriptions and decorative designs— found on the surface of temples throughout the religious landscape of Senji.

XIV.1 INTRODUCTION

It is nowadays widely recognised that the parallel study of art history and of epigraphic data contributes to a better understanding of the development of political, cultural and religious traditions in South India, and more generally in Asia. But despite the mutual exchanges between the two disciplines, it is not always easy to correctly use their tools in a context marked by a lack of source material and an obscure history. Scholars tend to emphasise the fact that the knowledge gathered from style and iconography and the textual materials complement each other, but one has to consider the possibility of contradictions, and the disruption of logical conclusions.

As a case study, the Fort of Senji (Gingee), in Villupuram district, northern Tamil Nadu, will be examined. In the attempt to comprehend the elaboration of a stylistic definition of religious architecture in this 16th century dynastic Nāyaka capital, we intend to underline the complex and delicate use of some of the inscriptions found inside the fortress, and *in fine*, the constant back and forth movement between archæological and epigraphic discourse in a peculiar setting.

Indeed, very little research on Senji's religious landscape has been undertaken until now.<sup>1</sup> Temples, and places of worship in the open air, have merely been touched upon, unlike the military and courtly aspects of the Fort architecture, analysed by both Jean DELOCHE<sup>2</sup> and George MICHELL.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, the precise history of the Nāyaka capital of Tonḍaimaṇḍalam remains a mystery. Aside from a small corpus of inscriptions, and a few travellers accounts during the end of the 16th and the 17th centuries, the glory and the fall of Senji's Fort is mainly known through the Nārāyaṇan Piḷḷai chronicle, 'The History of Carnatic Rulers.'<sup>4</sup> The text has been elaborated by his local Tamil secretary at General Mackenzie's request during his search for archæological monuments and their history. Written around 1802, the chronicle tells, among other things, the story of the 18th century Hindu hero Rāja Desingh, for which Senji is famous nowadays and which is portrayed in a popular ballad. The author of this unique account of the region's history uses a combination of authentic events and local myths and legends to explain the birth of the city. This document has now been for decades one of the first sources of information about the development of Senji's society, and therefore, unverified facts tend to be used as central elements of demonstration in the field of architectural and iconographic studies.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the general conclusions are

<sup>1</sup> This contribution is based on the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of the author: Davrinche, A. (2017) *Le paysage religieux de Senji. Étude architecturale et iconographique des édifices religieux de la ville de Senji (Tamil Nadu, Inde du Sud) et de sa région proche / Thèse dirigée par Vincent Lefèvre / Thèse soutenue le 28 Juin 2017*. (Thèse de doctorat). Langues, Civilisations et Sociétés Orientales, Uni-

versité Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. (Deloche, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. (Michell, 1991), pp. 143–60.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. (Narayana Pillai, 1939).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance (Srinivasachari, 1943), which is almost entirely based, for the most ancient parts of the history, on Piḷḷai's Chronicles, and affirms numbers of important unverified facts, de-

never false, because expressed with a lot of precautions, they prevent one from understanding the complex process of a temple construction, from the patron's ideological intention to the religious influence of the monument on the area and the human settlement.

Furthermore, only two temples are mentioned by art historians—the Venkaṭaramaṇa and the Paṭṭābhirāma temples— among forty structures in stone and brick, and more than twenty local deities' places of worship. The corpus has to be examined in its entirety, and in the light of archæological and epigraphic analysis, in order to answer the question: 'Is there a Senji architectural style?'

The site of Senji will first be presented, and its history outlined, to give an insight into the geographical and political environment; the major inscriptions found inside and outside the Fort will then be reviewed, highlighting the inherent difficulties in using them in a scientific context. Finally, the study will focus on the Venkaṭaramaṇa temple, one of the most important monuments in Senji, which could sum up alone all of the issues implied by this type of survey, and show that epigraphy, in this case, could raise more questions than it would provide answers.

#### XIV.2 THE FORTIFIED CITY OF SENJI

The fortress stands in the northern part of Tamil Nadu, forty kilometres east of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai and seventy kilometres north of Puducherry, in a dry land scattered with impressive granite hills and gneiss inselbergs, and hardly watered by the Śankarāparanī River<sup>6</sup> in the north and west. The stronghold is formed by a line of massive fortifications connecting in a triangle the three main mountains of the landscape: Rājagiri, Kṛṣṇagiri, and Chandrayandurgam. On each hilltop, a succession of walls protects ruined temples and *maṇḍapas*. The central enclosure—the 'Inner Fort'— contains a square tower and the vestiges of a palace, and many shrines and tanks remain on the 'Outer Fort.'

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spite the clear statement of the author regarding the questionable veracity of the text.

a fact which shows the simultaneous dominance of Śiva and Viṣṇu in the religious tradition of the area.

<sup>6</sup> Also called the Varāhanadī River,



Figure 23: Rājagiri hill and Chettikulam Tank from Chandrayandurgam hill



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The origin of the first settlement seems to be related to Tamil local deities, the Seven Sisters, or Seven Virgins. Among these *sap-takaṇṇigai*, Senjiamman was blessed with beauty and purity: as a consequence, after throwing herself with her sisters from the top of Rājagiri hill to escape molesters, she gave her name to the place, becoming the tutelary goddess of Senji.

The very first archæological and epigraphic accounts in the area attest to the presence of Jain ascetics on the small Tīrthaṅkara Hill, northeast of the Fort, around the 5th and 6th centuries. Following the Pallava occupation —as evidenced by excavated temples around Senji<sup>7</sup>— and according to Piḷḷai's chronicle, a shepherd clan lead by Ananda Kon took the power in this area in the 12th century. The Kon rulers initiate the construction of defensive structures, which will increase during the Vijayanagara domination in the middle of the 14th century. For two centuries, the Vijayanagara Empire stretches from the Deccan to the far south, and in order to control such a large territory, governors are sent to hold provinces in the name of the king and to provide military troops all over the country. These

<sup>7</sup> Cave-temples of Singavaram, Maṇ- along with the Toṇḍur sculpted rock. ḍagapaṭṭu, and Daḷavānūr as examples,

chiefs and warriors are usually of Telugu origin and bear the title of *nāyaka* (leader). First considered as feudal lords (a term that actually creates debates among scholars<sup>8</sup>), they became increasingly independent of imperial authority upon Vijayanagara's dissolution from the middle of the 16th century onwards, involving themselves in the religious and economic matters of their country. They created and improved a new system of landholding that would become a characteristic feature of the Nāyaka government in Tamil Nadu. Three great centres of power emerge at Madurai, Tañjāvūr and Senji, which became the respective capital cities of the three Nāyaka kingdoms. If the first two bear a long-lived and powerful royal lineage, well documented, Senji stands aside due to its lack of sources and obscure history.

The birth of the dynastic line of Senji might be situated approximately between 1475 and 1500 CE, when the Tuḷuva king Kṛṣṇadevarāya plans an expedition with his general Vaiyappa Kṛṣṇappa to subdue some rebellious chieftains in the Senji region. Even if the presence of the Pāṇḍya and Hoysala is attested in this part of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam by a small corpus of inscriptions in Singavaram, a village north of Senji, the exact identity of these resisting rulers at that time, and their effect on the development of the Fort, are still unknown. Following a time of growing prosperity and importance, the Senji Nāyaka kings seem to remain loyal after the empire's defeat at Talikota in 1565, but the civil war of 1616 starts an endless period of fights and betrayals, between emperors, main and secondary Nāyakas of Madurai, Tañjāvūr, Vellore and Senji. The fortress falls under the domination of the Bijāpuri sultanates in 1649, ending the Nāyaka rule in Senji. The citadel will be successively occupied over the 17th and 18th centuries by the Maratha Sivaji, the Mughal, French, and British armies, to be finally abandoned to wild animals and bandits.

Although the Senji Nāyaka's genealogy is very unclear, the architectural study shows that the city and the Fort reach their height during the mid-16th century. The town is indeed —as European

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. (Stein, 1999), pp. 372–6; (Subrahmanyam, 1990), pp. 40–2.

travellers testify<sup>9</sup>— a flourishing dynastic capital. Senji's topography is organised around two major points. The sacred centre is situated one kilometre north of the Fort in Singavaram, today a very small village. The Raṅganātha cave temple, built under the Pallava in the 7th century, is highly respected by the Nāyaka kings: they give the temple a number of additions, such as two *giripradakṣiṇā*, the procession paths, one at the top, and the other at the foot of Singavaram hill. The second important core of Senji is the Royal centre, with the palace area and its square tower, inside the first enclosure of the Fort. Between those two points lies on the east a residential area, and on the west, a busy commercial area. Finally, the rural and agricultural belt follows the curve of the river and provides irrigated fields and water reservoirs for the dry season.

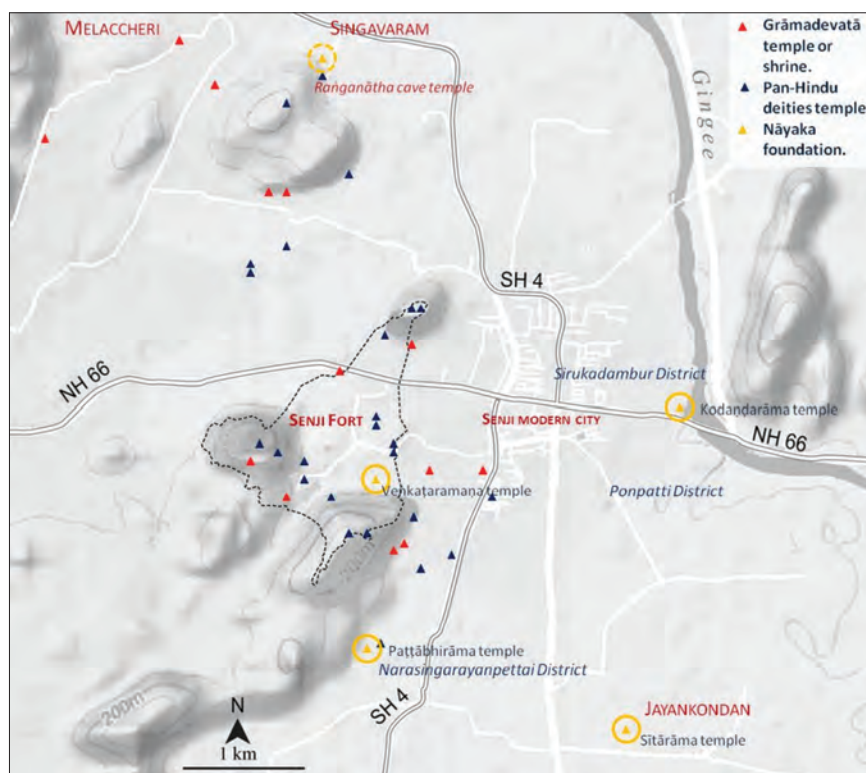
The religious landscape of Senji consists of stone temples, cave temples, brick structures, places of worship in the open air, and a fair number of memorial stones (hero and *sāti* stones, *nāgakaḷ*). A great majority of the monuments are dedicated to Vaiṣṇava pan-Hindu deities. This type of dynastic architecture, as it is called, is found mainly inside the enclosures of the Fort, except for four great royal foundations which correspond to four delimited districts. The *grāmadevatā* cult and the shrines of each of the *saptakaṇṇigai*, on the other hand, are distributed on the western border of the city, and always at the foot of a hill. Their number shows a very active and deeply rooted local tradition.

Regarding the pan-Hindu deities' temples, the surviving monuments can be divided in two main categories. Almost all the temples found in and outside the Fort are quite small structures, composed by only one sanctuary following the pattern *garbhagr̥ha-antārala-maṇḍapa*: a *sanctum sanctorum*, an antechamber, and an attached pillared hall. The four Nāyaka foundations —plus an unfinished fifth at Singavaram, near the Raṅganātha cave temple— are clearly under royal patronage, and show a more complex ground plan: one main sanctuary flanked by two secondary goddess shrines are enclosed inside by one or two rectangular walls

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<sup>9</sup> The travel depictions of the Nāyaka Samuel PURCHAS in *Purchas and his Pilgrims*, (Purchas, 1905), vol. X, ch. VII, pp. 205—22. PIMENTA compares Senji to Lisbon in terms of size, influence and activity.

Figure 24: Map of Senji Fort and close area



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(*prākāras*), open by tower gates (*gopuras*), only at the east side. Even if these royal temples are regarded as large complexes in Senji, they are far less ambitious and elaborate than other monuments of the *Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam* of that period, such as the *Jalakanṭheśvara* temple in Vellore, or the *Bhuvārāha* temple in Śrīmuṣṇam.

We will see that these two types of temple share, with more or less logic, two architectural designs and types of elevation decoration, which may help us to date the construction of Senji temples.

The iconographic programme in Senji is generally focused on the *avatāra* and other incarnations of Viṣṇu, mainly Kṛṣṇa and Veṇugopāla, Rāma and Narasimha, the latter representing a high symbol of ideal royalty and protection of the kingdom. It also displays images of the Vaiṣṇava poetic saints (*ālvār*), even in Śaiva temples, alongside with various forms of Śiva, the *liṅga*, and other Śaiva saints (*nāyaṇār*) and ascetics. A number of beautiful, but very conventional, royal portraits are sculpted on *maṇḍapa* pillars with strategic positions. Although the destructions and successive

repairs of the structures have made it almost impossible to define a logical and a pre-established design in the configuration of the sculpted reliefs, one is able to notice the emphasis laid on the themes of the righteous king, of the powerful kingdom, together with an impressive syncretism and the obvious will to promote local traditional figures. But the inequality of both the artistic treatment of the sculpture and the composition is a striking feature of Senji temples. It makes it difficult to date them and to understand the chronology of the construction.

#### XIV.3 EPIGRAPHY OF SENJI

A statement has to be made at this point: Senji is not well served by epigraphic sources.

The most important information about the Senji rulers is actually recorded by two 17th century inscriptions of the Murugan temple in Tirupparankunram, giving a supposed genealogy of the Nāyaka rulers of the Fort over twelve generations. But the only mention of a royal patronage from this dynasty is found in a 1580 inscription written on an enclosure wall of the Bhūvarāha temple of Śrīmuṣṇam (more than a hundred kilometers south from Senji). Often bearing the same names and titles throughout their history, none of these epigraphic records allows for a clear identification of the Senji kings ruling the Fort before the 17th century.

Noboru KARASHIMA is one of the only scholars who dedicated an entire study to Nāyaka names in the North and South Arcot districts. In his work *A Concordance of Nāyakas* published in 2002, he examines inscriptions mentioning ruler's names and administrative terms linked with Paḍaivīḍu (seat of the Śambhuvarāyar dynasty) and Senji, the two centres of Vijayanagara power in northern Tamil Nadu, although only Senji saw the development of a dynastic lineage.<sup>10</sup> He outlines the political relation between the Nāyaka and the king, and explains the importance of the 16th century landholding system. He also provides one of the five genealogies of the Senji rulers, certainly the most accurate, but acknowledges that a precise chronology of this lineage is —today— quite impossible to define.

On the site, inside the Fort and the Nāyaka period city, an overall total of thirty-seven inscriptions have been found, but only eight

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<sup>10</sup> (Karashima, 2002).



of them are published in Annual Reports. They are indeed in various states: most of them are damaged, illegible, or simply historically irrelevant. Once again, the military context, the multiple destructions, and the attempts at restoration don't help in the analysis of this material. They can be read on various locations: engraved on temple walls, base and ground, or scribbled on rocks lost in the fields or at the top of the hills. Very few of them give information about the context of the construction or management of the temples. The text generally presents less than two lines, when it is not limited only to family names in Tamil or Telugu. A small number of these unpublished inscriptions have been translated with the precious help of Mr. MURUGAIYAN and Mr. VIJAYAVENUGOPAL and analysed. They unfortunately reveal very few significant details, when the lines are complete and intelligible. An instance would be the occurrence of the Tamil expression *catā cervai*, meaning 'in perpetual devotion,' never encountered before the 13th century.

Aside from two engraved slabs from the end of the 16th to the early 17th century kept in the Fort Museum, and referring to late Senji Nāyakas, only three inscriptions could help one to understand the chronological development of the Fort's religious architecture. Located on the main shrine of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, in the Outer Fort, they appear in the Annual Reports of Epigraphy along with a translation. The first is dated from 1391,<sup>11</sup> and is much damaged, mentioning only the name of the Vijayanagara future king Viruppaṇa Uḍaiyar (Virūpakṣa I). The second is from 1550,<sup>12</sup> and records an offering of villages, taxes and temple repair by Śurappa and Mallapa Nāyaka in the name of the emperor Sadāśivarāya. The third inscription is dated from 1573,<sup>13</sup> and involves only the *sthānattār*, the council of the temple, granting the deity of the temple a religious festival and a procession on a palanquin.

Oddly enough, only the last two epigraphs have been used in architectural and historical studies about Senji. The 14th century inscription has never been mentioned, and thus, the temple's construction has been situated between 1540 and 1550, which seems to concur with Piḷḷai's chronicle, and with the primary architectural

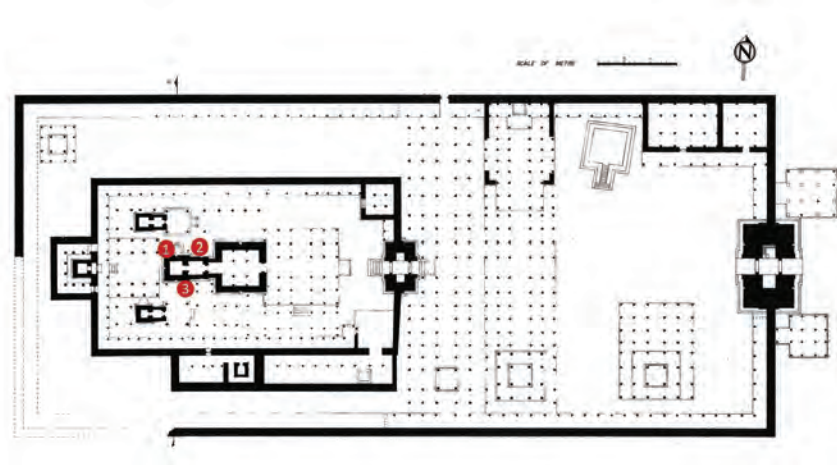
<sup>11</sup> (ARE 1939–40), No. 219.

<sup>13</sup> (ARE 1976–7), No. 226.

<sup>12</sup> (ARE 1904), No. 240.



Figure 25: Plan of Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple; (1) 1391 inscription, (2) 1550 inscription, (3) 1573 inscription



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analysis of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa, as we will see further.<sup>14</sup> This fact could partially be explained by the gap between the three publications of the reports. The 1550 and 1572 inscriptions appear respectively in the Archaeological Report of 1904 and 1976, whereas the 1391 inscription is the only one about Senji in the Report of 1940, in the middle of 70 years of ‘epigraphic silence,’ that makes it easy to miss. I was unfortunately unable to check *in situ* the authenticity of the text on the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, but the Mysore Epigraphic Department has confirmed the presence of an *estampage* matching the record appearing in the report.

Many questions rise from these observations. Firstly, compared to the extent and importance of the capital of the 16th century, why are there such a small number of royal inscriptions on the site, and why do some of the most important structures, like the Paṭṭābhirāma temple, not have any inscriptions at all? Could the

<sup>14</sup> It seems that the dating process of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple relies very lightly on epigraphy: some scholars prefer to see a 1570–80 temple, disregarding completely the 1550 inscription. Cf. (Michell, 2015). However, after a discussion of the subject, the author of this conclusion, Pr. MICHELL, has admitted not taking the 1550 inscription into consideration, by a simple omission, which doesn’t in any case affect the purpose of his study.

lack of epigraphic material be explained only by the recurrent destructions during years of war, by poor maintenance, or by questionable restorations? Then, why among twenty hero stones, *sāti* stones and other memorial stones, do none bear textual information? And finally, is the mysterious 14th century inscription questioning decades of architectural analysis? Focusing on dating the religious architecture of Senji, we might be able to give some explanations regarding the last point by studying the decorative design of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple.

#### XIV.4 THE VEṅKAṬARAMAṆA TEMPLE AND THE USE OF THE PAST

As we mentioned above, the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple presents the three most significant inscriptions of the site. It is the largest and the most complete religious monument of Senji. Located in the Outer Fort, at the foot of Chandrayandurgam hill, it has been restored and preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, but the *pūjā* is no longer performed. The temple measures 162 m × 74 m, and faces east with two *gopuras* channelling the devotee through two concentric enclosures. The inner *prākāra*, opened by a three *tala gopura*, contains a main sanctuary dedicated to Venkaṭeśa or Veṅkaṭaramaṇa, with a *garbhagrha*, antechamber, a *mukhamaṇḍapa*, and an attached open *mahāmaṇḍapa*. Two secondary shrines for Śrī (Lakṣmī) and Āṇḍāl, the only female saint and poet member of the *āḷvār*, stand on each side, and an additional *garbhagrha* with its closed circumambulatory passage is included inside the west wall of the *prākāra*.

Inside the second enclosure, a *kalyāṇamaṇḍapa* ('marriage hall'), three detached festival *maṇḍapas* and an *āsthānamaṇḍapa* (hall for royal assembly or meetings) go with the 'thousand columns hall,' the temple tank and the remains of a *tulābhara*, a stone scale for the king's ritual weighing. The impressive seven *tala* outer *rāyagopura* is flanked outside by two festival *maṇḍapas*, and the complex is surrounded by six tall four-pillared swing-pavilions for the gods' ritual procession.

The temple is praised for the sculpted panels inside the *rāyagopura*'s passageway, and for its royal imagery, almost entirely destroyed by invaders, particularly the high-relief representations in front of Āṇḍāl's shrine, one of the rare specimens of composite pillars with figural sculptures in Senji.

Figure 26: South of Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple from Chandrayandurgam hill



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Two types of architectural design are observed in this temple. In the first case, the shrine is supported by a very simple base and presents plain walls, decorated only by flat pilasters with bevel-edged brackets (often called ‘late Cōla type’), and shallow empty niches between split pilasters, capped with a foliated *makaratorana* arch, in horseshoe shape, hosting small reliefs. The wall ends with a *kapota*, a downward curve moulding, showing faces or vegetal patterns in *nāṣi*. The *makaratorana* niche and bevel-edged capitals are characteristic features of small ancient temples, featuring a decorative vocabulary used until the 13th century.

On the other hand, the second type of design is more elaborate: the double base is formed by an *upapīṭha* (a sub-base) and an *adhiṣṭhāna* (an upper-base) and various decorated mouldings with intricate details. The wall surface presents a rhythmic succession of *ædicules*, which are architectural components modelling small shrines. On the usual three main types of *ædicules* of Drāviḍa architecture, only two are used in this temple: the *śālā* and the *pañjara* *ædicules*, defined by their roof form and their width. The engaged column around empty niches are fluted and they support a *puṣpa-potikā* capital. Developed under the first Vijayanagara dynasties during the 14th century, this evolved and delicate curling flower bud

(*puṣpa*) capital is the best-known indication of the Nāyaka-period architecture. The *kapota* above is larger and goes along a *vyālamālā*. These two distinct designs and decorations could be used in the dating process of the architecture of the site.

If we take a look at the distribution of these two styles inside the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, the ‘plain style’ is found on the three main sanctuaries, and the store rooms. The ‘decorated style’ is seen on the two *gopuras* and the festival *maṇḍapas* of the second *prākāra*.

Figure 27: *Garbhagṛha* in ‘plain style’ of the west sanctuary (left), and north-west face of the *rāyagopura* in ‘decorated style,’ Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple (right)



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Regarding the whole corpus of temples inside and around the fortress walls, one can note that the ‘decorated style’ appears only on a few structures: the small Raṅganātha temple on top of Rājagiri hill; and two of the Nāyaka large foundations, the Paṭṭābhirāma temple outside the Fort, and the Sītārāma temple on the south of the Nāyaka city. For the latter, only the ruined *rāyagopura* is elaborate, the other parts of the temple —inner *gopura* and shrines— are plain in style, like the great majority of the temples in Senji. The small structures without enclosure, on the other hand, present, in general, with this severe and simple decoration on their wall.

Given that the three inscriptions of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa are located on the plain *vimāna* —the *garbhagṛha* and the attached closed *maṇḍapa*— of the central shrine, and based on the assumption that an inscription provides the relative age, hence the style, of a sanctuary —or at least of the part where the text is found— exceptions aside, one of the first conclusions could be that the core of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple has been built before the end of the 14th century, according to the 1391 inscription. Indeed, it would be logical to assume that this severe and simple decoration, showing



Figure 28: Raṅganātha temple, Rājagiri hill



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*makaratorana* arches, is closer to what has been done in the 13th and 14th centuries, than to the typical heavily ornate 16th century style, an assertion validated by the date of the earliest inscription of the temple. By association, all the religious structures showing the same design should belong to the same period, meaning that almost the entire religious landscape of Senji must have emerged during the 14th century.

Some arguments make this theory plausible. If this ‘plain style’ is not very frequent in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, one can observe it in Paḍaiviḍu, on the Veṇugopāla temple on the Kōṭṭaimalai Mountain. The very simple, almost bland, wall decoration could suggest that the temple was left unfinished, but might also indicate a more modern date of construction (19th–20th c.). Paḍaiviḍu epigraphy mentions Nāyaka rulers from 1495 to 1527 according to KARASHIMA,<sup>15</sup> but it is not possible to know if the temple dates back to the Śāmbhuvarāyar period, the defeated predecessors of the Nāyaka. Two other examples can be suggested. The Saumya Saumeśvara temple of Nimbapura in Karnataka, and the Mallikārjuna temple of Chandragiri in Andhra Pradesh, are dated from the first decade of the

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<sup>15</sup> (Karashima, 2002).

Figure 29: Bālaraṅganātha temple, Rājagiri hill



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15th century, and both show flat pilasters and *makaratorāṇa* on a simple basement.

More generally, plain styles are associated with architectural antiquity. The Nāyaka rulers are known for their strategic ‘preservation’ of more ancient architecture. They would keep in good condition the sacred core of temples from the Pallava, Cōla, or Pāṇḍya dynasties, but they would also extend them, adding heavily decorated structures, in a recognisable 16th century style. By these means, they displayed to the local population their capacity for financial



support, and also their religious affiliation with a preexisting deity of the land. That is why the new 16th century temple foundations tend to have a very elaborate *vimāna*, unlike the simpler sacred sactum of older dynasties' style.<sup>16</sup> That would explain the presence of the 'decorated style' preferably on outward elements of the complex. Hence, following this idea, the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa would have been an old temple restored and enlarged by Senji's Nāyakas, and the Paṭṭābhirāma temple, in contrast, a complete 16th century foundation.

However, this theory is only based on selected information; the general context also has to be taken into account. The physical situation of the 1391 inscription remains, for now, obscure, so precautions are necessary in its interpretation. The 1550 inscription seems to refer to a 'repair of the temple,' thus the early inscription's stone may come from a more ancient structure, rebuilt in the 16th century, or even from another temple, no longer existing. Moreover, regarding the historical context, the 14th century is actually not a major period for temple construction, especially in Tamil Nadu, because of the recurrent raids of the Delhi Sultanate, and the establishment of the Madura Sultanate, which caused a major disruption in religious activities at that time. The restoration of the worship and religious building construction starts only around the first half of the 16th century.<sup>17</sup> Even protected by fortified walls, it seems unusual for Senji to have developed the major part of its religious architecture at this moment.

The stylistic analysis of the temples also shows some confounding details. First, the Paṭṭābhirāma temple of Senji presents an irregularity in its general design. The complex is decorated with a typically 16th century Nāyaka period style, except for the small Garuḍa chamber, facing the main central shrine on a platform. But both elements are supported by the same ornate basement, meaning that the plain style shrine cannot be earlier than the main sanctuary. Similarly, in Paḍaivīḍu, the detached *maṇḍapa* of the Veṇugopāla temple is very plain on the outside, but displays beautiful *yālī* composite columns with *puṣpapotikā* capitals inside, which

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance the complex of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, enlarged by the Madurai Nāyakas from a local goddess sanctuary and a Pāṇḍya tradition, or the Aruṇācaleśvara temple of Tiruvaṇṇamalai, where many of the *maṇḍapas* have been built by the Taṇjāvūr Nāyakas.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. (Branfoot, 2007), pp. 15–16.

could not have been added later, proving that the structure has been built in one go.

Figure 30: *Garbhagr̥ha* of the central sanctuary of Paṭṭābhirāma temple with ‘decorated style’ (left), and its small facing Garuḍa shrine in ‘plain style’ on the east end of the platform (right)



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This disparity between a plain style centre and a more elaborate decoration of the secondary elements from the same period, inside the same complex, can be observed in very few temples in the south of the Tamil country. For instance, the Kṛṣṇa temple in Srivilliputtur, or the Venkitācalapati temple of Kṛṣṇapuram, are two structures securely dated from the middle of the 16th century by epigraphic data on stone and copper plates, but their *vimāna* is simple, with flat decorations and no mouldings, far from the sculpted pillars and elaborate basements of their *maṇḍapas* and *gopuras*.

These observations are evidence for a deliberate archaism in religious architecture. The Tamil Drāviḍa stylistic tradition is very conservative over the centuries, and when they settled in Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam, the Nāyaka rulers seem to have been perfectly aware of the association between a plain design and the inherent antiquity of a temple, an ‘aesthetic rule’ which has been for centuries subconsciously present in the devotees mind. They decided to make some structures appear to be older than they actually were. To understand the reasons behind this decision, we must consider the difference between sacred sites and royal sites.

The sacred temple owes its prestige to ancient legends that explain the importance of the area, and to specific mention in the devotional Tamil literature of the *nayanar* and the *ālvār*, where the monuments and places of worship are praised through hymns, as

Figure 31: Veṇugopāla temple, Kōṭṭaimalai Mountain, Paḍaiviḍu



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the home of famous saints, or places where a divinity revealed itself, creating a religious Tamil geography. Their history can be traced back through centuries and dynasties, displaying, with successive additions, a multitude of different architectural styles.

The new royal foundations, on the other hand, are often built in an uninterrupted period of time, and associated with a specific

patron or royal figure. So when the temple is not highly sanctified by a strong mythic association with the site of construction, this antiquity and glory has to be suggested. In the case of the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, one of the first theories that might emerge from the study is the possible use of epigraphy as a way to convince the devotee or the viewer that he enters an old structure. Simply: is the 1391 inscription deliberately situated —or even created— to make the *vimāna* look like it was from the 14th century, and thus to provide a greater status to the temple? If the tradition of replacing and copying inscriptions exists since the time of the Cōḷa rulers of the end of the 10th century,<sup>18</sup> such an imposture has never been attested until now for the Nāyaka period.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, inscriptions are the equivalent of a notarised agreement, unreadable for non-educated visitors; the visual appearance of the temple is a much more efficient solution to convey a meaning, say, through its overall decoration.

At Senji, the hills are of no importance in the devotional literature: even if the presence of local *grāmadevatās* was strong and constant through the ages, the 7th century Raṅganātha temple of Singavaram alone was part of the Tamil religious geography. The Nāyaka rulers intend to legitimise their power, and then their growing independence, over their adopted territory in the Tamil country. To achieve this political aim, they need to create an idea of the importance, sanctity and antiquity of their royal foundations: they manipulate the architectural design of the main *vimāna* of major temples, giving them a severe ‘archaic style,’ and applying a typically 16th century ornamented decoration on outer parts of the complex as a personal identity. On another hand, by adopting and supporting local cult, saints, and deities, they blend themselves in with Tamil cultural traditions. Resulting from this process of legitimising power, the Nāyaka capital seems to be an intentional imitation of a more legendary and sacred place.

<sup>18</sup> And especially under the authority of Queen Sembiyan Mahādevī, wife of Gandharāditha Coḷa, who ordered that brick temples be rebuilt in stone in order to preserve them, and copied the epigraphic records onto the new buildings. For more details, see (Balasubrah-

manyam, 1971), p. xii.

<sup>19</sup> This theory is not abandoned and has to be seriously considered, but at the present time, the lack of evidence prevents one from drawing any conclusion on the subject.



*Figure 32:* Venkīṭācalapati temple, Kṛṣṇapuram



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We have covered here only a small part of the architectural and epigraphic study; this needs to be completed by extended research —on the iconographic program, the aesthetics of the sculptures, and on the ritual circulation<sup>20</sup>— that demonstrates the intention of Senji's Nāyaka to reproduce the Vijayanagara capital, today's Hampi. They managed a subtle imitation of the most flourishing city of the Tuluva dynasty in Karnataka: first they adopted a similar topography; then they dedicated their main temples to the same tutelary gods in fashion at Tuluva times; and finally, they even partially reproduced the quite rough and massive sculptural style of the Vijayanagara capital. Their objective was to align their dynasty with the glory of their lords, especially the splendour of the Emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya's rule (1509–29), in order to be associated with a more established tradition of grandeur.

#### XIV.5 CONCLUSION

Senji is one of the rare sites allowing an almost complete analysis of an entire capital city, preserved from the growing urbanism. The renewed interest of the Fort after its classification as an Indian historical heritage site engages a series of limited studies, in which religious architecture is often neglected. Despite a cruel lack of sources, the chronological history of the place can be understood by the archaeological and epigraphic data. But, as we have seen, in some special cases, instead of helping the process, an inscription alone, and the mystery around it, can develop a fair number of theories, which must not be ignored by an art historian. If the ancient history of Senji remains obscure, it is now established that the apogee of the city development appears with the new Nāyaka governors under Vijayanagara authority in the 16th century, accompanied by an intense building activity, and lasting at least a century. However, the research on Senji epigraphy shows the existence of a possible 14th century origin of most of the stone temples on the site, with an inscription dated from 1391 engraved on the Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, in association with the 'plain style' of the main sanctuaries elevation, and such an assertion would reconsider an already accepted conclusion. It has been demonstrated that if uncertainty remains about the exact date of the monuments,

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. (Davrinche, 2017).



a building activity of this scale before 1500 seems highly improbable. The Nāyaka rulers appropriate local Tamil traditions, and the glory and prestige of ancient Vijayanagara dynasties, by creating a visual statement of archaism and old sanctity in the architectural decoration of temple cores, in order to legitimise, and root more deeply, their power over the country.

Again, considering previous research about the construction of Senji's temple, the former conclusions are not wrong – and the aim of the present study is not to confound them. However, we hope that we have shown how essential it is to explore all the possibilities, especially when they lead to a new understanding of the ambitions of Senji's rulers. The combination of unverified historical information from a 19th century chronicle, the chronological evaluation based on stylistic analysis and the independent consideration of the content of inscriptions, lead to a new attempt to date Senji architecture and to an understanding of the contradictory elements involved in the process. It also reminds us of the obligation to consider the physical aspects of inscriptions, their relationship with the monument, and the artistic context, as an archæological object in itself.

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CH. XV  
VIJAYANAGARA ICONOGRAPHY: PRELIMINARY SURVEY  
OF A SELECTION OF VIṢṆU TEMPLES IN RĀYĀLASĪMA  
MARION LE SAUCE-CARNIS

ABSTRACT

This paper constitutes a preliminary study for a project dealing with the iconography and history of a selection of Vijayanagara temples in Rāyālasīma. Having studied depictions of Rāma in Vijayanagara temples during my Ph.D., I would now like to extend my methodology to the entire iconography of these temples. This will lead to a better understanding of the religious and architectural history of the region, which has not been deeply examined until now. The article introduces some interesting recurring iconographic themes encountered in these temples. I first give an account of several reliefs depicting the *Rāmāyaṇa* to show my methodology, and then examine different reliefs: some represent Kṛṣṇa, others show various *avatāras* or depict *vyūhas*. They provide an idea of the iconographic richness of the monuments and of the questions they raise.

XV.1 INTRODUCTION

THIS paper will explore some new avenues of research for an ongoing project that I am undertaking on the Vijayanagara temples located in the southwest of present day Andhra Pradesh, the region traditionally known as Rāyālasīma. The Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1672) was the last great Hindu empire, established in Southern India at a time when the Mughal Empire already ruled over Northern India. The Vijayanagara Empire dominated mediæval Southern India for more than two centuries.<sup>1</sup> Although its capital city was in Karnataka, a number of temples were also built in Rāyālasīma. This region became the seat of the Vijayanagara power after the defeat of Talikota in 1565 and the resulting fall of the city of Vijayanagara. The capital's new location —Penukoṇḍa in 1569

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<sup>1</sup> From 1336 to 1565. From 1565 to 1672, its power was considerably weak-

or 1570, Candragiri in 1592, and Vellore in 1604— doesn't entirely explain why so many temples were built in Rāyālasīma, especially as most of them were constructed before 1565. One wonders why this region was so highly favoured, since the only other place where we find a strong concentration of Vijayanagara temples is the city of Vijayanagara itself, even though the Empire was vast and covered the current states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. We may find some answers by examining how these temples functioned, what linked them to one another and to the temples in the capital. As an art historian, I propose exploring these issues through iconography and architectural patterns. For the purpose of this presentation, I have chosen a few iconographic themes in Rāyālasīma temples in order to demonstrate some of the possibilities that this project offers.

Different parts of the temples were used for the display of iconographic themes: the walls, bases, cornices, *gopuras* and pillars. In order to present a homogeneous body of research here, I have chosen to focus only on the pillars, which are the most common media, and on Vaiṣṇava themes. Vijayanagara pillars were particularly suitable for the carving of reliefs. They are made up of three cubic sections separated by two octagonal sections. The reliefs are found on the cubic sections, so one pillar can contain up to twelve reliefs.

The iconographic themes I have chosen are Kṛṣṇa, the other *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and the *vyūhas*. I selected these themes because they seem to be the most common ones. I will thus firstly focus on Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the subject of my Ph.D. thesis, entitled *Du héros épique à l'icône divine. L'image de Rāma dans les décors sculptés de l'empire de Vijayanagar*.<sup>2</sup> I will then briefly outline the methodology I used for my thesis, and explain the results that can be expected. I will use reliefs from a selection of four temples: the Kodaṇḍarāma temple in Voṇṭimiṭṭa,<sup>3</sup> the Cennakeśava temple in Somapālem,<sup>4</sup> the Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple in Tāḍpatri,<sup>5</sup> and the *maṇḍapa* outside the Ahobila temple in Upper Ahobilam.<sup>6</sup> Surprisingly, these

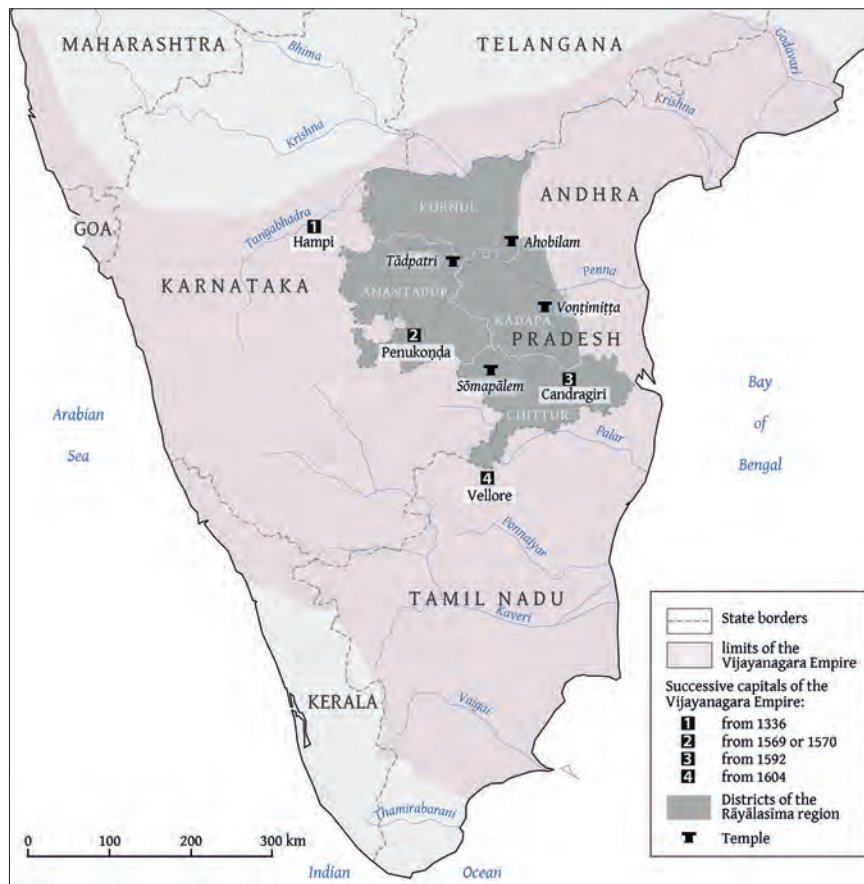
<sup>2</sup> (Le Sauce-Carnis, 2016b).

<sup>3</sup> (Michell, 2001), pp. 154–5; (Kamlakar, 2004), pp. 114–18.

<sup>4</sup> (Kameswara Rao, 1976), pp. 85–91; (Ramaswamy, 1981); (Michell, 2000), pp. 53–5; (Michell, 2001), pp. 148–50; (Dallapiccola *et al.*, 2014), pp. 72–7.

<sup>5</sup> (Ramaswami, 1976); (Kameswara Rao, 1976), pp. 69–76; (Michell, 2000), pp. 49, 52, 171, 180, 191; (Jayaprada, 1998); (Michell, 2001), pp. 140–1; (Dallapiccola *et al.*, 2014), pp. 63–5; (Le Sauce-Carnis, 2016a).

Figure 33: Map of Rāyālasīma and the sites studied



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temples, like most of the other temples in Rāyālasīma, have so far attracted little, if any, scholarly attention. The attached bibliography lists available works on the four temples studied here, although some are difficult to locate and could not all be consulted, indicated by a star (\*). Out of this literature, no work deals with the temple of Voṇṭimittā and only one is dedicated to that of Somapālem.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> (Sitapati, 1982); (Michell, 2001), 24–6.

p. 159; (Dallapiccola *et al.*, 2014), pp. <sup>7</sup> (Ramaswamy, 1981).



## XV.2 THE RĀMĀYAṆA

Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa* constitute one of the essential sources for the iconography of the period. I established three possible categories for these reliefs: narrative cycles, iconic depictions, and, as a kind of ‘in-between,’ what I have termed ‘narrative sequences.’ Narrative cycles are sets of reliefs that retrace a relatively long part of the tale. Narrative sequences are shorter than narrative cycles. They tend to depict only one of the stories in the epic, or perhaps a handful of them, and are often located on pillars. However, because of the pillars’ shape, these sequences are split up in such a way that one particular event can in fact be divided among several different reliefs. Thus, at first sight, a relief belonging to a narrative sequence can be interpreted as an iconic relief. It is thus important to consider the whole pillar to understand its iconography. In iconic depictions the heroes of the tale are not acting, but present characteristics (for example attributes and postures) that enable the visitor to recognise them immediately. Iconic depictions work individually, without any connection to the surrounding reliefs.

Identifying the iconography is the first difficulty encountered when observing these reliefs.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to narrative reliefs, the correct reading direction must be established. However, one can help to determine the other, and vice versa: understanding and correctly identifying the iconography can help to establish the right reading direction, and the right reading direction can, in turn, help to define the iconography.

Let us look at an example of a reading direction, which, upon first inspection, was a mystery. This sequence is located in the sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* outside the Ahobila temple in Upper Ahobilam. The scene is spread over three sides of the pillar, or, in fact, the whole pillar, as the fourth side contains a column in the round, which is standard for Vijayanagara pillars. There are nine

<sup>8</sup> To do this, I used several versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* dating from the Vijayanagara period or earlier, written in the language of one of the four regions covered by the empire (Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil) and translated into French or English. They are: *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* (Chhawchharia, 2010), *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (Tapasyananda, 2009), *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (Nagar, 2008), *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (Biardeau & Porcher, 1999), *Kamban Rāmāyaṇa* (Rollin & Cadelis, 2000; Sundaram & Jagannathan, 2002), *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* (Nagar, 2001).

*Figure 34:* Cennakeśava temple, Somapālem. Characteristic pillar of Vijayanagara.



reliefs depicting the birth of Daśaratha's four sons. These two sides must be read together, from bottom to top. On the lower panel, Daśaratha stands in front of Rṣyaśṛṅga, who is offering the sacrifice. The central panel shows the three queens with the magical food that Daśaratha is allocating to them. The upper panel depicts the three pregnant queens. After this, the west side must be read, where the three queens can be seen standing with their sons in their arms. Each panel shows a queen: the top one shows Sumitrā, easily recognisable because of her twins; Kausalyā and Kaikeyī are depicted on the central and lower panels, but we cannot tell which is which.

One of the lessons I have learned from my research on depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Vijayanagara temples is that thanks to a few details, it is possible to determine that the Telugu version of the epic was often favoured in iconographic programmes. One can observe this, for example, in the quite widespread representation of Hanumān's meeting with Kālanemi.<sup>9</sup> This story doesn't exist in all of the versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. While looking for the simples to save Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān meets a hermit and asks him for some water. The hermit is actually the demon Kālanemi and he points Hanumān to a pond where a female crocodile lives, which ends up swallowing Hanumān, but not digesting him. The crocodile opens its mouth and Hanumān comes out. Then, released by Hanumān, it turns back into a divine being. She tells Hanumān that Kālanemi is not actually a hermit but a demon, and that he knew all along

<sup>9</sup> We find this meeting in the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* (Nagar, 2001), pp. 366–71. This story also exists in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (Tapasyananda, 2009), pp. 298–300, and the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (Nagar, 2008), pp. 144–6, but other clues indicate that the Telugu text has been preferred, like the murder of Śūrpaṇakhā's son by Lakṣmaṇa. We consulted a number of versions of the epic and have selected the versions according to the following criteria: the text had to have been written either before or during the Vijayana-

gara period; it had to be written in one of the four languages used in the empire – Sanskrit, Kaṇṇaḍa, Telugu and Tamil; among them, we preferred those for which there is a translation into French or English – even if we did not fail to refer to the original text in the case of the Sanskrit versions. We have thus selected six versions: *Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa*, *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kamban's Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*.



Figure 35: Sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobilam. The birth of Daśaratha's sons.



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that Hanumān would be eaten if he went to the pond for a drink. Hanumān and Kālanemi then fight each other.

In the Cennakeśava temple in Somapālem, this episode is recounted in three reliefs, on the south and east sides of the lower panel, and on the east side of the central panel. The two reliefs at the bottom need to be read together: Hanumān meets Kālanemi. The monkey is already in a fighting stance: however this is more

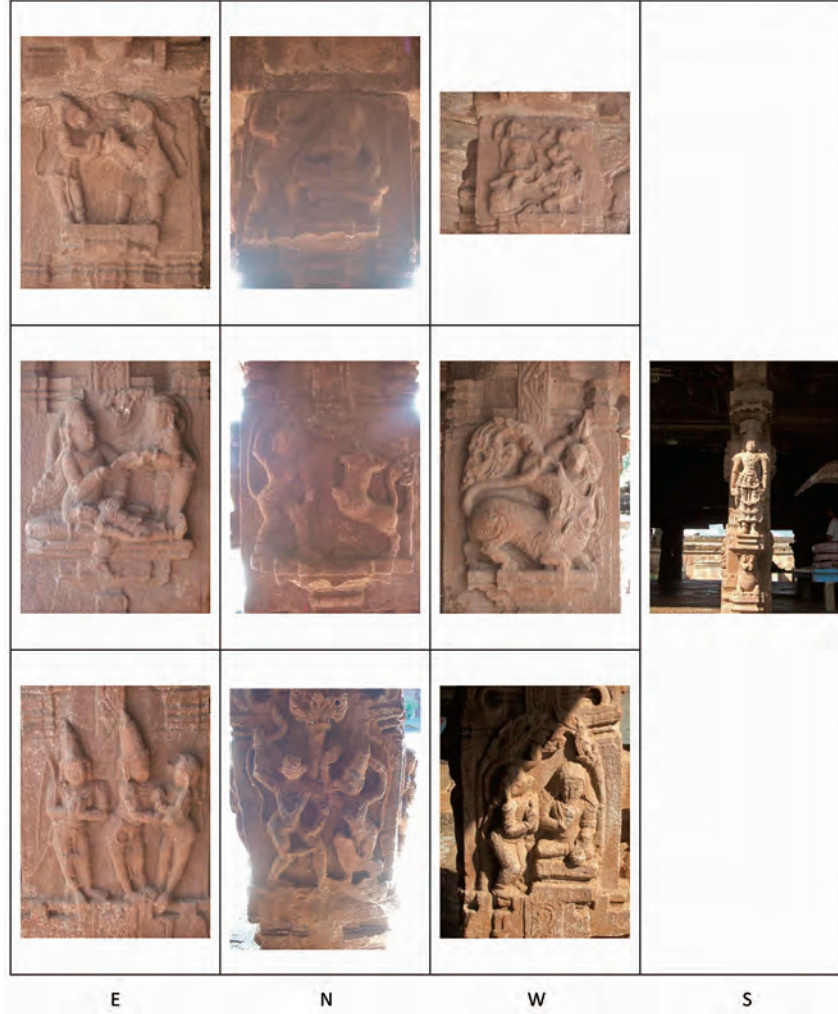
likely to be a way of identifying him, than a genuinely aggressive posture. The third relief shows the fight.

In the Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple in Tāḍpatri, the Kālanemi story takes up four reliefs, and is depicted with more detail than in the reliefs at Somapālem. The reading starts at the bottom of the north side, where Hanumān meets Kālanemi. The east side is then to be read from bottom to top: being advised by the false hermit, the monkey goes to the pond where the crocodile attacks him. He kills it and it then turns back into an *apsaras* and tells Hanumān that Kālanemi is not really a hermit. In the end, Hanumān comes back to kill Kālanemi.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the Kodaṇḍarāma temple in Voṇṭimiṭṭa dedicates more space to the telling of this story. The whole pillar recounts the story on the three of its sides which have reliefs, the fourth side containing a sculpture in the round. Starting with the lower section of the north side, we see the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva. In the text, this scene is located far away from Kālanemi's story. Perhaps this is to remind viewers of the alliance between Rāma and the monkeys. We then jump to the Kālanemi story on the lower section of the west side. Here, Hanumān meets Kālanemi. On the same side, in the middle, Hanumān is attacked by the crocodile. When the crocodile is defeated, it turns back into a divine being, which is seen in the upper section. The next relief is the upper panel of the north side, where we see the fight between Hanumān and Kālanemi. From that point on, two reading directions are possible: the next scene could be either on the central panel on the same side, or on the same panel on the east side. I have not been able to identify the latter, but the former could depict Kālanemi becoming a demon again. Then, turning to the relief on the central panel of the east side, we see the injured Lakṣmaṇa. He lies unconscious on his brother's knees, while Hanumān comes back with the life-saving simples. Finally, Rāma thanks Hanumān for having rescued Lakṣmaṇa, who is now standing by Rāma's side, restored to health.

<sup>10</sup> The other two sides of the pillar do not contain any relief. The last two reliefs, on the upper and central sections of the north side, are iconic and not linked with the Kālanemi story – they depict Hanumān fighting and Lakṣmaṇa honouring Rāma.

Figure 36: Cennakeśava temple, Somapālem.  
Hanumān's meeting with Kālanemi.



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The fact that the preference was given to the Telugu version is not all that surprising, since Telugu was the language of the elite. Though not surprising, however, it is a new example of the supremacy of Telugu, which was not limited to Andhra Pradesh, but had, by this point, spread over the whole empire. For example, the murder of Śūrpaṇakhā's son by Lakṣmaṇa is depicted in the Rāma temple in Hampi, and the meeting with Kālanemi can be seen in the Tiruveṅgaḷanātha (or Acyuta) temple in Hampi, Karnataka, and in the Śrī Raṅganāthasvami temple in Trichy, Tamil Nadu. These are some of the most obvious clues, but others, less obvious, as I



have demonstrated in my thesis, show that *Raṅganātha's Rāmāyaṇa* is the version that often most closely corresponds to the reliefs, and is least often divergent from them.

The entire epic is depicted in narrative cycles or narrative sequences. In parallel to these narrative reliefs, we also frequently see iconic reliefs connected to the *Rāmāyaṇa* throughout Vijayanagara architecture. The iconic image of fighting Hanumān, taken from the epics and portraying his numerous fights, including the one against Kālanemi that we have just discussed, became a very common motif. Out of all iconographic depictions of Rāma, the one of him holding the bow and arrow is the most common. I believe 'iconisation' is a phenomenon that attests to the fact that Rāma has become a god himself, and is no longer an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Moreover, Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are very common motifs.<sup>11</sup> The importance given to them demonstrates the essential role of Rāma in the Hindu pantheon during the Vijayanagara period. However, in order to evaluate the importance of his role, I intend to compare it with other iconographic forms which I will now discuss.

### XV.3 KṚṢṆA

Kṛṣṇa, like Rāma, is an epic character who, in what is termed the 'mediæval period,' moves from the status of an *avatāra* to that of a major deity, worshipped by his own community of believers.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, one might expect that the depictions of him would follow the same process of 'iconisation' as those of Rāma. My next study will attempt to throw light on this question, but my initial observations, as I will go on to demonstrate, did not confirm this hypothesis from the outset.

My first observation was that the stories connected to Kṛṣṇa that were chosen for depiction are from the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Bhagavata Purāṇa*,<sup>13</sup> and not from the *Mahābhārata*. Exploits from Kṛṣṇa's childhood are the episodes most commonly depicted. Episodes from his adolescence, like the story of Govardhana and other events, are also represented. In the four temples chosen for study,

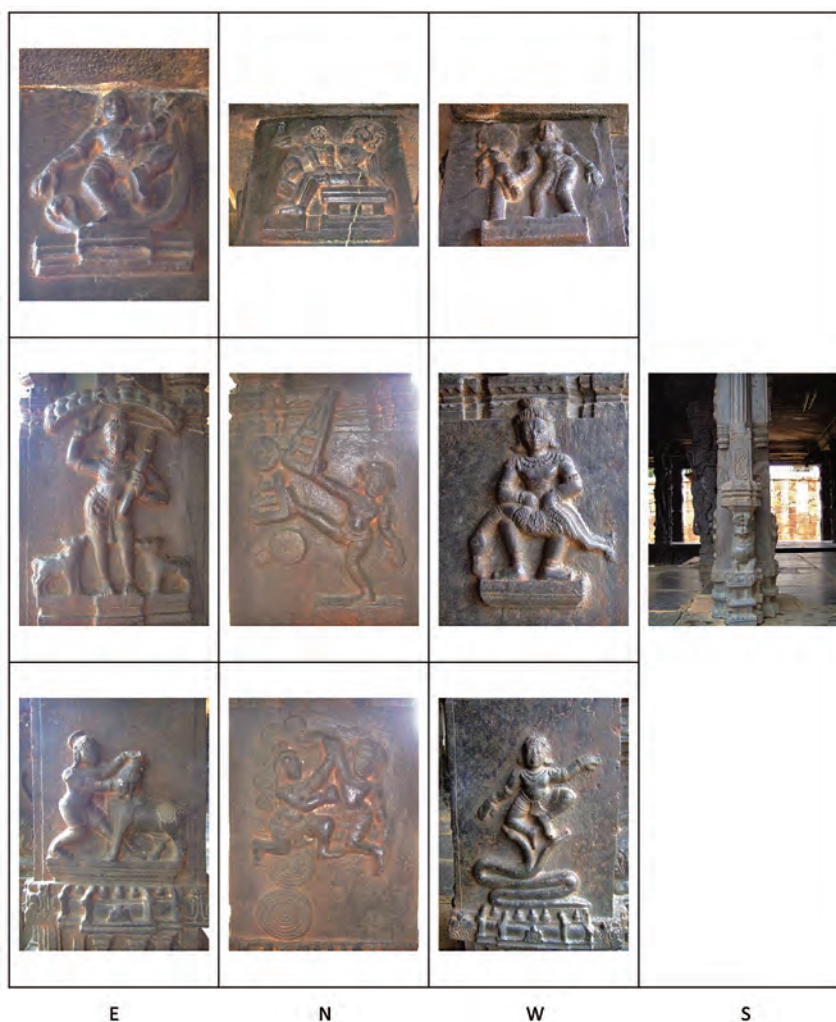
<sup>11</sup> (Dallapiccola *et al.*, 1992).

came an *avatāra* afterwards, (Schmid, 1997, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon is actually more complicated in Kṛṣṇa's case. C. SCHMID considers that, initially a god, he be-

<sup>13</sup> (Dallapiccola & Verghese, 1998), p. 52.

Figure 37: Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, Tāḍpatri. Kṛṣṇa's childhood.



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his fights against demons like Pūtana, Dhenuka, Bakāsura, etc., are highlighted, as well as some of the pranks he played.

In Voṇṭimiṭṭa, a set of four fights can be found on the west side and on the central panel of the north side of a pillar: on the west side, the fight against the demon who turns into a chariot,<sup>14</sup> Pūtana's death,<sup>15</sup> and the fight against Bakāsura are depicted<sup>16</sup>; on the north

<sup>14</sup> *Harivaṃśa* (HV), chap. 50, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), p. 200; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP), Book X, chap. 8, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> HV 50, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 201–2; BhP X.6, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, p. 30.

side, one can observe a fight against an anthropomorphic enemy, who may be Cāṇūra, the wrestler Kṛṣṇa fights in Mathurā.<sup>17</sup>

In Ahobilam, two pillars have this kind of sequence, each on two whole sides. The first one shows, on the north side, the fight against the demon who turns into a chariot, a fight against an unidentified demon and Pūtanā's death; on its west side, it shows the fight against Dhenuka<sup>18</sup> and the fight against Ariṣṭa.<sup>19</sup> The last relief, at the top of the west side, rather than depicting a fight, shows Kṛṣṇa dipping his hand into a jar of butter. The second pillar shows Kṛṣṇa dancing on Kāliya,<sup>20</sup> the story of the *arjuna* trees<sup>21</sup> and Kṛṣṇa Govardhana.<sup>22</sup> These scenes are displayed from top to bottom on the south side of the pillar. On the east side, human figures can be seen observing these scenes.

In Tāḍpatri, there are many depictions of these same motifs. One of the sequences occupies three sides of a pillar. To follow the story in (roughly) chronological order, we must begin with the upper panel of the north side where we see Pūtanā's death, the chariot's breakdown and the fight against Tṛṇāvarta.<sup>23</sup> On the west side, from top to bottom: Dhenuka, Bakāsura and Kāliya. Finally, on the east side, once again from top to bottom: Kāliya, Govardhana and the fight against Ariṣṭa. Another pillar shows Kṛṣṇa's childhood pranks. On the upper panel of the east side, Yaśodā checks to see if Kṛṣṇa has eaten some dirt.<sup>24</sup> On the central panel, Kṛṣṇa annoys the Cowherd Maidens,<sup>25</sup> and, on the lower one, he seems to be begging his mother for something. Then, on the south side, from bottom to

<sup>16</sup> BhP X.11, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, p. 56. pulled off Ariṣṭa's horn and is about to hit the bull with it.

<sup>17</sup> HV 75, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 309–12. Cāṇūra does not exist in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. <sup>20</sup> HV 56, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), p. 225; BhP X.16, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> HV 57, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 227–8; BhP X.15, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, pp. 82–4. In this episode, it is Balarāma that kills Dhenuka, not Kṛṣṇa. <sup>21</sup> HV 51, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 204–5; BhP X.9-10, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, pp. 45–52.

<sup>19</sup> HV 64, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 263–4; BhP X.36, (Burnouf, 1884, vol. 4, p. 171). We can see that Kṛṣṇa has <sup>22</sup> HV 61, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 244–9; BhP X.25, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, pp. 127–8.

<sup>23</sup> BhP X.7, *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 36–7.

<sup>24</sup> BhP X.8, *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 42–3.

<sup>25</sup> BhP X.8, *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 42.

top, he is seen stealing some butter from Yaśodā.<sup>26</sup> From there on, we see more of his exploits. He fights Kāliya and appears as Kṛṣṇa Govardhana. On the west side, from top to bottom, he fights against Bakāsura. I have not been able to decipher the central relief on the west side. Lastly, he straightens the back of a hunchback perfumer called Trivakrā.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 38: Kodandarāma temple, Voṇṭmiṭṭa. *Arjuna trees* episode.



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I noticed that the sequences depicting Kṛṣṇa have less narrative fluidity than those devoted to Rāma. As we have just observed, several reliefs combine to depict Rāma's actions or scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In Kṛṣṇa's case, however, although the reliefs show various fights, the juxtaposition of these reliefs, rather than constituting a chronological sequence, corresponds instead to a set focusing on Kṛṣṇa's fights, and these fights are actually independent of each other. Each relief tells its own story, and therefore, the reliefs could be classified as iconic reliefs. Some reliefs are difficult to classify as narrative or iconic. Such is the case for two very common iconographies that can be taken out of sequence and can stand alone: Kṛṣṇa dancing on the snake Kāliya and Kṛṣṇa on all

<sup>26</sup> HV 51 in certain versions, (Couture & Esnoul, 1991), pp. 356–60.

<sup>27</sup> BhP X.42, (Burnouf, 1884), vol. 4, pp. 202–3.

fours, with a pot in front of him and the *arjuna* trees in the background. These two sequences depict easily identifiable scenes. This was a decisive criterion for determining which reliefs representing Rāma were narrative. But in Kṛṣṇa's case, certain depictions have become so archetypal that it is difficult not to think of them as icons. The first one symbolically contains all of Kṛṣṇa's childhood exploits, the second one all of his pranks. The boundaries between narrative sequences and iconic reliefs are thus more blurred. Unlike Rāma, Kṛṣṇa does not possess a specific attribute that allows for easy recognition when he is not in action. He is defined by his exploits and not by his attributes.

#### XV.4 THE OTHER AVATĀRAS OF VIṢṆU

The other *avatāras* of Viṣṇu are present in all four monuments studied here. We sometimes come across a series of *avatāras*, although not always a complete one. In Somapālem, a pillar with only two panels of reliefs is entirely devoted to them, apart from one relief, which shows the primordial form of Viṣṇu with his consorts, in other words, the origin of the *avatāras*. In this case, Matsya, Varāha, Narasiṃha, Kūrma, Balarāma, Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa are all depicted, although obviously not in a logical order.

In Voṇṭimiṭṭa, on a pillar bearing two primordial forms of Viṣṇu, a woman carrying a flywhisk, an ascetic, and Garuḍa, are Matsya, Kūrma, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa. Thanks to the other pictures on this pillar, we know that Kṛṣṇa is depicted here not as a god but as an *avatāra*.

The *maṇḍapa* in Ahobilam has not only one, but two series of *avatāras*. The first one shows Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana and Rāma. In this case, the right order is observed if the depictions are read from bottom to top and in boustrophedon style. The second one shows Narasiṃha, Kṛṣṇa, Kalkin, Balarāma and Rāma. It doesn't follow a logical order. Once again, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, represented elsewhere in the same building as gods, are included in series of *avatāras*.

Along with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the most depicted *avatāra* is Narasiṃha, probably to remind devotees of his role as protector of the empire.<sup>28</sup> As in the case of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, both narrative and iconic representations can be observed. In Ahobilam,

<sup>28</sup> (Verghese, 1995), p. 34.



Figure 39: Sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobila. Viṣṇu's *avatāras*.



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where the main deity is Narasiṃha,<sup>29</sup> Hiranyakaśipu's death takes up three reliefs on the north side of a pillar. The sequence must be read from bottom to top: Narasiṃha comes out of the pillar, catches Hiranyakaśipu and eviscerates him. In Tāḍpatri, the same scenes are depicted in just two reliefs, read from top to bottom. An iconic relief of Lakṣmīnaraṣiṃha has replaced the first scene. In Somapālem and Voṇṭimiṭṭa, the narrative sequences are limited to the relief of the evisceration. This moment is represented

<sup>29</sup> (Sarojini, 2011), p. 52.



Figure 40: Sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* outside the Ahobila temple, Upper Ahobilam. The *avatāra* Narasiṃha.



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in a similar way in all four cases. There are several iconic motifs: Lakṣmīnarasiṃha, already seen in Tāḍpatri but existing also in Ahobilam and Voṇṭimiṭṭa, Narasiṃha standing with a devotee who is paying homage to him, and lastly, the ascetic Narasiṃha are the most common. Narasiṃha usually has the same attributes as Viṣṇu.

There are also narrative reliefs depicting Matsya killing Hiraṇyākṣa in Somapālem, Voṇṭimiṭṭa and Tāḍpatri. This iconography seems to be an innovation of this period. As in the case of the reliefs of Narasiṃha eviscerating Hiraṇyakaśipu, these three are very similar, and this raises the question of possible iconographic

Figure 41: Kodandarāma temple (Voṇṭimiṭṭa), Cennakeśava temple (Somapālem) and Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple (Tāḍpatri). The *avatāra* Matsya killing Hiraṇyākṣa.



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models, a subject which will require further investigation in the future.

#### XV.5 THE VYŪHAS

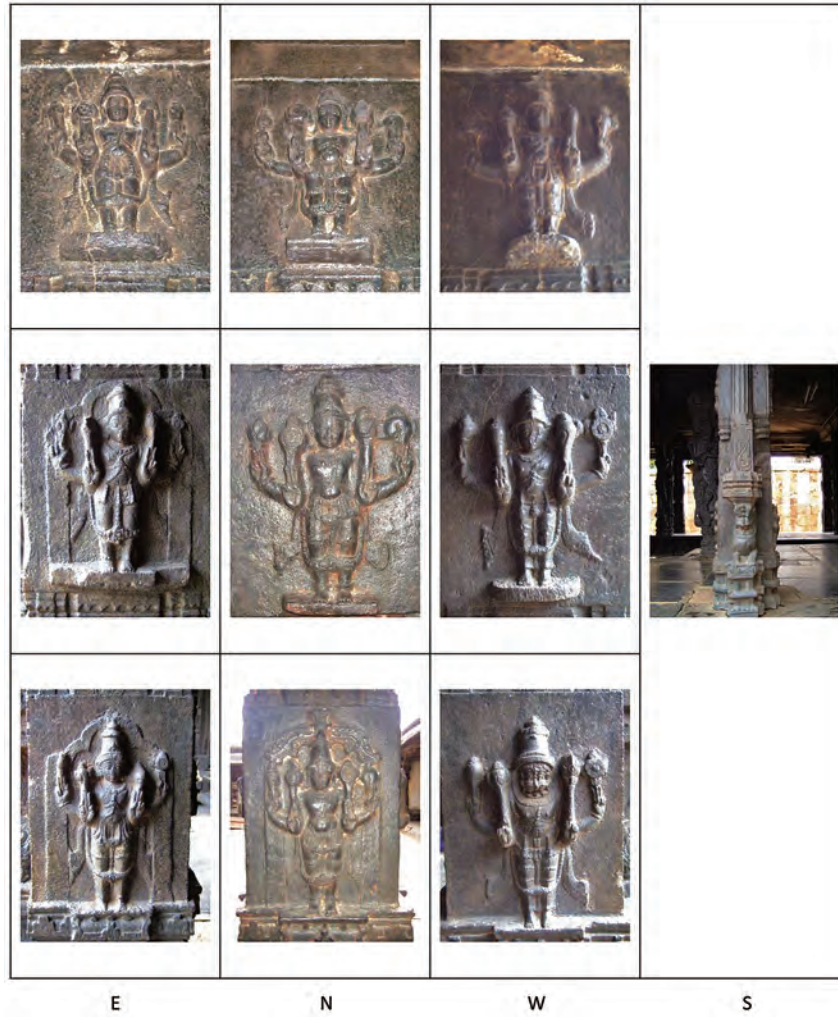
The *vyūhas*, the twenty-four manifestations of Viṣṇu, are a regular iconographic theme in Vijayanagara temples. They belong to sophisticated Vaiṣṇava doctrines and take the form of four-armed anthropomorphic figures, adorned with a forest garland and a tiara. The *vyūhas* are depicted with the lotus flower, conch shell, discus and mace. Observing in which of the four hands the attributes are placed allows us to understand which of the twenty-four *vyūhas* is represented. These can be found in Tāḍpatri and Somapālem, and probably also in Voṇṭimiṭṭa.

In Tāḍpatri, seventeen of the twenty-four *vyūhas* can be found, split across three pillars. They are logically arranged, since the west side of a pillar, for example, shows Trivikrama, Vāmana and Śrīdhara, according to the lists in the *Rūpamaṇḍana* used by RAO<sup>30</sup> and the *Agnipurāṇa* used by M. T. DE MALLMANN.<sup>31</sup> We recognise Trivikrama thanks to the lotus flower in his front right hand, the mace in his back right hand, the discus in his back left hand and

<sup>30</sup> RAO explains that the *Padmapurāṇa* gives an incorrect list in which the same attributes are sometimes used for two

different *vyūhas*. See (Gopinatha Rao, 1914), p. 230.

<sup>31</sup> (de Mallmann, 1963).

Figure 42: Chintala Veṅkaṭaramaṇa temple, Tāḍpatri. Nine *vyūhas*.

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the conch shell in his front left hand. Vāmana has, in the same order, the conch shell, discus, mace and lotus flower, and Śrīdhara has the lotus flower, discus, mace and conch shell. All three are manifestations of Pradyumna. The same logical layout, following the *vyūhas*' order of emanation, can be found on the other pillars showing *vyūhas* in Tāḍpatri.

In Somapālem, there are twenty *vyūhas*. In my pictures, it is not always possible to identify them because their attributes are not clearly visible, however, there is no doubt whatsoever that they are *vyūhas*. It will be interesting, in future research, to discern which are depicted, and then to compare them with the *vyūhas* in Tāḍpatri

to determine if the same ones are missing, and if so, to try to understand why. Moreover, I am sure I will find *vyūhas* in other temples. I have only identified three that are repeated several times in Voṇṭimiṭṭa. One of these three is either Janārdana (according to the *Agnipurāṇa* and the *Rūpamaṇḍana*) or Vāsudeva (according to the *Padmapurāṇa*). Janārdana's distinctive attributes are the lotus flower, discus, conch shell and mace, which also happen to be Vāsudeva's attributes as the Supreme God, as described in chapter 44 of the *Agnipurāṇa*,<sup>32</sup> separate from the list of the *vyūhas*. The other two *vyūhas* are Keśava and Adhokṣaja. With regards to the manifestation order, they are not depicted in any logical arrangement.

Narasimha as a *vyūha* is depicted in Somapālem and Tāḍpatri. In Somapālem, he has the discus, lotus flower, mace and conch shell, as stipulated in the texts. In Tāḍpatri, these attributes have been placed in the wrong hands but the lion face shows irrefutably that this is Narasimha. Although the *vyūhas* are supposed to be anthropomorphic, the *vyūha* Narasimha looks like the *avatāra*, with a human body and a leonine head. DE MALLMANN explains that given the homonymy between some *vyūhas* and some *avatāras*, a syncretism can sometimes be observed.<sup>33</sup>

#### XV.6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have chosen a few iconographic themes that I have undertaken to explore further since then. I also take many other themes into consideration, including Śaiva ones, some more temples, and also other media, such as walls, *gopuras* and so on. The first step is to look at each monument separately in order to study its iconography in depth, to identify the scenes depicted and understand their layout and the directions in which they ought to be read. I use the same method as the one I used to study Rāma's reliefs. This stage alone is a long project. I will then compare my findings from different sites. This will allow me to determine what the recurrent themes are and if they are implemented in the same way. If not, differences and developments will be observed and noted. In addition to iconography, I also take the historical aspects of each

<sup>32</sup> (de Mallmann, 1963), p. 16. In footnote 5, the author clarifies: « Nous ne parlons pas ici du Vāsudeva des Vingt-

quatre [...] »  
<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

temple into account. Focusing on these sites, which until now have received only very little scholarly attention, if any, will enable me to outline in more detail the religious history of the region during the Vijayanagara period.

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CH. XVI  
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BRAHMĀ AND ŚIVA IN  
PALLAVA AND CŌĻA ICONOGRAPHY: THE  
ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM OF THE KAILĀSANĀTHA OF  
KĀÑCĪPURAM AND THE CASE OF THE ‘BRAHMĀ-ŚIVA’  
VIRGINIE OLIVIER

ABSTRACT

The privileged status granted to Brahmā on several Śaiva temples of the end of the Pallava period, then of the Cōḷa period, in which Brahmā often occupies the central niche of the north façade, is premised in the complex relationship of complementarity and rivalry that he establishes with Śiva since the first developments of the royal Pallava ideology, and more specifically, as it is staged in the iconography of the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñcīpuram. On the one hand, the multiple interactions between the two divinities are notably structured around the ambiguous confrontation of orthodox Brahmanism with a new form of expression of Śaiva knowledge, and, on the other, around the figure of the king, which Śiva can represent, and of the brahmin, the *purohita*, embodied by Brahmā. This particular alliance seems to reach a culmination with the appearance, towards the end of the 9th century, of a series of Śaiva images, exceptional in their scarcity, and in their iconography, ostensibly inspired by that of Brahmā.

IN the iconography of the Kailāsanātha temple, founded by King Narasiṃhavarman II in Kāñcīpuram at the turn of the 8th century, Brahmā is first of all part of a Trimūrti: Brahmā (Fig. 43, p. 183) and Viṣṇu respond to each other in the two largest niches of the enclosure wall, facing north and south respectively, and in the *liṅga* axis. They also frame the Somāskandamūrti of the *vimāna*, and all those arranged along the enclosure wall to the west, a theme on which their iconography is based, suggesting that they must be linked to this image of worship, which is also the image of a royal-looking couple and their heir. The pattern has been repeated at the east entrance, probably built shortly after the small shrine sponsored by Mahendravarman III, Narasiṃhavarman II's son, who presumably died before his father. At this location, the Trimūrti provides

the spatial and temporal framework of the temple, within which all forms and acts of the divine can unfold, as in the puranic narratives. It certainly contributes to the idea of a mythical lineage of the Pallava, and to the inscription of their earthly action in a socio-cosmic order, as it is formulated in their epigraphic records. The multiple Somāskandamūrti could symbolise all the rulers who have already reigned, or who will reign, during the many ages (*yuga*) to which the foundation inscription of the temple, arranged around the outer wall of the main shrine, alludes.<sup>1</sup> That Brahmā is the source of the royal lineage is mentioned for the first time in the Pallava epigraphy around the middle of the 6th century, and is reported again in the Kailāsanātha's inscription: although fragmentary, we can deduce from 'Aṅgiras, born from his mind' (verse 2), that it started with Brahmā.

The divinity is also at the origin of the creation of the three worlds in which men, kings, and devotees, evolve together with the gods. The god traditionally acts in this context in concert with the Vaiṣṇava divinity, resting on cosmic waters, the head protected by the hoods of the serpent Śeṣa. Although thereafter, the three deities of the Trimūrti are frequently mentioned together in the introductory stanzas of epigraphic charters, Viṣṇu is conspicuously not mentioned here. The first verse of the inscription, however, alludes to the hoods of Sthānu's snakes, and it is Gaṅgā who springs from him to fill the 'lake of the three worlds,' just before Brahmā begins his task in the next verse. The epithet of Śiva —*sthānu* 'pillar'— is significant, since the meeting of the triad in iconography is also a pretext to formalise the superiority of Śiva, and to reallocate the cosmogonic myth to him: Brahmā and Viṣṇu Varāha once again frame the *liṅga* in the Liṅgodbhavamūrti, of which this would be the first representation at the western end of the south wall of the *vimāna*. Until now, there wasn't any image of the Śaiva divinity capable of competing with that of Anantaśayin, which gradually became one of the most popular aspects of Viṣṇu in the excavated architecture of this southern region.

Brahmā is also placed in front of the Dakṣiṇāmūrti of the south wall of the *vimāna*: here too, it is probably the first representation of this aspect of Śiva. The creator god, the promulgator of the Veda, thus faces a depiction of Śiva as a master, perhaps the author of

<sup>1</sup> (Brocquet, 1997), pp. 548–52; (Mahalingam, 1890), No. 24. (Mahalingam, 1988), No. 54; (Hultzschn,

Figure 43: Brahmā, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram





the royal initiation evoked in the foundation inscription (verse 5). Possibly, they are both images of a ritual officiant: Brahmā with the libation vase; Dakṣiṇāmūrti with the torch or fire. This new form of Śiva appropriates the iconography of the Buddhist master as well, and we can imagine that it also positions itself in front of the traditional knowledge of the orthodox brahmin that Brahmā could embody: indeed, in the *Tēvāram*, the Master of the Veda is indiscriminately Brahmā or Śiva, and the god teaching under the banyan tree is continually called the 'Master of the Veda,' while his four disciples are frequently identified with the four books. Dakṣiṇāmūrti, moreover, appears shortly after with the book in the lower right hand at the Mukteśvara temple in Kāñcīpuram, a rare attribute for the period. Dakṣiṇāmūrti could really be the 'Form of the South' here, representing the southern tradition, and, in that case, I believe that Brahmā, facing north, may represent the knowledge of the Sanskrit tradition, originating in the north. In the *Tēvāram*, too, the importance of Tamil heritage and language never excludes the use of Sanskrit, accepted as a sacred language, and the reference to the Veda, as stressed by I. V. PETERSON.<sup>2</sup> The notion of filiation, of a lineage having Brahmā at its origin—he embodies the original Vedic knowledge—and leading to the teaching of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, expressed on the later temples associating the two deities, is undoubtedly also already contained in germ in this first face-to-face. Symmetrically, and on the same principle, in the centre of the north façade, Viṣṇu is both dominated and absorbed by Jalandharasamhāra, holding his attribute the *cakra*<sup>3</sup>: the supreme divinity thus assumes the tasks usually assigned to competing divinities.

The rivalry opposing him to the Brahmanic divinity is all the more significant since the only known representation of Śiva cutting off Brahmā's fifth head is found in the twelfth niche of the southern enclosure (Fig. 44, p. 185). In the upper part of the composition, an eight-armed Śiva springs up holding an axe, while at the same time lifting the fifth severed head; in the lower part, Brahmā sits quietly cross-legged, smiling, a hand in *kaṭaka-mudrā*, as if indifferent to the terrifying fate which awaits him. His attitude, apparently unsuited to the situation, is explained by the presence of

<sup>2</sup> (Peterson, 1989), p. 69.

resented not far away on the enclosure:

<sup>3</sup> The gift of the *cakra* to Viṣṇu, sometimes integrated to the myth of Jalandharasamhāra in the *Purāṇas*, is also rep-

resented not far away on the enclosure: it faces the Kirātārjunīyamūrti of the south wall.

*Figure 44:* Śiva cutting off Brahmā's fifth head, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram





another figure with arms crossed, sitting next to him, probably his pupil or acolyte; it is a teaching, or a ritual scene, that is interrupted by a furious Śiva. The two figures also echo the cross-legged listeners of Dakṣiṇāmūrti; like the sages surrounding Śiva, Brahmā does not look at the divinity but at his assistant, as if it were a separate stage, above which stands the supreme divinity, belonging to another sphere.

Given the unusual choice of this episode, coinciding precisely with the appearance of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, one can wonder if the skull that will then be placed in Dakṣiṇāmūrti's headdress, at the very end of the Pallava period, and that links him to Bhikṣāṭana, a figure repeated three times at the Kailāsanātha, does not mean that he has already cut off Brahmā's head. Moreover, the owl perched in the tree above him could allude to the cremation field frequented by this form of the god, as suggested by C. SCHMID.<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, the brahmanicide is at least recalled by the ascetic beggar, whose bowl, effectively stuck to his hand, represents the skull of the victim. In the beheading scene, it is really the metamorphosis of the warrior that is represented, still wearing his hair held in a *jaṭā-makuṭa*, but already with the globular eyes and bowed eyebrows of a wrathful form. It is only then, to free himself from his crime, that he releases his hair, and agrees to abide by the consequences of murder; the composition is remarkably expressive in this respect.

The theme deepens the relationship between Dakṣiṇāmūrti and Brahmā. It asserts the superiority of Śiva, and perhaps through him of the king, and his disdain for orthodox values, though he doesn't however deny them, since he then submits himself to the prescriptions imposed by the traditional brahmanical society for the atonement of his sin. On the other hand, this act could be justified by the need to put an end to Brahmā's erroneous teaching. The fifth head of Brahmā should normally transcend the ritual plan, yet in most myths mentioning it, it is the head that causes his loss, because of its behaviour, and its immoral or obscene words, prefiguring in a way the advent of Bhairava or Bhikṣāṭana. The five heads are also the prerogative of Sadāśiva, the deity of the Śaiva Siddhānta, evoked

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<sup>4</sup> Workshop of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, November 2014.

*Figure 45:* Brahmā grants Rāvaṇa his invincibility, east wall of Brahmā's niche, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram



in the foundation inscription of the temple. The copper plates issued at the end of the 7th century at Kūram by Parameśvaravarman I<sup>5</sup> already mention a five-headed Śiva, identified with the Creator and whose spirit consists in the three Veda. In this inscription, Śiva is also the ‘Jewel that the three worlds —usually ruled by Brahmā— wear on their headdress.’ The decapitation of Brahmā is sometimes also related to the myth of the Liṅgodbhavamūrti. In the *Kūrma Purāṇa* (II.31) and *Śiva Purāṇa* (*Vidyēśvarasaṃhitā*, VIII.I.8), the myth of the fiery *liṅga* precedes the beheading and the wandering of Bhairava. In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, whose oldest parts are considered contemporary with our images, the Liṅgodbhavamūrti also refers to the decapitation of Brahmā, and in I.1.6, the myth is combined with that of Bhikṣāṭana: Viṣṇu and Brahmā argue about the origin of the *liṅga* fallen to the ground, following the curse of the sages of the Dāruvana forest, whose wives Śiva seduced. Bhikṣāṭana frequently appears after the murder of Brahmā, but this episode is not always clearly at the origin of the wandering, as one might expect. Despite the difficulty in determining their possible chronology according to literary sources, the proximity and concentration of these images —Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Bhikṣāṭana, Liṅgodbhavamūrti, and the decapitation of Brahmā— in the niches of the enclosure wall facing north, and on the south façade of the *vimāna*, seems to be sufficient evidence of their interaction, and to attest to the existence, perhaps in an original reconstruction, of a common mythological cycle.

The gift of his head, to which Brahmā is compelled, evokes the Vedic sacrifice, which required an animal victim. The beheading also responds to the relief on the opposite part of the enclosure wall, in which Viṣṇu offers, voluntarily, his eye to Śiva. The gift of one’s flesh is also a practice attributed to the Kāpālīka, worshippers of Bhairava. Brahmā, however, does not seek to win the favour of the Śaiva divinity, or perhaps of the king; he is never a devotee at the foot of Śiva, and he is reluctant to recognise his supremacy; there is indeed a hierarchical conflict between the two divinities. Maybe a questioning of orthodoxy is suggested here, to the benefit of the *siddhānta* initiation, which grants victory over desires —attached to the fifth head, or, more generally, to the personality of Brahmā— and over enemies, as Rājasimha’s inscription claims.

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<sup>5</sup> (Brocquet, 1997), p. 522; (Maha-  
lingam, 1988), No. 46.



*Figure 46:* Brahmā and a devotee, west wall of Brahmā's niche, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram



In this context, Brahmā's similarity with the demon Rāvaṇa, who finally becomes a Śiva devotee in the iconography of the Kailāsanātha, deserves to be underlined. As Śiva, Brahmā intervenes to grant gifts: in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (III.30.17; VII.10.10–26), and in the *Tēvāram* (1.21.8abc) which is inspired by it, Brahmā grants the king of Laṅkā his invincibility, after he has successively offered him nine of his ten heads in oblation in the fire. This scene was identified by V. GILLET<sup>6</sup> on the east outer wall of Brahmā's niche (Fig. 45, p. 187): the three-headed and four-armed *rākṣasa* is kneeling at the feet of the deity, and the two characters are very little different from each other. The demon pays homage to Brahmā, who raises a hand, a sign of favour; the parallel is obvious with the composition of Śiva's gift scenes (*anugrahamūrti*). A similar scene, unfortunately very plastered, is depicted on the other side of the niche (Fig. 46, p. 189). Brahmā seems to commit an error of appreciation by rewarding the demon, but he is only scrupulously respecting the Dharma. This episode underlines, again, that the Orthodox way presents weaknesses. Rāvaṇa is finally defeated by Śiva and becomes his fervent follower; Brahmā is again vanquished through Rāvaṇa, who shows him the example of true devotion. Like the demon defying Śiva, he does not recognise at once his superiority, and displays excessive pride. However, Brahmā, although apparently favouring demons, always offers the opportunity for gods and men to restore the divine order. In the Epics, he participates in the victory of the warriors (*kṣatriyas*), and this is also another aspect of his relationship with Śiva at the Kailāsanātha temple.

Brahmā's decapitation is immediately succeeded by the Kirātārjunīyamūrti, announcing the gift of the Pāśupata weapon to Arjuna, portrayed in another niche of the northern enclosure, as if we had just been told the origin of its terrible power. Identified with the Brahmaśīras —or Brahmāstra— that he receives from his *guru* Droṇa in the *Mahābhārata* (III.40), it is the most powerful of the divine weapons: this 'Brahmā's head' literally resembles Death itself; misused, it could destroy the world. The myth is repeated in the *Tēvāram* and the magical powers coveted by the Kāpālīka are also symbolised by the weapon Pāśupata. Charged with all the brahmanic energy, it is offered to the Pāṇḍava prince; the power is transferred from *brahman* to *kṣatra*, to a prince who masters its handling

<sup>6</sup> (Gillet, 2007), pp. 30, 35.

through yoga, as Śiva Jalandharasamhāra masters the *cakra* in the next niche.

The scene also confirms the sacrificial nature of Brahmā's murder. The hunter Śiva refers to the brahmin-slayer in the Vedic version, as told, for example, in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (III.33). Prajāpati, the Creator, in the form of an antelope is the sacrifice pursued by Rudra, who embodies its destructive aspect. The weapon is also transmitted to Aśvatthāman, the son of Droṇa: these two characters recur in the *Pallava praśasti* (cf. verse 3 of the Kailāsanātha's inscription). Personifying Rudra's anger, Aśvatthāman annihilates the descendants of the Pāṇḍava and will have to wander for three thousand years to atone for his action. In the *Mahābhārata*, it is also at this time that Droṇa dies beheaded.

Facing the north in the enclosure, where warlike forms are concentrated, that could be reminiscent of the king's victory over his enemies, Brahmā certainly also represents the function of *purohita*, the officiant who traditionally carries out the rituals legitimising royal violence. Thanks to the ritual, the *purohita* is also able to confront the forces harmful to the prosperity of the kingdom, and to subdue its opponents. Even if the status of the *purohita* is not very explicit in the *Pallava* epigraphy, the appearance of Brahmā on a war chariot alongside Tripurāntaka (Frontispiece, p. iv), on the north wall of the *vimāna*, confirms, in my opinion, this role. Already in the *R̥g Veda* (II.23.18; II.24.2), Bṛhaspati, the *purohita* of Indra, drives a chariot in the episode of the combat against Vṛtra; both figures are cited in Rājasimha's inscription (verse 2). Here, Brahmā significantly shares the space of the composition with the victorious archer. More than a simple coachman, he converses with Śiva. Two of his four hands perform a curious gesture, close to the 'setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma,' proper to the Buddha. The composition is reproduced in one of the first niches of the enclosure, introducing the king and his *purohita* into the temple; the gestures of the two deities respond to each other. It can also be noted that Brahmā, unlike Dakṣiṇāmūrti or Bhikṣāṭana, for example, readily acquires the traits of a high-ranking figure belonging to the royal entourage: he is always lavishly adorned, and the rosary and water vase, which can point to the ascetic, would therefore be here, above all, the instruments of ritual.



*Figure 47:* Birth of Skanda, southern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram



The location of the image, above the outlet of the lustral water drainage channel, deliberately diverted to that specific spot, and the relatively peaceful character of the scene, indicate, in my opinion, that it is first and foremost a representation of the king-*purohita* couple, and a concrete allusion to the execution of the ritual that binds them. The *kṣatriya-brāhmaṇa* alliance thus guarantees the restored balance in the Three Worlds (or Three Cities) thanks to the victory of Tripurāntaka, to whom the king compares himself in his inscription (verse 12). Their relationship speaks for itself in this respect; complementarity, but superiority of the king over the Brahmin, of Śiva over Brahmā. Jalandharasaṃhāra, the warrior yogin, who follows him at the centre of the northern wall, appears again as the synthesis of this union: he holds the attributes of both Brahmā and Viṣṇu, who assist him on both sides, the rosary and the water vessel, and the *cakra*, and probably also the Buddha's wheel as suggested by V. GILLET,<sup>7</sup> to which Brahmā's gesture seems to refer.

Brahmā intervenes again in the birth of Skanda,<sup>8</sup> depicted in the eighth niche of the south wall of the enclosure (Fig. 47, p. 192), a theme in reality focused on the opposition between Indra and Brahmā, who appear in the centre. Brahmā defends the child folded up in the upper right-hand corner, helped by his father Agni, whom we recognise thanks to his flamed hairstyle: it is therefore also the struggle of a king, engaged in the exercise of violence, and of a Brahmin who cannot subscribe to it.<sup>9</sup> The Skanda-Brahmā couple also seems to be related to the Vedic pair, Indra-Agni. This episode was probably chosen to echo the description of the origins of the Pallava formalised in their epigraphy: in the foundation inscription, the ascetic Aṅgiras, that is to say, one of the forms of Fire, is born from the mind of Brahmā, at the origin of a lineage whose descendant is compared to Guha (Subrahmaṇya or Kumāra, the Prince). In the *Mahābhārata* (III.23), at the request of Indra, Brahmā also organises the birth of the bridegroom who will suit

<sup>7</sup> (Gillet, 2010), p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> The scene was identified by (Schmid, 2014), p. 100, and (Gillet, 2018), p. 291.

<sup>9</sup> In one of the epic versions of Vṛtra's murder, a Vedic myth, Indra having

killed a brahmin demon, Brahmā nevertheless comes to his rescue to free him from his fault (*Mahābhārata*, XII.272.27–273), thus restoring the cosmic order, destabilised by the *kṣatriya-brāhmaṇa* rivalry.



*Figure 48:* Wedding of Skanda, northern enclosure, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram



Devasenā, whose name evokes a *kṣatriya* princess, but who is herself the daughter of Prajāpati. He thus ensures the perpetuation of the lineage, and the outcome of the myth could be represented by the scene of Skanda's wedding, intervening further on, in a niche of the northern enclosure, at which Brahmā is attending (Fig. 48, p. 194). The representation is sometimes identified as the wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī. But the conical headdress, the *channavīra*, and the two arms of the young groom, refer rather to Skanda's usual iconography at this period. Skanda could appear again with his wife in the following niche (which would explain the absence of the child, and of Viṣṇu and Brahmā, in a composition otherwise identical to Somāskandamūrti). Behind them appears Sūrya, with a halo, and perhaps Candra; they confirm the universal scope of the ceremony, its inscription in the cosmic cycle. The presence of Brahmā in these two compositions, in the context of the Kailāsanātha, once again emphasises the relationship between prince and officiating priest, ancestor and descendant.

If Brahmā undoubtedly competes with Dakṣiṇāmūrti, he still represents the orthodox foundations, the Vedic knowledge, on which any new doctrine claims to be based, more or less artificially, and the guardian of its transmission. This ambivalent relationship is of the same order as that which confronts him with the king. The purification of the king's bloody deeds is implied by the consequences of the sacrifice of the fifth head, transforming into triumph the ritual impurity assumed by the terrible form of Śiva. In the Kailāsanātha's inscription, the passage designating Narasiṃhavarman as the one who reduces to dust the enemy multitudes, and who, on the path traced by the Śaiva Siddhānta, destroys all impurity (verse 5), is immediately followed by another (verse 6), describing him as the protector of those who follow the triple path, the destroyer of the enemies of the twice-born, and a king who ensures wealth to men, that is to say, the benefits of the orthodox ritual.

It is in the area included between Thanjavur and the south of the Kāverī, a region conquered by the Cōla as early as 850, but where the Muttaraiyar, Pāṇḍya and Pallava lineages continue to coexist according to the epigraphic evidences, that, probably at the turn of the 10th century, a new iconographic model appears, materialising in an unprecedented way the relationship between Brahmā and Śiva. To date, the corpus is composed of at least ten sculptures that I will

identify as 'Brahmā-Śiva,' for lack of any epigraphic or literary reference to this very rare form of the divinity. The American Museums of Arts of Cleveland and Worcester, each of which keeps one copy, identify this form as Brahmā; the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum refers to it as Brahmā-Śiva; while the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the New York Metropolitan identify them as Śiva. None of these images were discovered at their original location. They are all modelled in the round, with a carved back, although more summarily, suggesting that they could have been subject to ritual circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*), and thus occupy the centre of a sanctuary – but not necessarily, as it was not unusual to sketch the back of a sculpture. Several temples in the region were surrounded by ancillary shrines, but these are generally of modest size, and the sculptures are almost human-sized; their exceptional quality also seems to designate them as prestigious objects of worship.

The oldest is probably the one currently stored inside the enclosure of the Sundareśvara temple of Centalai (Fig. 49, p. 198), near Thanjavur, which could date to the end of the 9th century. The complex appears to consist of an assemblage of architectural elements and isolated sculptures from surrounding sites, and interestingly, the temple bears on its western façade one of the very few mentions of a donation to both Śiva and Brahmā, in an inscription dated in the 8th year of a king Parakesarivarman,<sup>10</sup> suggesting the close association of their two daily rituals; from the incomes of a *devadāna* of Punrakai, in addition to the maintenance of lamps for the worship of Tirupperunturai Mahādeva, a rice offering to Brahmā must be made daily. The rosary is held in the upper left hand with a *jñāna-mudrā*; the right executes the *abhaya-mudrā*, thumb joined to the palm; the lower left hand, opened in *varada-mudrā*, rests on the thigh; the right one, broken, could hold the lotus, as on all copies where it was kept. The *jaṭā-makuṭa*, really planted in the centre of the four heads is very stretched in height, a recurrent convention in the Pallava art (see, for example, the sculptures of the Kailāsanātha and Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temples in Kāñcīpuram), or in the sculpture of the beginning of the Cōḷa period (as at Puḷḷamaṅkai, Kīlaiyūr). The third eye is present on the four heads, each having a pair of asymmetrical earrings, except at the back. Another donor is from

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<sup>10</sup> (Gai, 1970), No. 210, p. 107.

Kaṇṭiyūr,<sup>11</sup> nine kilometres west of Thanjavur, where a similar image is housed today.

Of comparable size, the sculpture is now placed in one of the internal ancillary shrines, north of the *maṇḍapa* of the Vīraṭṭāneśvara temple, also called Brahmāśirakantiśvarar, because of the myth attached to it; it is considered to be the place where Śiva cut off the fifth head of Brahmā, in the *Tēvāram* notably (3.38; 4.93). The oldest inscription of the temple dates back to the 21st year of the Pallava Nṛpatuṅgavarman, around 875, but it could have been reengraved. The next inscriptions date back to the 11th year of Parāntaka I,<sup>12</sup> around 918, but there is no evidence that the sculpture belonged originally to this temple. The attributes and gestures are identical but I could not verify the presence of the third eye. This is clearly the work of another workshop: it is visible, for example, in the drawing of the *jaṭā* —we do not find the *makara* spitting rows of pearls which decorate the tiara of all the other pieces— and the facial features are also more deeply incised.

Five other sculptures, remarkable for their astonishing similarity and the quality of their workmanship, in dark granite, a little larger, and undoubtedly later, around the second half of the 10th century, were sold by the collector C. T. Loo in 1927–8 to American museums. The sculpture held at the Cleveland Museum of Art (No. 2007.155) was acquired from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo in 2007, at an auction organised by Sotheby's, for more than four million dollars, an exceptional sum for an Indian sculpture. It measures 1.63 meters in height. The four heads all have a third eye protruding vertically. The palm of the hands in *varada* and *abhaya-mudrā* are decorated with a link, as for the Brahmā of the Nāgeśvara of Kumbhakoṇam, towards the ends of the 9th century for example, while the lotus bud and the rosary are held with a *jñāna-mudrā*. The refined treatment of the many ornaments reflects the opulence of the divinity rather than austerity, as for the images of Brahmā in Tamil Nadu. The limpness of the belly, the slight disproportion of the broad shoulders, reinforce the idea of power, and of a certain ease. It is thus a peaceful form, whose princely appearance is

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, No. 209, p. 106. The inscription is also dated to the reign of a Parakesarivarman, but the title being very common, there is no confirmation that it is the same king as in the previous one.

<sup>12</sup> (Dhaky, 1983), p. 167.



*Figure 49:* Brahmā-Śiva, Centalai



difficult to ignore, echoing the iconography of Śiva in Somāskandamūrti. Apart from the four heads associated with only four arms that usually characterise only Brahmā's iconography, the third eye, asymmetrical earrings, and short loincloth —Brahmā always wears a long *dhotī* even when seated— identify it as a form of Śiva. It is really a Brahmā-Śiva, rather than a particular form of Śiva or Brahmā.

The Brahmā-Śiva of the Detroit Museum (No. 28.151) is almost identical. The Worcester Museum of Art's sculpture seems to be almost identical to that of Cleveland, although the third eye is hollow in its centre. The lower right hand of the divinity from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (No. 42.120) is not in *varada-mudrā*, but folds up, as if to hold an attribute, a gesture also performed by the Śiva of Tiruppalanam for example, and by the Dakṣiṇāmūrti of Puñcai. We find it again with the Brahmā-Śiva of the Metropolitan Museum of New York (No. 27.79), which is also distinguished within this group by the third eye, visible only on the frontal face and on the left side, and by a somewhat less masterful treatment.

The Thanjavur Art Gallery in India preserves another image, which according to the indication of the museum (No. 16), comes from Karanthai (or Kāruntaṭṭaṅkuṭi), a village located in the present suburbs of the city; it is said to have been discovered along a canal. The Śiva temple of Karanthai dates from the second half of the 10th century. It is a small temple, and no space seems to have been planned for such a sculpture. The iconography is identical to the pieces held in the Cleveland, Detroit and Worcester's museums, the stem of the broken lotus being still visible. The last example is currently installed in front of the Collector Office in Thanjavur (Fig. 50, p. 200); the third eye has been incised on all four sides. A contemporary image of a four-armed Śiva (Fig. 51, p. 202), capped with a *jaṭā-bhāra*, and seated in the same posture on the double lotus, is today judiciously placed in front of him. It is undoubtedly the work of the same workshop, if not the same hand, and it is possible that they belonged originally to the same structure. The back of the sculpture could have been reworked later to be leaned against a wall.

These sculptures have no real precedents, however their appearance at the turn of the 10th century coincides, or follows on chronologically, with the installation of Brahmā on the *vimāna*, in one of the three main niches. Most often, either the other two are occupied by Śiva, and in that case the rear façade entails cosmogonic implications (Ardhanārīśvara, Liṅgodbhavamūrti), or the iconographic program restores the Trimūrti, associating again Brahmā

*Figure 50:* Brahmā-Śiva, Collector Office, Thanjavur





to Viṣṇu and Dakṣiṇāmūrti. Other temples display an exclusively Śaiva iconography and seem to replace Brahmā with Bhikṣāṭana (Saptaṣṭīśvara temple in Lālkuṭi, Mūvarkoyil in Koṭumpālūr, and Puṣpavaneśvara in Tiruppūnturutti, for example). The brahmanic divinity would thus, once again, be symbolically sacrificed.<sup>13</sup> The fusion of the two deities is not very surprising in this context. It renews the staging of an already rich and multiform relationship, around which are articulated a large number of contemporary iconographic programs, and it is also part of a process of iconographic standardisation, begun at the end of the Pallava period – the image of the Androgyne, for example, merges with that of Śiva leaning on the bull. Their great similarity may imply confusion or superimposition of meaning. The iconographic convergence also indicates pairs, poles that must work together. Brahmā and Viṣṇu, for example, who embody respectively spiritual and temporal power, differ very little from each other in Tiruttaṇi, on the Vīraṭṭāneśvara temple, at the end of the 9th century. On the Kadambavaneśvara temple at Erumbūr, close to Cidambaram, around the beginning of the 10th century, Śiva's iconography is contaminated by Brahmā's, rather than the other way around. The two divinities, seated in meditation on a lotus base, start a merger that has, I believe, not only cosmogonic implications – since this is the posture adopted by Brahmā when he accompanies Anantaśayin in the contemporary excavated architecture of the region; he also appears in this posture in the superstructure, notably in Kalugumalai, farther south, in Tirunelveli district, and in Tiruvakkarai, near Villupuram. The great kinship of their iconography could mean that they belong to a common line of masters, like the Tīrthaṅkara and the Buddha frequently lined up in this posture. The idea of the transmission of knowledge, within a lineage that also includes Dakṣiṇāmūrti, in the southern niche of the temple, seems to be implied here. The two sculptures set up in front of the Thanjavur's Collector Office also suggest that Brahmā-Śiva originally responded to a form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti. The rivalry for knowledge and the conquest of the creative function already observable at the Kailāsanātha of Kāñcīpuram seem to remain major themes of iconography.

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<sup>13</sup> For further development on these topics, see (Olivier, 2018), pp. 295–326.

Figure 51: Śiva with *jaṭā-bhāra*, Collector Office, Thanjavur



How can we determine more precisely the meaning and function of such an image? It seems to me that the iconography can inform us. The four arms and four identical heads probably signal that this divinity acts in the manifested universe, assuming the function of Brahmā who controls the worldly sphere in cosmogonic myths. The number four represents space: the vertical succession of the four spheres and the four cardinal points, i.e. the totality of the world, but the territory attached to the temple as well, or to the king, as in the epigraphic formulas; these are also the divisions of time (the four *yuga*), which may be symbolised also by the rosary.<sup>14</sup> The *lalitāsana*, still found for Brahmā or Viṣṇu on the temples of the late Pallava and early Cōla period, probably derived from that of Śiva in the Somāskandamūrti of the royal Pallava iconography, also refers to temporal power. The four identical heads, invariably qualifying Brahmā in the *Tēvāram* as in the *Purāṇa*, but also in iconography, are here associated with the third eye and the asymmetrical earrings of Śiva. In the *Mahābhārata* or *Purāṇa*, however, Śiva is sometimes also *caturvaktra* ('four-headed'), an epithet which emphasises above all his omniscient aspect, as he looks in all directions, rather than the origin of the four Veda. But here, it is probably suggested that the supreme form of knowledge (the third eye) integrates knowledge of the four Veda (the four heads), corresponding quite simply to the description of Śiva in the *Tēvāram*, in which he is repeatedly the Master of the Veda and Knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The *Skanda Purāṇa* (33.8) also lists different forms of Śiva beginning with Mahādeva, the One who has four heads and four appearances, followed by Brahmā and Dhruva, which is also the highest manifestation of Rudra for the Lākula. Another passage (5.71-94) confuses a four-headed Mahādeva and Brahmā when it comes to the transmission of knowledge from the *guru* to his students. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is already paired with Brahmā on many temples: the four heads spread knowledge (the Veda) in the four directions, i.e. in the entire earthly space, mirroring the four disciples receiving the teaching of Dakṣiṇāmūrti. In the Śaiva Siddhānta, and more generally in

<sup>14</sup> The inscription of the Kailāsanātha mentions both these divisions of space (verse 11) and time.

<sup>15</sup> However, these sculptures correspond only very partially to the descriptions of Sadāśiva or Maheśa in literary

sources, as in epigraphy; in the Kūram plates (p. 188, n. 5), Sadāśiva is described with five heads and ten arms, his body composed of five *brahma-mantra*.



the Āgamic conceptions formalised from the 11th century onwards, the myth of the divine revelation of texts, previously associated with Brahmā, is adapted, and Śiva becomes the ultimate source of texts, which he then reveals to Brahmā: Śiva is the first *guru*, Brahmā the first disciple. This act of revelation and transmission also often takes place in the Forest of Dāruvana, elsewhere frequented by Bhikṣāṭana.

The rosary, *varada* and *abhaya-mudrā* may suit Brahmā and Śiva, while the lotus, closely associated with Brahmā in Tamil literature, as well as in the *praśasti* (it is above all the attribute of the creator), is unusual for both deities at this period (despite Brahmā already holding it in the Lower Cave of Tirucirāpaḷli), but it is very common for their two-armed assistants or gatekeepers since the Pallava period. This suggests the fusion of the offering bearer, and by extension of the officiant, with the divinity. Another unusual feature is that the two *mudrā* are usually executed by the front hands and the attributes held by the rear hands. The *abhaya-mudrā* is thus curiously executed with the palm in profile, and by a rear hand: was it intended to be seen in front of the lateral head, during a circumambulation around the sculpture? The rosary is also generally held in the right, and not in the left. The pre-eminence of gestures (*mudrā*), associated with infrequent attributes, deliberately maintains a fuzzy identification and could suggest a sculpture linked to a codified initiation ritual.

*Mudrā* and *mantra* take on particular importance in Āgamic rituals, especially those affiliated with the Śaiva Siddhānta described in slightly later texts<sup>16</sup>; they also make the lotus the offering to the deity par excellence (the flower in which the devotee places his *mantra* is the privileged medium to convey his devotion to the divinity<sup>17</sup>). The identification of the officiant with the divinity during the initiation ritual (*dīkṣā*), and the preponderance of the concept of knowledge (*jñāna*), could join the ‘concept’ of the ‘Brahmā-Śiva,’ Brahmā being able to possibly materialise the officiant. These notions cannot be assimilated to a specific current, they are, in fact, quite widespread. In the *Pāśupatasūtra*, for example, the *guru* who initiates the novice to the *pāśupata vrata* (‘vow’), by communicating to him the doctrine taught by Śiva, embodies Śiva himself, and

<sup>16</sup> (Davis, 1991), p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

the double nature of the preceptor, both person and divine archetype, is explicit in the commentary of Kauṇḍinya, as pointed out by H. BAKKER.<sup>18</sup> The cult of the sect also includes a manifested image of the god, which can be represented either by an image, or by the *guru* himself, in the initiation rite (at the origin of the Dakṣiṇāmūrti for the author). On the other hand, since the candidate must stand to his right in this type of ritual, could the *abhaya-mudrā* have been destined for him here? Can we go so far as to suggest that it was an image more particularly connected with the initiation of high-ranking individuals? Parallel with the idea of a merging of the officiant with the divinity, the iconography of Brahmā-Śiva suggests the king-brahmin fusion, reminiscent of the Pallava models. We can also envisage a kind of prophylactic function, around rites undertaken by the *purohita*, of whom Brahmā seems to still retain many aspects on the contemporary temples. It is indeed possible to link the activity of the military directly to the activity of several temples of the region; the combatants constitute an important section of the donors probably because the ritual always allows one to legitimise and purify the violence related to the exercise of *kṣatra*, to ensure victory in combat, and consequent prosperity for the territory. The lotus could also indicate that the rivalry and complementarity of the two deities is partly built around the cosmogonic myth. The process of emission and reabsorption that punctuates the cosmic cycles equally underlies, for example, all the theoretical conceptions of Saiddhāntika rituals.

Issued at the same period, an inscription coming from a Mahāvratin *maṭha* in Tiruvorriyūr also provides an interesting detail. It records the story of its foundation, on the occasion of a donation from the head of the *maṭha*, the former chief of prince Rājāditya's armies, Vaḷabha, dated the 20th year of Kṛṣṇa III (959).<sup>19</sup> It reports that in 948, during the battle of Takkolam, lost against the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Kṛṣṇa III, Vaḷabha was not able to assist the son of the Cōḷa King Parāntaka I, who lost his life. As a sign of contrition, after bathing in the Ganges, he practiced austerity near Tiruvorriyūr, in order to obtain deliverance; he then took the head of the *maṭha* under the very rare title of Caturānana-pañḍita ('the four-faced master'). He thus has the dual nature of a warrior Brahmin. His initiation name evokes the very common epithet of Brahmā, and would

<sup>18</sup> (Bakker, 2004), pp. 123, 125–6. See <sup>19</sup> (Raghavan, 1956), No. 47.  
also (Davis, 1991), pp. 59–60.

also suit our sculptures, for it is not unusual to bear the name of the divinity to which one dedicates oneself.

This Vaḷabha can be identified with Veḷḷaṇ Kumāraṇ, who sponsored the stone restoration of the Śivalokanātha temple in Grāmam in 943. The Sanskrit portion of the inscription<sup>20</sup> engraved on this occasion constitutes a true praise of the warrior, ‘the best among those who defeated the power of the Kali era’; as in the royal eulogies, the necessity to restore order in a troubled period justifies violent and impure acts, but also replaces earthly action in a socio-cosmic order transcending them. The Śiva of the site is here Tripurāntaka, the warlike form par excellence, and the one that has the most affinity with the figure of the king; the myth of the destruction of the Three Cities is also the one in which the socio-cosmic order is the most explicitly threatened. Veḷḷaṇ Kumāraṇ, the head of the armies, is himself called Kumāra twice, an obvious allusion to Skanda, the son of Śiva. This comparison is repeated in Vaḷabha’s inscription at Tiruvorriyūr, that begins with a true genealogy, valuing his ancestry as in the royal epigraphy. Devoted to the good of the world, he has Śrī, the goddess of the Royal Fortune, installed on his chest. The return of Lakṣmī —embodying sovereignty, but also life in the world— following his initiation implies that his new function is the equivalent to that of a sovereign over his co-religionists. The *Āgama* also often codified the consecration of the *guru* with this same royal connotation.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the inscription, one passes thus from the image of a prince, the one who traditionally claims the conquest of the orients according to the consecrated formula *digvijaya*, to a preceptor diffusing the knowledge in the four directions within this same territory. And, in both cases, the question of sovereignty is involved, temporal first, then spiritual. Likewise, the line of kings mentioned in the introduction turns into a line of pandits and the possible identification of the initiate Caturānana to Brahmā, divine prototype of the first disciple, exalts his new spiritual lead role.

I can not establish a direct link between these sculptures and the title of Caturānana, but their appearance at a contemporary date suggests a common context, within which new ritual practices would have emerged, perhaps under the influence of the warrior

<sup>20</sup> (Swaminathan & Ravishankar, 183–4.

2012), No. 44. (Venkayya, 1909), pp. <sup>21</sup> (Brunner-Lachaux, 1985), p. 322.

caste, or in response to their claims.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the iconography of the Brahmā-Śiva images reflects, in an original way, a set of concepts already rooted in the heart of the Tamil country since the Pallava period.

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the (Olivier, 2021).  
iconography of the Brahmā-Śiva, see

- Olivier, V. (2018) *La représentation de l'ordre socio-cosmique: interprétation du rôle de Brahmā dans la sculpture du Tamil Nadu et du Deccan du 6<sup>ème</sup> au 9<sup>ème</sup> siècle / Virginie Olivier; sous la direction de Édith Parlier-Renault.* (Thèse de doctorat). Histoire de l'art, Sorbonne université, Paris.
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CH. XVII  
JAIN IMAGES, HINDU IMAGES: BORROWINGS AND  
CONVERSIONS IN THE SCULPTURE OF TAMILNĀṬU  
KARINE LADRECH

ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of Hindu-Jain interaction in the sculpture of Tamilnāṭu. Fieldwork and epigraphical data are scrutinised in order to recognise divine images of shifting identity. It examines figures of the Jain pantheon borrowed from Hindu deities (such as Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla and Brahmadeva), as well as Hindu conversions of Jain images. Attention is given to conversion of Jain sites (with Jain images): for example, Jain eremitic places such as Aivarmalai, Kaḷukumalai, Tirumūrttimalai, or one temple with attached Jain scholars in Nākarkōvil, have become, in a recent past, active Hindu shrines. In a few cases, the appropriation process involves slight alterations of the original images – Trimūrti in Puttūrmalai, Attāli Amman in Āḷiyāru.

XVII.1 INTRODUCTION

THE earliest vestiges of Jainism in Tamilnāṭu date back approximately to the 2nd century BCE. They are rock shelters —natural caves or big overhanging boulders— which were used by ascetics as temporary abodes during the rainy season.<sup>1</sup> These natural rock shelters have been provided with a few basic facilities to improve hermitic living conditions. These alterations include the cutting of flat and smooth surfaces making stone ‘beds,’ the cutting of water canals to prevent rainwater from running on the beds, and the cutting of drip ledges: the overhanging edge of the rock shelter is carved in such a way that rainwater would drip vertically or flow laterally instead of running inside, keeping the residents in a dry place. In a number of cases, inscriptions give the name(s) of the

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these rock shelters may also have been inhabited by other ascetics, Buddhists or Ājīvikas, though inscriptions do not provide clear evidence. Terminological clues found in inscriptions point to a Jain occupation of these sites. Cf. (Mahadevan, 2003), pp. 126ff.

monk(s) residing in the shelter and / or the name(s) of the donor(s) who commissioned the cutting of the rock beds and drip-ledges, and sometimes the name of the stone-masons who executed the work. The earliest of these inscriptions, in Tamiḻ Brāhmī script, have been assigned, on palæographical grounds, to the 2nd century BCE.<sup>2</sup>

Jain iconography developed much later, from about the 8th century CE onwards, when a number of the early Jain sites frequented by ascetics turned into places of worship visited by the laity, a change which is attested by additions of rock-cut Jain cult images, sometimes also of brick and stone structures that turned the shelters into temples, and by inscriptions recording donations for religious rituals. According to the inscriptions, a number of the carved images of Jinas and of minor deities such as the popular *yakṣīs* Ambikā and Padmāvatī were commissioned not only by the laity but also by monks and nuns, such as Ajjanandi, a Jain teacher referred to in about ten inscriptions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> (Mahadevan, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Inscriptions stating that Ajjanandi caused a Jain image to be cut, assignable to the 9th century, are found in several sites of southwestern Tamiḻnāṭu: Aivarmalai (Tiṇṭikkal [Dindigul] dt, Paḷaṇi tk), Citarāl (Kaṇṇiyākumari dt, Viḷavaṅkōṭu tk), Aḷakarmalai (Maturai dt, Maturai North tk), Āṇaimalai (Maturai dt, Maturai North tk), Ariṭṭāpaṭṭi (Maturai dt, Mēlūr tk), Karuṅkālakkuṭi (Maturai dt, Mēlūr tk), Uttamapāḷaiyam (Tēṇi dt, Uttamapāḷaiyam tk), and Eruvāṭi (Tirunelvēli dt, Nāṅkunēri tk). Cf. (Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasam, 1987), Insc. nos 7, 174, 206, 211, 217, 219, 268, & 526. Another inscription, engraved under a Jain image in Koṅkarpuliyāṅkuḷam (Maturai dt, Maturai South tk), mentions only Ajjanandi's name (ibid., Insc. no. 236). In Pēccippaḷḷam cave in Kīḷakkuyilkuṭi (Maturai dt, Maturai South tk), mention

is made of Kuṇamatiyār, mother of Ajjanandi, who caused an image to be cut (ibid., Insc. no. 254). Examples of images commissioned by nuns can be encountered, for instance in Aivarmalai and Kaḷukumalai (ibid., Insc. no. 13, 65ff.). In Citarāl, two inscriptions from the end of the 9th century engraved on a rock south of the Bhagavati temple inform us that a nun built the shrine of the goddess, offered a lamp-stand and a gold flower, and made provisions for burning a perpetual lamp, and that another nun gave some gold ornaments to the goddess (*paṭāriyār*) of Tiruccāraṇattumalai (the ancient name of the place). Cf. ibid., Insc. nos 178 & 179. The hillock at Citarāl has a rock shelter with rock-cut Jain images. It has been converted into a cave-temple which is now dedicated to the Hindu goddess Bhagavati. The temple has

Jain *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* are considered minor gods and goddesses, attendants of the twenty-four Jinas. They are often referred to in Jain literature as *śāsana-devatās*, deities protecting the teachings (*śāsana*) of the Jina. The growing popularity of these minor deities in the Jain pantheon is largely due to the fact that they can be approached by the devotees for help in worldly matters, unlike the Jinas, which are perfect beings free from all worldly bondages. They are generally described as bestowers of material and spiritual welfare, and as protectors of the Jain religion, community and sacred places.

In this paper I will focus on two minor gods who were relatively late comers in Tamil Jain temples, and who were, in a large measure, borrowed from Hindu deities.

#### XVII.2 BHAIRAVA-KṢETRAPĀLA

Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla,<sup>4</sup> the Hindu traditional temple guardian, is a case of direct assimilation in Jain worship. In either Jain or Hindu temples, he assumes the same functions as guardian and protector. In both religions, he has the same iconographic features (Fig. 52, p. 212).

Jain Kṣetrapāla images are relatively scarce in Tamiḷnāṭu. They are late sculptures; according to A. EKAMBARANATHAN, Kṣetrapāla images were installed in Tamil Jain temples from the 19th century onwards.<sup>5</sup> The god is mainly found in northern Tamiḷnāṭu, in the districts of Viḷuppuram, Tiruvaṇṇāmalai and Kaṭalūr [Cuddalore]. A few images are also found in Tiruvārūr dt and in Putuccēri [Pondicherry].

In accordance with the god's protective function, his images are generally installed near the temple entrance, often in a small shrine in the northeastern corner of the courtyard, or in a recess of the compound wall near the *gopura*. For example, in Viḷukkam (Viḷuppuram district, Tiṇṭiṇāṇam taluk), Kṣetrapāla stands in a niche near the compound entrance of the Ādinātha temple. In Tīpaṅkuṭi (Tiruvārūr dt, Kuṭavācal tk), the god is housed in a small

three chambers, housing a Tīrthaṅkara (possibly Mahāvīra), Pārśvanātha, and a plaster-coated image of a *yakṣī*, worshipped as Bhagavati by Hindus.

<sup>4</sup> There are other Jain *kṣetrapālas*, such as, among the most well-known, Ghaṇṭākaraṇa and Māṇibhadra.

<sup>5</sup> (Ekambaranathan, 2002), p. 154.

Figure 52: Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla. Peramaṇṭur (Viḷuppuram dt, Tiṇṭiṇaṇam tk), Candraprabha temple.





*Figure 53: Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla (detail). Uppuvēlūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Vāṇūr tk), Ādinātha temple.*





shrine in the courtyard near the entrance of the Ādinātha temple. In Tirunaṟuṅkoṇṭai (Viḷuppuram dt, Uḷuntūrpēṭṭai tk), the god is found before entering the compound of the Appāṇṭainātar temple, in a small shrine on the way leading to the temple. In Nallūr (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci [Wandiwash] tk), two images of the god are carved on the first pillars of the *maṇḍapa* of the Ādinātha temple. In Ālakirāmam (Viḷuppuram dt, Tiṇṭiṇaṇam tk), he is the guardian of a *dharmacakrastambha*<sup>6</sup> located at the entrance of the Ādinātha temple.

Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla also appears elsewhere in Jain temples: in *maṇḍapas* among other minor deities, or in carved decoration, on pillars and superstructures.

As regards the god's iconography, it is similar to his Hindu Tamil counterpart, apart from one detail, either a small seated Jina figure, or a small Jina head, added in his headdress. Such addition is common in the iconography of Jain minor deities (Fig. 53, p. 213). However, this detail, that underlines that the god is a servant and a protector of the Jinās' teachings, is not systematically shown; in its absence, nothing distinguishes him from the Hindu Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla. The god is naked, he has the upraised flaming hair of the fierce deities, he wears a garland or a waistband made of small bells, and sometimes snakes as ornaments. The god usually displays no fangs. He is always accompanied by his mount, a large dog standing behind him, a standard representation in Tamiḷnāṭu. The god is generally four-armed, and holds the *ḍamaru* drum and the *kapāla* bowl in his left hands, while the attributes in the right hands are more various: often the noose (*pāśa*) and the sword, but also trident, mace, or, far more rarely, the fear-not (*abhaya*) gesture.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Dharmacakrastambhas*, or *cakra-stambhas*, pillars crowned with the wheel of *dharma*, are not very common in Jain temples of Tamiḷnāṭu. They seem to exist only in the northern region, in the Viḷuppuram and Tiruvaṇṇāmalai districts. As Julia HEGEWALD pointed out —(Hegewald, 2009), p. 185— they 'usually date from very recent centuries and indicate a return to an earlier

symbolic imagery'; the earliest known Jain representations of this symbol also associated to Buddhist imagery being found on *āyāgapaṭas* from Mathurā. They generally coexist with a *mānas-tambha* on the same site, the latter being located closer to the temple.

<sup>7</sup> One such instance is found in the Ādinātha temple in Ālakirāmam (Viḷuppuram dt, Tiṇṭiṇaṇam tk).

## XVII.3 BRAHMADEVA

Another Jain guardian deity is Brahmadeva. Found mainly in northern Tamiḷnāṭu, there are many images in the districts of Viḷuppuram and Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, a good number also in those of Vēlūr, Tiruvallūr, Ceṇṇai, Kāñcīpuram, and Kaṭālūr [Cuddalore], and a few images in those of Tiruvārūr, Tañcāvūr, and Putukkōṭṭai. Brahmadeva is a rather popular minor deity in Tamil Jain temples, and is often given a shrine of similar importance to those of the much revered *yakṣis* Ambikā, Padmāvatī and Jvālāmālīnī.

Although Brahmadeva is nowadays sometimes identified with the *yakṣa* of the tenth Jina, the *yakṣa* called Brahmā, described in texts as four-headed, eight-armed, and sitting on a lotus flower, Brahmadeva has visually little to do with the male attendant of Śītanātha.<sup>8</sup> In the Tamil land, Brahmadeva is always single-headed, two-armed, and generally sits on his elephant mount.

Brahmadeva is a guardian deity particularly popular among the Digambaras of South India. But a striking fact is that the god's iconography is completely different in Karnāṭaka and in Tamiḷnāṭu.

In Karnāṭaka, Brahmadeva is often depicted on tall stone pillars erected in front of Digambara temples, usually called *brahmadeva-stambhas* or *brahma-stambhas*, sitting at the top of the pillar, and also carved at the base riding a horse and holding a weapon—usually a sword—in his right hand.<sup>9</sup> The god is clearly a warrior deity.

As Shadakshari SETTAR has shown,<sup>10</sup> initially, this Brahmadeva seems to have been a powerful non-Jain tribal god in coastal Karnāṭaka, a dreaded deity regarded as a war-god and a cattle-god; he is believed to reside on the village boundary and in trees. It seems that originally blood offerings were made to him, one of the animals most often sacrificed being the horse. Later, bloody sacrifice has given place to offerings of clay images of these animals. The practice of putting clay horses in Brahmadeva temples has survived to the present day. In the course of time Brahmadeva has been integrated among the deities worshipped by the local Jains. The Jains as well as non-Jains of this region hold him as a fearful warrior deity. The Jains regard him as the guardian of their village, temple and religion. They also believe that Brahmadeva punishes the Jains who transgress the basic tenets of their religion.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance (Balbir, n.d.), fig. 17.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance (Settar, 1971), <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

*Figure 54:* Brahmadeva. Brahmastambha in front of the Candraprabha temple in Vijayamaṅgalam (Īrōṭu dt, Perunturai tk).





Figure 55: Brahmadeva. Mēlcittāmūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Ceñci tk), Pārśvanātha temple.



This kind of representation of the god, riding a horse and holding weapons, betrays his original identity as a warrior god, and fits in with his role as a guardian or protective deity. Today, Brahmadeva on the *brahma-stambhas* is worshipped as a guardian of the temple precinct. Literary evidence in Kannaḍa shows that this Brahmadeva had become popular by the 16th to 17th century.<sup>11</sup>

In Tamiḷnāṭu, with the exception of one image similar to those in Karnāṭaka, Brahmadeva's iconography is completely different, even though he has a similar role of guardian and protector. This exception is found in Vijayamaṅgalam (Īrōṭu [Erode] dt, Perunturāi tk) – an area close to Karnāṭaka.<sup>12</sup> In front of the Candraprabha's temple complex stands a *brahmastambha* whose upper part is broken; carved at the base of the pillar, Brahmadeva rides his horse, holding a sword and a shield (Fig. 54, p. 216).

The usual representation of the god in Tamiḷnāṭu is very different, but, in the same way, is inspired by a local non-Jain god, Aiyaṇār. The Tamil Brahmadeva obviously borrowed his iconography from the Hindu god Aiyaṇār.

Aiyaṇār – the god is also known by other names, such as Śāstā / Cāttan – is a dravidian deity worshipped mainly in Tamiḷnāṭu and Kerala. Many temples dedicated to this village god are found in Tamiḷnāṭu; usually they are erected at the boundary of the villages, on the south side.<sup>13</sup> Considered a guardian of the land, his main role is to protect fields and villages. He also protects people from disease and malevolent spirits. Probably a god of folk origin, Aiyaṇār has been later absorbed by the classical Hindu tradition that made him a son of Śiva and Viṣṇu – as Mohinī.

<sup>11</sup> (Balbir, n.d.).

1987), p. 301.

<sup>12</sup> The Candraprabha temple there has an inscription in Tamil datable to the 10th century that commemorates the fast unto death of Pullapai, the younger sister of Cāmuṇḍarāya – who may be the same as the minister of the Gaṅga king Rājamalla IV. Cf. (Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasan,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. (Clothey, 1982), p. 38; (Pichard, L'Hernault, Boudignon & Thyagarajan, 1994), vol. I, p. 155. Texts prescribe various locations for the god's temple; cf. (Adiceam, 1967), pp. 60ff. According to TIRUMŪLAR, Aiyaṇār's temple is located at the northwest (Tirumantiram 999).



Aiyaṇār's mount is an elephant, but he is also sometimes described as riding upon a horse. Horses and elephants made of terracotta or brick and mortar, covered with stucco painting, are usually found near the god's temples.

The Jain Brahmadeva, just as the Hindu Aiyaṇār, is usually shown seated on his elephant or on a seat, with his left leg folded and resting diagonally upon the seat or the elephant's back (Fig. 55, p. 217). A yogic band (*yogaṭṭa*) is often tied around the waist and the upraised knee. Two-armed, the god generally holds an unusual attribute, a crooked stick or whip, in his right hand, while his left hand is dangling, the elbow of the stretched left arm resting on the knee of the upraised left leg. The god's attribute is given various names in texts describing Aiyaṇār-Śāstā, such as *ceṇṭu*, a Tamil word meaning 'horse-whip,' or *vakradaṇḍa*, a Sanskrit word that can be translated as 'crooked stick,' a stick with a curved end.<sup>14</sup>

Brahmadeva is sometimes accompanied by his two wives,<sup>15</sup> generally called Pūrṇā and Puṣkalā (Tam. Pūraṇai and Puṭkalai) in

<sup>14</sup> *Ceṇṭu* is the god's usual attribute, always held by the god's right hand. Far less frequently, the right hand may hold a lotus flower (Venkuṇṇam [Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci tk], Pārśvanātha temple), a simple staff (Ōtalavāṭi [Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Pōlūr tk], roof of Brahmadeva's shrine in the courtyard of the Ādinātha temple), or an axe (Cōlai Arukāvūr [Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci tk], Ādinātha temple). In Tiruppaṇamūr (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Ceyyār tk), in the courtyard of the Puṣpadanta temple, the god's left hand shows the teaching gesture (*vyākhyāna* or *cin-mudrā*). A snake is visible under the left hand of Brahmadeva in his shrine in the southwestern corner of the courtyard of Kunthunātha temple in Karantai (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Ceyyār tk). The left hand is usually empty, but sometimes holds an indis-

tinct object (Mēlcittāmūr [Viḷuppuram dt, Ceñci tk], Pārśvanātha temple; Citarukāvūr [Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci tk], Ādinātha temple; Vāṅkāram [Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci tk], Ādinātha temple) that may be the fruits and tender leaves of plants (*phalapallava*) prescribed by the *Suprabhedāgama* for Śāstā (*Kriyāpāda*, LIII, 8; (Gopinatha Rao, 1997), II, 2, App. B, p. 239).

<sup>15</sup> Such is the case, for instance, of cult images in the Mallinātha temple in Maṇṇārkuṭi (Tiruvārūr dt, Maṇṇārkuṭi tk), in the Ādinātha temple in Kaṭalūr [Cuddalore; Kaṭalūr dt & tk], or in Brahmadeva's shrine in the courtyard of the Ādinātha temple in Ōtalavāṭi (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Pōlūr tk); also a bas-relief sculpture on a pillar of the Ādinātha temple in Tīpaṅkuṭi (Tiruvārūr dt, Kuṭavācal tk).

Figure 56: Inside view of the Bhagavati Malaiyamman cave-temple in Tiyaaturkam (Viluppuram dt, Kalakkuricci tk)



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texts. This is also the case of Aiyaṇār, whose two wives bear the same names.

The main detail distinguishing the Jain Brahmadeva from the Hindu Aiyaṇār is the small seated Jina which is often depicted on the god's headdress – which is usually a halo of long hair, or, more rarely, a tiara.

Figure 57: Rock-cut Jina image. Tirumūrttimalai (Tiruppūr dt, Uṭumalaipeṭṭai tk), Amaṇaliṅgeśvara temple.



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According to A. EKAMBARANATHAN, the cult of Brahmadeva seems to have gained popularity in the Tamil land from the 16th century onwards, as is reflected by Jain sources such as the *Appāṇṭainātar-ulā* (16th century), which eulogises Brahmadeva of the Tirunarūṅkoṇṭai temple as Mahāśāstā and Hariharaputra, and as one who protects *dharma* and frightens *bhūtas* and *piśācas*. He is described as having four heads and two arms, holding a crooked stick, and riding an elephant. EKAMBARANATHAN cites another text, the *Stotramālā* (17th century), which informs us that Brahmadeva is a guardian deity of the Tirunarūṅkoṇṭai temple, who rides on his elephant around the temple at night, holding his



crooked stick. The god is described as protecting his devotees from all evils.<sup>16</sup>

In these texts, Brahmadeva clearly borrows from Hindu gods: he is given some of the names of Aiyaṇār —Mahāśāstā and Harihara-putra, which designates him as son of Viṣṇu and Śiva— and the four heads of Brahmā. His name Brahmadeva also refers to the Hindu Brahmā. However, sculptures show him with only one head.

Brahmadeva may be housed in individual shrines or small temples in the courtyard of temples dedicated to one of the Jinas. For instance, in Vempākkam (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Ceyyār tk), a small Brahmadeva temple is erected in the southwest corner of the courtyard of the Mahāvīra temple; this is also the case in the Ādinātha temple in Ōtalavāṭi (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Pōlūr tk); the courtyard of the Pārśvanātha temple in Pūṇṭi (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Āraṇi tk) has several small temples for Brahmadeva and the goddesses Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Cakreśvarī, Padmāvatī and Ambikā; in Tīpaṅkuṭi (Tiruvārūr dt, Kuṭavācal tk), a Brahmadeva shrine stands in the courtyard of the Ādinātha temple; and there is also a modern Brahmadeva temple about five kilometres from Tīpaṅkuṭi.

The god sometimes shares a shrine with another popular minor Jain deity, for instance in the Kuntavai temple complex in Tirumalai (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Pōlūr tk), where a small shrine housing Brahmadeva and Jvālāmālīnī is found in the cave-temple to the north of the Neminātha temple.

Brahmadeva shrines are also found inside the temples, for instance in the Ādinātha temple in Mēlmalaiyaṇūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Ceñci [Gingee] tk), where a shrine dedicated to Brahmadeva is located in the *maṇḍapa*.

Carved representations of the god are also found in temple halls among many other minor deities, for instance, in the Mahāvīra temple in Vālaippantal (Vēlūr dt, Ārkāṭu [Arcot] tk); more rarely on temple roofs, for instance, in the Ādinātha temple in Ālakirāmam

<sup>16</sup> (Ekambaranathan, 2002), pp. 155–7. In the Appāṇṭainātar temple on the Tirunaṇṅkuṇṇam hill near Tirunaṇṅkuṇṇai (Viḷuppuram dt, Uḷuntūr-pēṭṭai tk), a cave-temple dedicated to Pārśvanātha, Brahmadeva is carved in a niche to the right of the way leading to the main cult image, a 9th century rock-cut sculpture of Pārśva; he is depicted inside a small temple, shown in the usual sitting posture with only one head, two arms, his crooked stick or whip; his elephant mount is carved below.

*Figure 58:* Yakṣī Ambikā / Dharmadevī. Nākarkōvil (Kaṇṇiyākumari dt, Akattisvaram tk), Nāgarāja temple.





(Viḷuppuram dt, Tiṇṭivaṇam tk), and in the ruined Jain temple in Tiṇṭakkōl (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci [Wandiwash] tk); or on pillars, for instance, in the Ādinātha temple in Tīpaṅkuṭi (Tiruvārūr dt, Kuṭavācal tk), or in the Ādinātha temple in Periyakoḷappalūr (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci [Wandiwash] tk).

More unusual cases are found in Pērāvūr (Viḷuppuram dt, Vāṇūr tk), where Brahmadeva is housed in a small niche cut into the compound wall of the Mahāvīra temple, and in Poṇṇūr (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai dt, Vantavāci [Wandiwash] tk), where he is carved on the northern outer wall of the *maṇḍapa* of the Ādinātha temple.

#### XVII.4 CONVERTED SHRINES AND DEITIES

With Brahmadeva and Bhairava-Kṣetrapāla, we have considered two examples of figures of the Jain pantheon borrowed from Hindu deities. We will now explore some cases of Hindu conversions of Jain images and shrines.

In the course of time, for various reasons, some Jain shrines fell into disuse, and a number of them were converted into Hindu shrines. Some are now difficult to identify for unambiguous evidence is lacking—the Jain images having been destroyed or removed from the place, or the cult image being only partially visible—but others are clear testimonies of such conversions.

This is the case, for instance, in Aivarmalai (Tiṇṭikkal [Dindigul] dt, Paḷaṇi tk), where a large natural cave was used as an abode for Jain monks. Just above the cave, sixteen Jina images, which may belong to the 9th century CE, or earlier, have been carved on the rock.<sup>17</sup> At present this is a Hindu site; the ground has been covered with cement, some brick structures have been added to the cave, and it houses Hindu deities such as Draupadī Ammaṇ, Hanumān and Śiva in the form of several *liṅgas*.<sup>18</sup>

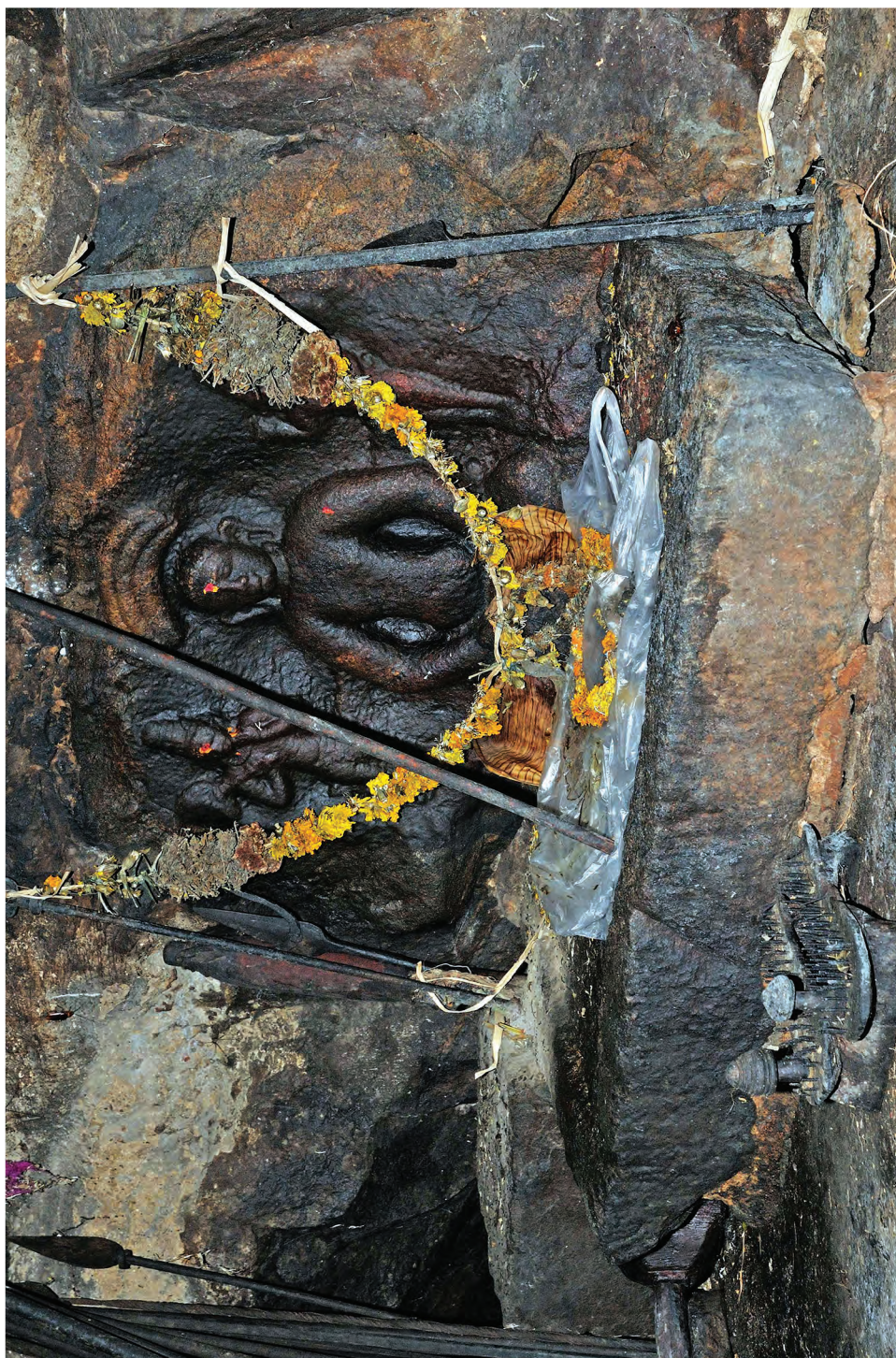
Another instance is found in Kaḷukumalai (Tūttukkuṭi [Tuticorin] dt, Kōvilpaṭṭi tk), where ancient Jain rock shelters have become

<sup>17</sup> Inscriptions in Tamil language and Vaṭṭeḷuttu script from the 7th to the 10th century are engraved above the cave, mostly below the Jina images. Several persons commissioned these images,

among whom are the monks Aḷḷanandi and Malliṣeṇa, and the nun Avānanti-kurattiyār.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. (Balbir, Ladrech, Ramesh Kumar, & Murugesan, 2018).

Figure 59: Jina worshipped as Murukan. Moṭṭamalai (Tiruccirāppalli dt, Maṇappārai tk).



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*Figure 60:* Jina worshipped as Viṣṇu. Puṭuppēr (Kāñcīpuram dt, Śrīperumputūr tk), Ādikeśavaperumāl temple.



Hindu shrines. The big hill has on its eastern side a rock shelter with beds and many rock-cut Jain images with 9th century Vaṭṭeḷuttu inscriptions below. Close to these rock-cut images, there is a Jain cave with Jina images carved inside. It has been converted into an Aiyaṇār temple. Near this Aiyaṇār temple is a cave-temple with a rock-cut Pārśvanātha image, which is nowadays dedicated to Śiva.<sup>19</sup>

On the western side of the Tiṃkaturkam / Tyāgadurgam hill (Viḷuppuram dt, Kaḷḷakkuṛicci tk) is a Jain rock shelter that has been converted into a Hindu cave-temple dedicated to Bhagavati Malaiyamman. The main cult image was originally the Jain goddess Ambikā / Dharmadevī, now worshipped as Durgā. Beside the goddess, a Tirthaṅkara image is worshipped as a saint (Fig. 56, p. 220).

Tirumūrttimalai (Tiruppūr dt, Uṭumalaipēṭṭai tk) is a somewhat special case. This Śiva temple, called Amaṇaliṅgeśvara, is located at the foot of Tirumūrtti hill. This shrine, dedicated to the Trimūrti—Śiva, Brahmā and Viṣṇu—is constructed against a big boulder in which the three gods are believed to reside, and on which is carved a Jina image. This image is invisible now, because it has been covered with small balls made of sandalwood paste that devotees throw towards the rock, a popular practice in this place. Fortunately, the sculpture was photographed by the French Institute of Pondicherry in 1964, while it was still clearly visible (Fig. 57, p. 221). Quite strangely, the image is carved upside down on the top of the rock. A popular belief is that this rock rolled down from the hills few centuries back during a flood.

Another interesting case is that of the Hindu Nāgarāja temple of Nākarkōvil [Nagercoil] (Kaṇṇiyākumari dt, Akattisvaram tk), which may have been a Jain temple in former days. This is suggested by the presence of Jain images—several Jinās and Yakṣī Ambikā / Dharmadevī—carved on pillars in the *maṇḍapa* in front of the central shrine (Fig. 58, p. 223), and by some inscriptions from the 16th century mentioning gifts of lands, *paḷḷiccantam*, to Kamalavāhanapaṇḍita and Guṇavīrapaṇḍita, who seem to be two Jain teachers attached to the temple.<sup>20</sup> The word *paḷḷiccantam* usually refers to a gift of land made to a Jain temple or monastery (*paḷḷi*).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. (Balbir, Ladrech, Ramesh Kumar, & Murugesan, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> (Ekambaranathan & Sivaprakasan, 1987), pp. 127ff.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance (Ekambaranathan, 1996), p. 31; (Thiruvengkatachari,

n.d.), p. 52.



Figure 61: Jinas worshipped as the Hindu Trimūrti. Puttūrmalai (Maturai dt, Ucilampatti tk).



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Regarding conversions, we also notice that many loose sculptures from ruined temples in places where the Jain community had disappeared came to be worshipped under a new identity; they became village gods or well-known Hindu deities.

One example is found in Puliyūr (Karūr dt & tk), where a loose sculpture of a Jina stands under a neem tree and is worshipped by the villagers as a Hindu local deity called Muni Appicci.<sup>22</sup>

In Cērumākkānallūr (Tañcāvūr dt, Pāpanācam tk), another loose Tīrthaṃkara sculpture is worshipped by the locals as the village guardian deity Karuppacāmi.<sup>23</sup>

In Moṭṭamalai (Tiruccirāppaḷli dt, Maṇappārai tk), a rock-cut Jina image is worshipped as Murukaṇ [Murugan] (Fig. 59, p. 225). On the hill is a rock shelter with an inscription from about the 12th century mentioning a gift of tax-free land to the Jain *paḷli*. A small stone temple has been built against a part of the rock shelter. It houses the rock-cut Tīrthaṃkara sculpture being worshipped as Murukaṇ, popularly known as ‘Moṭṭamalai Murukaṇ.’<sup>24</sup>

In Puṭṭupṭēr (or Puduppair, Puduppedu; Kāñcīpuram dt, Śrīperumputūr tk), a temple was built to house a statue of the Jina Pārśvanātha which was unearthed near the lake. This image is worshipped as Viṣṇu, called Ādikeśavaperumāl (Fig. 60, p. 226).<sup>25</sup> It shows the rather unusual feature of a lotus and a conch—the *padma* and *śaṅkha-nidhis*—flanking the Jina, just above the shoulders.<sup>26</sup>

In Puttūrmalai (Maturai dt, Ucilampaṭṭi tk), a rock shelter adorned with rock-cut images of four Jinas has been converted into a Hindu site. The carved relief shows four figures, a small standing Jina and three larger seated Jinas with their heads crowned by the triple umbrella (Fig. 61, p. 228). The central seated Jina is Pārśvanātha, with the *nāga* undulating behind him and sheltering him with its five heads. The faces of the Jinas have been altered, especially by the addition of a moustache and of a *tilak* on the forehead. The three seated Jinas are now worshipped as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, the gods of the Hindu Trimūrti.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. (Balbir, Ladrech, Ramesh Kumar, & Murugesan, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> This Pārśvanātha may have belonged to a tenth or eleventh Jain tem-

ple that existed on the site, but which has disappeared in the course of time.

Cf. (Ekambaranathan, 2005), p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Another instance is found in the Pārśvanātha temple in Ciṇṇampēṭu (Tiruvallūr dt, Poṇṇēri tk).

Figure 62: Jina worshipped as Attāli Amman. Āliyāru (Kōyamputtūr dt, Vālpārai tk).



Another case is found in Āliyāru (Kōyamputtūr [Coimbatore] dt, Vālpārai tk), where a Jina has become a Hindu goddess. There are on the site several rock shelters, and a loose sculpture of a Jina, now worshipped as a Hindu goddess called Attāḷi Amman (Fig. 62, p. 230). The goddess receives a daily worship conducted by a priest; once the clothes are removed, the image appears clearly as that of a Jina. According to an article published by the newspaper *The Hindu*:

the transformation happened some twenty years ago when people belonging to nearby Kottur village found the sculpture in the rock shelter. [...] They brought a sculptor from Paḷaṇi who set about transforming the sculpture [...] The damaged visage [...] was repaired and female features were created in cement. Ornaments were added and the eyes painted to make it look like that of a Hindu female deity, and *trishuls* were planted behind it. It was wrapped in a sari.<sup>27</sup>

#### XVII.5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was by no means to be exhaustive, but to give an overview of the shifting identity of some religious sites and images: Hindu to Jain, Jain to Hindu. Surely many cases are still to be discovered. In a number of instances, conversion is likely, but cannot be ascertained for want of unambiguous evidence.

It is not always possible to have the clothes and ornaments of some converted images removed to be able to witness the change of religious identity (as in Puṭuppēr). This is also essential to state if the currently Hindu deity was formerly Jain or Buddhist. For instance, Pāṇṭimuṇi, worshipped in the Pāṇṭimuṇiśvarar temple in Mēlamaṭai near Maturai (Maturai dt, Maturai North tk), is obviously of Jain or Buddhist origin, but the crown, flower garlands, clothes and painted ornaments that cover the sculpture on all the available photographs do not permit one to decide.<sup>28</sup>

The Jain origin of some Hindu sites is sometimes deliberately hidden. The Vaḷḷimalai hill (Vēlūr dt, Kātpāṭi tk) has several Jain rock shelter sites, which is testified by inscriptions and rock-cut

<sup>27</sup> (Subramanian, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> It may also be noted here that there are some cases of loose Tirthaṃkara sculptures identified by the local people as Buddha: in Peṇṇakkōṇam (Per-

ampalūr dt, Kuṇṇam tk), Aṭaṇcūr (Taṇcāvūr dt, Tiruvaiyāru tk), and Mākāṇipaṭṭu (Vēlūr dt, Arakkōṇam tk). Cf. (Balbir, Ladrech, Ramesh Kumar, & Murgesan, 2018).

sculptures of Jinas and attendant deities. One of the rock shelters has been transformed into a Subrahmanya temple. During our visit in September 2008, we were not allowed to see the Jain rock-cut sculptures of the cave, which were hidden from view. We could only see the unfinished rock-cut sculpture of a goddess, not easy to identify by her mere iconography, now worshipped as Valli. A photograph, taken in the temple by Mr NAGARAJ, shows a rock-cut carving of a sitting Jina that has been intentionally damaged.<sup>29</sup>

It is also difficult to determine the time and circumstances of most of these conversions, for information is scant or nonexistent. Further research will surely provide interesting discoveries to study. At this stage of the research, only case to case explanations are conceivable. But a focus on fieldwork and a study of all available data may reveal new historical interpretations.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. (Balbir, Ladrech, Ramesh Kumar, & Murugesan, 2018).



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CH. XVIII  
VISUAL ARTS AND EPIGRAPHICAL POETRY: THE  
GAṄGĀDHARAMŪRTI OF TIRUCCIRĀPPAḷḷI  
ÉDITH PARLIER-RENAULT

ABSTRACT

The Gaṅgādhara image of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, and the inscription in *kāvya* style engraved in the same monument, set a pattern for a dialogue between visual arts and poetry that enlightens us on the many implicit meanings that iconographical choices and variations may assume. Just as the eulogies of the different dynasties of India used to borrow from each other certain expressions and metaphors, the figures they chose to represent in their monuments echo one another. The article focuses on this parallel process. It analyses the interplay between inscriptions and images, and tries to highlight their connection to earlier and later examples.

XVIII.1 INTRODUCTION

THE Gaṅgādharamūrti of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi<sup>1</sup> is the first large Hindu cave sculpture in Southern India (beginning of the 7th century CE), and the long and beautiful inscription in the highest *kāvya* style attributed to the Pallava king Mahendravarman which accompanies the image, initiated a dialogue between visual arts and poetry that remains unparalleled in the history of Indian art, since up to this day no similar example of association between an epigraphical poem and a visual representation has ever been discovered. This dialogue enlightens us, nevertheless, on the way iconography builds its allegories. Michael LOCKWOOD already drew attention in 1976 to the importance of this inscription, not only for that particular site, but for the whole Indian conception of mythological sculpture, and dedicated several articles to it.<sup>2</sup> As observed by Emmanuel FRANCIS

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<sup>1</sup> For complete image, see (Brocquet, 2021), Fig. 26, p. 226. For detail depicting Śiva, see Fig. 63, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> (Lockwood & Bhat, 1976); (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), pp. 47–65; pp. 129–41.

in a publication on Pallava inscriptions and monuments,<sup>3</sup> this epigraph has been the subject of quite a large number of translations and interpretations, and the last one is offered in the present publication by S. BROCQUET.<sup>4</sup> If I consider it once again here, at the risk of tiring the reader, it is because I feel that, as with all true works of art, its possible meanings may not be exhausted and deciphered once and for all.

Figure 63: Gaṅgādharamūrti detail (Śiva),  
Tiruccirāppallī, beginning of the 7th c.



© 2012 Sylvain BROCQUET.

I will first try to analyse the interplay between the inscription and the relief,<sup>5</sup> which in my view may explain some of the difficult

<sup>3</sup> (Francis, 2017), p. 518, n. 36.

<sup>4</sup> See (Brocquet, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> I dealt with that question in an article published in 2008 which was also to a certain extent based on the Gaṅgādhara

inscription: see (Parlier-Renault, 2008).

Although this paper resumes several points of the latter, the overall orientation is different.

passages of the poem. I will then focus on the image, and attempt to understand its most specific aspects in the light of the stanzas that accompany it. Lastly, I will explore, through a few examples, the parallel process of mutual borrowings and innovations, quite similar to intertextuality, that can be observed in iconography and in epigraphy from the 5th to the 8th century.

## XVIII.2 THE POEM

For convenience, I shall give here the text of the inscription, and as a starting point, I shall use the English version proposed by Michael LOCKWOOD.<sup>6</sup> When his translation of the stanza is integrally reported without any modification, I specify it. Otherwise, it has been used as a basis but I have introduced a few changes, particularly on some points which are relevant to this paper.

śailendramūrdhani śilabhavane vicitre  
śailīn tanuṃ guṇabharo nṛpatir nidhāya |  
sthānum vyadhata vidhir eṣa yathārthasaṃjñam  
sthānuḥ svayaṃ ca saha tena jagatsu jātaḥ || 1<sup>7</sup>

- 1 When King Guṇabhara established a stone figure in the wonderful stone abode on top of the King of Mountains, this ruler ‘Vidhi’ [the Creator], made Sthānu [Śiva] true to His name [sthānu: stationary, firmly fixed] and became himself sthānu [fixed, immortal] together with Him, on earth.<sup>8</sup>

gṛham akṛta śatrumallo girīndrakanyāpater girāv asmin |  
giriśasya giriśasaṃjñam anvarthīkartum arthapatiḥ || 2<sup>9</sup>

- 2 The lord of wealth / the lord of meanings, Śatrumalla, made on this mountain an abode for the husband of the ‘Daughter of the King of Mountains’ [Śiva], so that the mountain-dweller’s [Śiva’s] name of ‘Giriśa’ would be made consistent with its meaning.<sup>10</sup>

vibhūtiṃ colānām katham aham aveksheya vipulām  
nadīm vā kāvīrīm avanibhavanāvasthita iti |  
hareṇoktaḥ prītyā vibhur adīśad abhramliham idam  
manuprakhya rājye giribhavanam asmai guṇabharah || 3<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), pp. 50–2.

<sup>10</sup> Trans. present author; *cf.* *ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

- 3 Having affectionately been asked by Hara [Śiva], ‘How can I, while remaining in an earthly abode, see the abundant wealth of the Coḷas or the river Kāvērī?’ this supreme ruler, Guṇabhara, the fame of whose empire rivals that of Manu, ordered for him [Śiva] this sky-scraper [‘cloud-licking’] mountain-abode.<sup>12</sup>

nirmāpitām atimudā puruṣottamena  
śailiṃ harasya tanum apratimām anena |  
kṛtvā śivaṃ śirasi dhārayatātmasaṃstham  
uccaiḥśirastvam acalasya kṛtaṃ kṛtārtham || 4<sup>13</sup>

- 4 This highest of men (Puruṣottama) [Mahendra], with an extreme joy, had an incomparable stone figure of Hara [Śiva] made, and having raised it to his head, and having had the mountain bear Śiva, the God within himself / itself, on its top, he made the ‘greatness’ of the ‘Immovable One’ [Śiva] a concrete reality / he made the height of the Mountain true to its purpose.<sup>14</sup>

The aim of the temple’s foundation is given in the second verse of the first stanza: the Pallava monarch gave its full meaning to the name *sthānu* (immutable, eternal) by setting the god in stone, and has thus secured for himself eternity. What I would like to stress first here is the symmetry established by the inscription between the epigraphical poem and the temple, which acquires the dignity of a literary composition, although we know that sculpture, painting and architecture are traditionally considered as mere technical skills, and don’t enjoy the same prestige as literature in Indian aesthetics. In the inscription, the analogy between both forms of artistic expression, visual and poetical, is not only a question of status, it is deeply rooted in their very nature. Like poetry, sculpture, and to a certain extent architecture, deal here with language and significance; the insistence upon the word *artha* is remarkable in this respect. The mountain (*giri*) has been chosen for the location of the temple as it refers to the names of Śiva (*giriśa*) and his wife (*girīndrakanyā*). The monument is at once identified with the meaning that it conveys: its main objective is to materialise the content of the words *giri*, *giriśa*, *girīndrakanyā*.

Śiva, in the form of a stone image, will now inhabit a real mountain. What seems to characterise sculpture here, in contrast to po-

<sup>12</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Trans. present author; *cf. ibid.*, p. 50.



etry, is its ability to give a concrete and material form, a literal meaning, to an imaginary statement. But the effigy or the monument may also cover a whole range of implicit significances, that the accompanying poem will help us to understand, without ever expressing them directly.

According to the inscription, the mountain has fulfilled its function, has found its meaning, thanks to the monument that crowns it now, and to the presence of Śiva's image: the little hill of Tirucirāppaḷḷi has become the mountain of the god. In other words, the building of a temple expresses the true meaning of every natural eminence: it is the mountain of Śiva, as if the presence of the god, referred to by the compound *ātma-saṁstham*, of which the first component *ātma* may relate to the king as to the mountain, had remained until then only implicit, and had finally found its expression.

The poem, then, develops a complex series of implications. Twice repeated in the first stanza, the term *sthānu* applies first to the god, and then to the king. The fourth stanza stresses equally the analogy between the king and the mountain, which can appear as a metaphor of the territory over which he reigns; both the king and the mountain bear the god Śiva on their head (*śiras*). The name Śiva seems to be simultaneously related to *śirasi kṛtvā*, which refers to the king, and *dhārayatā*, which refers to the mountain. The word *acala* establishes another parallel, this time between the mountain and the god, pointing to a double semantic process; thanks to the temple and the image, the greatness of Śiva is concretely manifested, and, conversely, the greatness of the mountain has fulfilled its purpose. In other words, a concept (Śiva's greatness), finds a material expression, and a material reality (the mountain), receives a conceptual significance. The two meanings that the word *artha* assumes in the compound *arthapati* of the second stanza —as 'material wealth,' and as 'signification'— are quite enlightening in this respect.

In this stanza the king is not directly compared to Śiva, but their analogy is suggested by their common link to the mountain, which recalls the quality they both share with it, according to the first stanza, their immovability (*sthānu*). The inscription thus introduces a triple comparison between the king, the mountain (the kingdom), and the God. The first words of the poem (*śailendramūrdhani*, 'on the king of the mountains' head') already suggest the personification of the mountain. This initial compound contains the

Figure 64: Gaṅgādharamūrti, Elephanta, ca. 550



© 2016 Ashwin KUMAR. After: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elephanta\\_Caves\\_\(27737337302\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elephanta_Caves_(27737337302).jpg) Licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>

metaphor on which the double entendre (*śleṣa*) of the fourth stanza are based: the identity of the mountain and the king. Like the mountain on which he had the temple excavated, the king bears Śiva on his head. The word *śiras* may be used both for the mountain and for the king, and the word *puruṣottamena*, ‘the loftiest / the best among all men,’ designating the sovereign, suggests also a parallel with the mountain. The metaphor that appeared in the first stanza is concluded in the fourth: the Tiruccirāppallī hill, which thanks to the temple has become the king of mountains, holds its head high, but it is only to carry Śiva. If the king is the highest among men, he uses this superiority to serve Śiva. The parallel between the mountain and the king highlights, actually, the devotion of the latter to

his god: the king ‘bears on his head’ Śiva, i.e. manifests his deference to the divinity, while the parallel between the mountain and the god stresses the greatness of Śiva. The mountain appears here like the common element that links together the god and the king, who still belong to different spheres and levels of reality.

In the seventh stanza, which appears in the second part of the inscription, engraved on the other of the two pilasters framing the sculpture, the mountain becomes the head of the Cōḷa country, and the different particulars of the description this time suggest a parallel between the land and its sovereign.

coḷaviṣayasya śailo maulir ivāyaṃ mahāmaṇir ivāśya |  
haragṛham etaj jyotis tadyam iva śāṃkaram jyotiḥ || 7<sup>15</sup>

7 This mountain is like the diadem of the Coḷa province, this abode of Hara is like its chief jewel, and like its splendour is the splendour of Śaṅkara.<sup>16</sup>

The comparison between the king and the god which rests on their common similarity to the mountain is thus intertwined in the seventh stanza with a parallel between the Cōḷa land and its king. By a sort of mirroring effect, the king, the mountain, and the Cōḷa land echo each other as they all ‘bear Śiva on their head.’ The ultimate term involved in this series of comparisons is not formulated, but it is obviously Śiva Gaṅgādhara, who himself bears on his head the celestial river, and is represented in the sculpture. The image is thus intimately involved in the poem.

The insistence of the first stanza upon the word *sthānu* attracts our attention to one particular aspect of the Gaṅgādhara myth that could have eluded us: the main quality of Śiva when he receives the Gaṅgā on his head is his stability, his immovability. We know from the different versions of the myth that Śiva is the only one able to check the violence of Gaṅgā’s fall, but the comparison between the mountain and the king focuses on a level of significance which might have been overlooked, had we relied only on the Epic and Puranic narrative accounts of the famous myth: while receiving on his head the celestial river before letting her flow on earth, Śiva Gaṅgādhara secures the link between heaven and earth. This process of mediation, which has been thoroughly analysed in its ritual dimension by S. BROCQUET,<sup>17</sup> is mirrored in the king, the moun-

<sup>15</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> (Brocquet, 1997); see also (Esti-

<sup>16</sup> Trans. present author; *cf.* *ibid.*, *enne*, 2021).



Figure 65: Aihole (Rāvaṇa Phaḍi cave), end of the 6th c.



© 2012 ISMOON. After: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva\\_Gangadhara,\\_Parvati,\\_Bhagiratha.\\_Ravana\\_Phadi,\\_Aihole.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_Gangadhara,_Parvati,_Bhagiratha._Ravana_Phadi,_Aihole.jpg) Licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

tain, the Cōḷa land, and the image. The Lalitāṅkura cave's relief thus expresses the fundamental meaning of sculpture as a process of mediation between the spiritual or conceptual level and the material one, or, in mythical terms, between heaven and earth.

The second part of the inscription, engraved on the other pilaster framing the image, develops further the parallel between the king and the God, while subtly suggesting also the difference between them.

kāvīrīṃ nayanābhirāmasalilām āramamālādhārām  
devo vīkṣya nadīpriyaḥ priyaguṇām apy eṣa rajyed iti |  
sāśaṃkā girikanyakā pitṛkulaṃ hitveha manye girau  
nityan tiṣṭhati pallavasya dayitām etāṃ bruvāṇā nadīm || 5<sup>18</sup>

- 5 Suspecting that the God [Śiva], who is fond of rivers, on seeing the Kāvērī, whose waters please the eyes, who wears a garland of gardens, and who possesses attractive qualities, might fall in love with her also, the 'Daughter of the Mountain' [Gaṅgā] has left her father's family to reside, I reckon, permanently here on this mountain, reminding [him] that this river [Kāvērī] is the beloved wife of the Pallava (king).<sup>19</sup>

The stanza contains an *utprekṣā*, which implies that the author superimposes on the enunciated fact an imaginary assumption. He assumes that the 'Daughter of the Mountain' followed Śiva, because she is jealous of the Kāvērī river. The theme of Pārvatī's jealousy is well known in the literary tradition, so the first idea that occurs to the reader is that *girikanyākā* —the 'Daughter of the Mountain,' a frequent epithet of Pārvatī— can only refer to her. But the inscription would then seem to imply the presence in the relief, or in the temple, of an image of Pārvatī, while there is no trace whatsoever of such a representation. Michael LOCKWOOD solved the problem of interpreting *girikanyākā* by holding that it referred to Gaṅgā, and this interpretation is also favoured by E. FRANCIS<sup>20</sup> and S. BROCQUET.<sup>21</sup> The ambiguous compound *girikanyākā* might have been chosen on purpose in order to outline, at the same time, a parallel between Northern and Southern India, the Gaṅgā and the Kāvērī. But the stanza may allude also to the invisible presence of

<sup>18</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> (Francis, 2017), p. 517.

<sup>19</sup> Trans. present author; *cf.* *ibid.*,

<sup>21</sup> See (Brocquet, 2021).



*Figure 66:* Viṣṇu Varāha, Bādāmī, end of the 6th c.



Pārvatī, who remains in the realm of the poet's imagination, as suggested by the verb *manyē*: 'I think Pārvatī is there' (although she is not).

One can notice again the contrast between the imaginary and the concrete level that is a leitmotiv of the poem, but here, unlike in the preceding stanzas, which stressed so insistently the fact that Śiva's name or his presence had become a material fact thanks to the temple and its image, there is a discrepancy between both levels: the presence of Pārvatī remains an imaginary concept, while the presence of the Kāvērī is a concrete reality. The *utprekṣā* suggests the difference between imagination and reality, and continues the parallel between the king and Śiva, while emphasising, at the same time, the fact that both cannot be considered identical. The king and the god are not to become rivals, in spite of their close similarity. In the stanza, the allusion to the presence of Pārvatī highlights the difference between Śiva and the king, while referring openly to the usual iconography of Gaṅgādhara as represented in earlier examples,<sup>22</sup> so that the exclusion of Pārvatī from the relief introduces, conversely, the possibility that it could point in fact to the king, while emphasising at the same time the difference between the conceptual and the material spheres: Pārvatī is mentioned in the poem, she is not represented in the relief. What I would suggest is that there is a deliberate interplay between the inscription and the image, which aims at suggesting both the similarity and the difference between the god and the king, as between the imaginary world and the 'real,' material one.

The absence of the goddess is all the more puzzling since the earlier or contemporary sculptures carved in Elephanta and Aihole show her at the side of Śiva Gaṅgādhara. Both seem centred on the relationship between the two spouses, while the Tiruccirāppallī relief highlights another aspect of the myth: the role of Śiva as a mediator between heaven and earth, and his similarity to the king in this respect. The ambiguity of the image which encompasses both Śiva and the king corresponds to the indirect language of the inscription, which constantly suggests the identity of the god and the king but never openly states it. The *śleṣa* attached to the compound *arthapati* ('lord of wealth' / 'lord of meanings') acquires in this respect a

<sup>22</sup> For instance, the Gaṅgādhara of Phaḍi cave in Aihole, that we will examine later, or the one in the Rāvaṇa cave in Elephanta.

new dimension: to ‘master’ the significations means to be able, alternately, to hide them and to express them, through the image, as through the poem, which implies also a complete understanding of the different levels of reality.

The stanzas 6 and 8 of the inscription are particularly complex. As shown by S. BROCCQUET in the present publication, they may assume several meanings. I will here focus exclusively on the parallel between language and sculpture / architecture that they suggest to me.

guṇabharanāmani rājany anena liṅgena liṅgini jñānam |  
prathatāñ cirāya loke vipakṣavṛtteḥ parāvṛttam || 6<sup>23</sup>

- 6 The king named Guṇabhara being inferred (*liṅgini*) by the sign (*liṅgena*, i.e. the figure of Gaṅgādhara), may the knowledge spread over the world for a long time, which keeps away from the opposite statement.<sup>24</sup>

The stanza, as such, is undoubtedly very obscure, but I will try to show that this translation, the most literal of all, can make sense. This doesn’t exclude, naturally, the other possible meanings that have been proposed by various scholars.<sup>25</sup>

Does the word *liṅgena* refer to the cult symbol? There is actually no *liṅga* in the temple and the term used in the inscription most probably doesn’t refer to any stone *liṅga*.<sup>26</sup> Could it designate then the image of Gaṅgādhara? It is the interpretation favoured by M. LOCKWOOD, as well as by E. FRANCIS<sup>27</sup> and S. BROCCQUET. In this case, *liṅga* should be understood in its primary meaning, as ‘sign.’ As recalled by BROCCQUET in this publication, HULTZSCH highlighted the fact that the poem here borrowed its words from the language of logic, and assumed that it contained a *śleṣa*:

This whole verse has a *double entendre*. It contains allusions to the Indian logic (*tarkaśāstra*), in which *liṅgin-* means the subject of a proposition, *liṅga* the predicate of a proposition and *vipakṣa* an instance on the opposite side.<sup>28</sup>

*Vṛṭti* can designate a commentary, particularly a literary one. BROCCQUET admits that the stanza ‘undoubtedly contains an allusion

<sup>23</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 140. see *ibid.*, and (Francis, 2017), p. 518,

<sup>24</sup> Trans. present author; *cf. ibid.*, n. 36, & p. 521, n. 48.  
p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 519.

<sup>25</sup> See (Broccquet, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> (Hultzs, 1890b), p. 29, n. 3.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion about this subject,

to logic, which responds to Mahendravarman's *biruda* [*anumāna*],<sup>29</sup> but, according to him, a translation based on the vocabulary of logic would be meaningless. Still, if we understand the whole stanza as relating to the very nature of the allegorical language used both in the inscription and in the carved image, its significance becomes clearer. In this view, the compound *vipakṣavṛtteḥ* may be translated in three different ways. It could be: i. 'the opposite commentary.' As a sign, but only as a sign, at an allegorical level, the sculpture refers to the king, and 'the opposite commentary' that should be avoided would then be that it is a portrait of the king, or, conversely, that it doesn't allude to him at all.

But if we keep closer to the terminology of logic: ii. *vipakṣa* is more specifically the counter-statement. If we take the standard example of the fire (the *lingin*) which can be inferred from the smoke (the *liṅga*), then the counter-statement would be that from the absence of smoke (the *liṅga*) can be inferred the absence of the fire (*lingin*).<sup>30</sup> In the case of the Gaṅgādharamūrti, such a statement must obviously be avoided, since from the absence of the image, one should not infer the absence of the king, and still less of the god. This assertion, at first reading, seems to make no sense, but it actually highlights the very nature of allegory: unlike the smoke and the fire, an allegorical sign, be it a sculpture or a poetical creation, doesn't refer to the same level of reality as the object that it designates. The stanza perhaps aims at asserting the spiritual essence of the god as well as of the king, reverting again to the contrast between material and conceptual levels. Interestingly, it stresses also the fact that the language of both poetry and visual arts doesn't belong to the sphere of logic, which is governed by the principle of contradiction.

We could even, perhaps, venture to say that *vipakṣavṛtteḥ* could refer also to the latter principle. It could mean: iii. that the 'commentary (*vṛtti*) based on opposites (*vipakṣa*)' is to be discarded with regard to the interpretation of the image. The knowledge which is to be spread is the knowledge which deals with signs and allegories and overcomes the contradictions inherent to ordinary language, as well as to ordinary experience. On this level, unlike in logic, a

<sup>29</sup> See (Brocquet, 2021), § IX.5.6, "6th stanza", pp. 245ff.

<sup>30</sup> (Monier-Williams, 1899), p. 973.



*Figure 67:* Gaṅgādharamūrti, Kailāsanātha temple, Kāñcīpuram, shrine of the enclosure, first quarter of the 8th c.





visible and concrete representation may point at an invisible reality like the god, and may embody at the same time a living man, the king.

The eighth stanza opposes the ‘material form’ (*bhautikī mūrtiḥ*) and the ‘glorious’ one (*kīrtimayī*), relating them both to Satyasandha, generally identified as the Pallava king, since it is one of his well-known *birudas*, engraved on the Tiruccirāppallī temple itself. The stanza seems thus to highlight the complementarity between the epigraphical poem and the material image, in consistency with the parallel between conceptual and tangible reality that runs through the poem. *Kīrtimayī* refers primarily to the inscription which celebrates Satyasandha; let us recall that the word *kīrti* comes from *kīrt* (‘to celebrate’, ‘to speak’), which also gave the name *kīrtana*, used sometimes for ‘temple.’ Conversely, *bhautikī* is more closely related to the sculpture itself. Nevertheless, both the effigy and the inscription share these qualities; there is a certain degree of materiality in the inscription, although the poetical language is clearly characterised by its *kīrtimayin* aspect, its power to praise and celebrate. But the image, although basically a mere stone artefact, a *bhautikī mūrtiḥ*, deals also with celebration and praise. I would suggest, then, this translation:

śilākṣareṇa janitā satyasandhasya bhautikī |  
mūrtiḥ kīrtimayī cāsyā kṛtā tenaiva śāśvatī || 8<sup>31</sup>

- 8 With words engraved in stone a material form of Satyasandha has been produced, which is also a praise (*kīrtimayī*), and thus it has been made eternal.<sup>32</sup>

At first reading, this stanza seems obscure, because we tend to dissociate the carved figure and the inscription; how can an image be produced by an inscription? But the stanza stresses the close relationship between both, between sculpture and poetry: thanks to the inscription, the image belongs both to the material and the conceptual / verbal levels, it will be eternal because it is made out of hard stone, and also because it is ‘made of glory,’ through the praise that accompanies it and expresses its meaning.

If we admit that Satyasandha is more clearly connected to the Pallava king than to Śiva, which seems to be the case, then the poem

<sup>31</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 140. p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. present author; cf. *ibid.*,

appears to end with a clear assertion about the identity of the image with Mahendravarman. It led several scholars to conjecture the presence of another figure in the temple, a true portrait of the king,<sup>33</sup> or another representation of Śiva.<sup>34</sup> According to M. LOCKWOOD<sup>35</sup> and S. BROCQUET,<sup>36</sup> the name could refer simultaneously to both. Their interpretation complies with the fact that the whole inscription aims at suggesting the identity between the god and the king, but both scholars recognise that the name is rarely used for Śiva. That allows me to venture another assumption: the last stanza deliberately expresses openly a signification which until then had been only suggested, the identity of the king and the god, but it does so through the mediation of the image. The name Satyasandha refers, in my opinion, first and foremost to Mahendravarman.

Why such a unilateral and assertive identification, when all the preceding stanzas aimed at suggesting the identity of the king and the god? The answer may lie again in the connexion between the image and the poem. The image remains implicit, even when the poem becomes explicit: clearly we don't have here a royal portrait, but a well codified figure of Śiva Gaṅgādhara. The whole written composition thus results in the identification of the sculpture, but this identification remains ambivalent, on account precisely of the dialogue between the image and the text, and is intended to remain so: the poem asserts what the carved effigy seems to negate. The sculpture obscures the final revelation of the poem, but the interplay between both reaches then its peak, as it points to the veiled identity between the king and the god, stressing at the same time the link and the difference between both, as between the material and the conceptual / verbal levels, the stone representation and the poem.

Lastly, a few remarks may be made about the name Satyasandha. Though its primary meaning is 'true to his promises,' one cannot but notice that the compound involves the concept of truth, exactitude (*satya*), a key notion concerning the image and its accompanying inscription, as well as the idea of 'connexion' (*sandha*), which seems equally significant. Truth, in this context, is beyond the opposites, and is essentially ambiguous; it is connected to the 'signs,' but at the same time transcends them. The *biruda* chosen

<sup>33</sup> (Hultsch, 1892), p. 58; p. 59, n. 5.

<sup>35</sup> (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001), p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> (Srinivasan, 1964), p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. (Brocquet, 2021).

Figure 68: Kṛṣṇa supporting the Govardhana mount, Mahābalipuram, 7th c.



© 2007 Ilya MAUTER. After: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krishna\\_lifting\\_Govardhan\\_Hill\\_\(Bas\\_relief\\_in\\_Mahabalipuram\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krishna_lifting_Govardhan_Hill_(Bas_relief_in_Mahabalipuram).JPG) Licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

to designate Mahendravarman is particularly revealing in this respect, as it combines two words which refer to the main ideas underlying the poem. That the king is 'connected to truth' could mean that he understands the truth contained in the 'signs,' but the *biruda* seems also to allude to the very nature of the poetical or visual language as a connecting process, suggested by the whole poem. Like the image, the king echoes the god, but remains distinct from him. In the mirror effect, which runs throughout the inscription, everything becomes part of a network of signs, of a language that aims at uniting elements which at first would seem contradictory, while pointing at a higher level of reality: heaven and earth, god and king, conceptual notions and material reality, verbal expression and image.

### XVIII.3 GAṄGĀDHARA

The Lalitāṅkura cave's inscription allows art historians to claim with more confidence the allegorical aspect that many divine *mūrtis* probably assumed in the eyes of the temples' patrons.<sup>37</sup> That most of the divine icons referred to the king, had, however, always been obvious to many scholars of Indian art, who have been interpreting, for instance, the Udayagiri Viṣṇu Varāha as an allegory of the king without referring necessarily to an inscription.<sup>38</sup> The very fact that the divine boar 'carries the earth,' and thus directly translates the concept of Indian royalty, best expressed in the compound *pr̥thivīdhara*, would have prompted this interpretation. In this respect, the interplay between the image and the epigraph of Tiruccirāppaḷi does not basically transform our perception of Hindu temple sculptures, but strengthens and legitimates a trend of investigation that has existed in Indian art history for quite some time. This inscription confirms, for instance, the interpretation of Gaṅgādharamūrti as a figure of the royal consecration.<sup>39</sup> That this is one of the primary significances of the image accounts most probably for its importance in Pallava art. It explains partly why it was the only form of Śiva represented in the Ādivarāha cave of Mahābalipuram, and why it occupies a key position in the Kailāsanātha temple

<sup>37</sup> For a synthetical view of the question, see for instance (Huntington, 1994). pp. 46–55, for a historiography of the subject from 1932 to 2009.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance (Willis, 2009), <sup>39</sup> Cf. (Schmid, 2006), p. 501.



of Kāñcīpuram, where it is represented in the central western niche of the main sanctuary.<sup>40</sup>

The inscription may also throw light on certain particulars of the relief: why, for instance, choose to represent the underworld dog —convincingly identified by M. ADICÉAM<sup>41</sup> as the guardian of the subterranean worlds which the Gaṅgā waters will ultimately reach— when it is hardly mentioned in the Puranic and Epic accounts of the myth? Why, conversely, omit the character which plays such an important part in them, Bhagīratha? If we bear in mind that the main significance of Gaṅgādhara stressed in the inscription is the process of mediation he assumes, like the king, between heaven and earth, the upper and the lower spheres, we could say that the relief highlights the central position of Śiva / the king representing symmetrically on both sides two symbolical figures of heaven and earth: the celestial river and the underworld dog. Of course, an underworld dog would be expected to be represented at the bottom of the image rather than at the top of it, but then the symmetry with Gaṅgā, as a symbol of heaven, would have been difficult to keep, as already stressed by V. GILLET.<sup>42</sup> Such consideration could also explain the absence of Bhagīratha, usually shown in prayer at the feet or at the side of Śiva: it was perhaps in order to enhance the particular meaning on which the parallel between the king and the god was based, that the sculpture focused exclusively on Gaṅgādhara's figure. Similarly, Pārvatī's presence would have obscured that meaning rather than highlighted it.

In Mahābalipuram as well, the two representations of Gaṅgādhara, in the Ādivarāha cave and on the Dharmarājaratha, omit both Bhagīratha and Pārvatī, and seem to relate in this respect to the Lalitānkura cave's iconography. The Dharmarāja's image's posture is closer to the Tiruccirāppallī Gaṅgādhara with its bent knee, and may recall the dynamic posture of Varāha, while the effigy in the Ādivarāha cave reminds us of the Elephanta Śiva, and bears no resemblance with the Varāha of the adjacent Varāha cave.

<sup>40</sup> On the placement of Gaṅgādhara in Pallava temples and its meaning, cf. (Gillet, 2010), pp. 249–72.

<sup>41</sup> (Adicéam, 1976), p. 106; p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. (Gillet, 2010), pp. 260–4.



XVIII.4 EPIGRAPHICAL POETRY AND SCULPTURE: BORROWINGS  
AND INNOVATIONS

What is more surprising is the discrepancy between Śiva's dynamic posture and the stress laid in the poem on the epithet *sthānu*: a rigid stance like the one featured in the Cālukya Rāvaṇa Phaḍi cave of Aihole (Fig. 65, p. 242) would have better corresponded to that adjective. The posture of Gaṅgādhara was new and unusual with respect to the reliefs carved earlier in Elephanta (Fig. 64, p. 240) and Aihole, to which it most probably owed certain characteristics while introducing different ones. This brings us to another aspect of the parallel between sculpture and epigraphical poetry which pertains to their development. It is well known that the Indian dynasties often borrowed from each other their references and similes in their inscriptions, and in the field of visual arts, we witness a similar process. I will first recall a few examples of these borrowings in epigraphy before returning to the images.

The mention of the river Kāvērī in Mahendravarman's inscription as the beloved of the Pallava king, jealously watched over, echoes her personification as a woman whose faithfulness cannot be relied upon in a verse of the fourth canto of the *Raghuvamśa*, dedicated to the *digvijaya*:

sa sainya-paribhogena gaja-dāna-sugandhinā |  
kāvērīṃ saritāṃ patyuh śaṅkanīyām ivākarot || 45<sup>43</sup>

45 Since the soldiers enjoyed themselves in her waters, which then bore the fragrance of the ichor of elephants, he made the river Kāvērī an object of suspicion to the lord of rivers (the Ocean).<sup>44</sup>

The famous *praśasti* of Pulakeśin in the Meguti temple in Aihole (634/635) uses the same image, as stressed by KIELHORN<sup>45</sup>:

kāvērī dṛta-śapharī-vilola-netrā colānāṃ sapadi jayodyatasya yasya |  
praścyotan-mada-gaja-setu-ruddha-nīrā saṃsparśaṃ pariharati sma  
ratna-raśeḥ || 30<sup>46</sup>

30 When straightway he strove to conquer the Coḷas, the Kāvērī, who has the darting carps for her tremulous eyes, had her current obstructed by the causeway formed by his elephants whose ruiting juice was dripping down, and avoided the contact with the Ocean.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> (Nandargikar, 1971), p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> (Kielhorn, 1900–1), p. 11, n. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Trans. present author.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

It is quite possible that while taking his metaphor from the *Raghuvaṃśa*, as first highlighted by KIELHORN, the author of the Meguti inscription praising Pulakeśin II, notably for his victory over the Pallavas, might have had in mind the inscription of Mahendravarman in the Lalitānkura cave.

We can notice in particular this kind of borrowing between the 5th and the 7th centuries in the Deccan. However their authors seem to have been usually careful not to reproduce exactly the inscriptions of other dynasties. For instance the Kalacuris, a dynasty who reigned over part of the Deccan, and perhaps commissioned the Elephanta cave, and which Pulakesin II claims to have subdued in the Meguti *praśasti*, took from the Guptas the allusion to the four oceans and to the four Lokapālas, which they inserted into a new text, as we can see in the two following examples:

(samudraguptasya) [sar]va-rāj[o]chch[e]tthuḥ pṛthivyām apratirathasya  
catur-udadhi-salilāsvādita-yaśaso dhanada-varuṇendrāntaka-sa[masya]  
kṛtānta-paraśoḥ ... (Bhitari Skandagupta inscription)<sup>48</sup>

Samudragupta ... whose fame was tasted by the waters of the four oceans;  
who was equal to Dhanada and Varuṇa and Indra and Antaka; who was  
the very axe of Kṛtānta ...<sup>49</sup>

(sankaragaṇaḥ) ... pṛthivyām apratirathas catur-udadhi-salilāsvādita-  
yaśā dhanada-varuṇendrāntaka-sama-prabhāvaḥ (Abhona plates of  
Śaṅkaragaṇa the 1st, dated 597)<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, the Cālukyas borrowed from the Kadambas the initial invocation to the Mātṛkās which one finds in all their inscriptions, but they added Varāha, which they claimed also as their tutelary god.

Turning back to the Descent of the Gaṅgā, we notice that it is alluded to in several Pallava inscriptions, but seems absent from early Cālukya epigraphy. It appears at the beginning of the Kāñcīpuram Rājasiṃheśvara temple (today called Kailāsanātha) inscription:

- [1] ... tvaj-jaṭābhīr nīlatvam kaṇṭha-dhamnā phaṇa-maṇi-kiraṇaiḥ śoṇimā-  
nan dadhānā [ | ]  
niryānti sthānu-ratnāt tri-bhūvana-sarasī-pūraṇī vaḥ puṇitā(t) ... [ | ]<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> (Fleet, 1888b), p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> (Mirashi, 1955), ln 10, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> (Hultzsich, 1890a), p. 12.

May (Gaṅgā) purify you! – she who springs from the jewel (on the head) of Sthānu, appearing ... black by the splendour of (his) neck and red by the rays of the gems of the hoods (of his snakes), who fills the lake of the three worlds ...<sup>52</sup>

The Kailāsanātha inscription is somehow completed by the Kasakudi plates of Nandivarman:

tataḥ prabhṛty-akhaṇḍa-kala-bhuvana-maṇḍalātmasāt-karaṇākhaṇḍita-vikrama-paraḥ paripālita-sakala-varṇāśrama-vyavasthā-viśeṣa[h] prabhaviṣṇuḥ viṣṇor aṃśāvatāra iva vaṃśāvatāra[h] pallavānān nikhila-bhuvana-pāvanatayā gaṅgāvatāra iva ca nirmalas samavartata [ | ]<sup>53</sup>

- 19 From him descended the powerful, spotless race of the Pallavas, which resembled a partial incarnation of Vishnu, as it displayed unbroken courage in conquering the circle of the world with all its parts, (and) as it enforced the special rules of all castes and orders, and which resembled the descent of the Gaṅgā (*on earth*), as it purified the whole world.<sup>54</sup>

Thanks to the Kasakudi inscription we understand that the allusion to the various colours (*varṇa*) of the Gaṅgā in the Rājasimheśvara inscription is not just a visual observation: *varṇa* means here also caste, and the descent of the Gaṅgā legitimises the social order which the king ensures. The emphasis is laid upon the word *avatāra*, repeated thrice: what is important is the divine origin of the Gaṅgā, the fact that she comes from heaven down to earth in order to secure its sanctity, just like an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu or like the divine Pallava lineage. Like the king or Viṣṇu's incarnation, her descent links heaven and earth, and becomes a metaphor of the power's verticality, of its transcendent origin.

In the Allahabad *praśasti* of Samudragupta, the glory (*yaśas*) of the king is praised through two images that follow each other in lines 29 and 30. The first one is the column itself which is compared to the raised arm of the earth, proclaiming the glory of the emperor.

... samudraguptasya sarva-prthivī-vijaya-janitodaya-vyāpta-nikhilāvani-talām kīrtim itas tridaśa-pati-bhavana-gamanāvāpta-lalita-sukha-vicaraṇām ācakṣāṇa iva bhuvo bāhur ayam ucchritaḥ stambhaḥ [ln. 29]<sup>55</sup>

- ln. 29 This lofty column (*is*) as it were an arm of the earth, proclaiming the fame (*of Samudragupta*) –which, having pervaded the entire surface of

<sup>52</sup> (Hultzsch, 1890a), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 355 (19).

<sup>53</sup> (Hultzsch, 1895), pp. 347–8 lns

<sup>55</sup> (Fleet, 1888a), pp. 8–9 ln. 29.

the earth with (*its*) development that was caused by its conquest of the whole world (*has departed*) hence and now experiences the sweet happiness attained by (*his*) having gone to the abode of Indra the lord of the gods— of the Mahārājādhirāja, the glorious ...<sup>56</sup>

The column appears here almost like a funeral monument, which points to heaven where the glory of the dead king has reached after his death. The following metaphor moves then in the opposite direction, coming back to earth, as the glory of the king is compared to the descent of the Gaṅgā, which flows down from the head of Śiva:

(samudraguptasya) yasya pradāna-bhuja-vikrama-prāsama-śāstra-vāk-yodayair upary-upari-sañcayocchritam aneka-mārgam yaśaḥ bhuvana-trayam paśupater-jaṭāntar-guhā-nirodha-parimokṣa-śīghram iva gaṅgam payaḥ || [ln. 30]<sup>57</sup>

ln. 30

(Samudragupta) whose fame —ever heaped up higher and higher by the development of (*his*) liberality and prowess of arm and composure and (*study of*) the precepts of the scriptures— travelling by many paths, purifies the three worlds, as if it were the pale yellow water of Gaṅgā, flowing quickly on being liberated from confinement in the thickets of the matted hair of Paśupati.<sup>58</sup>

We may notice that the allusion to the arm of the king echoes that of the Earth's arm in the preceding *śloka*.

What particular light do these inscriptions throw on the images? The Kasakudi inscription draws a parallel between the descent of the Gaṅgā and the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu which can be also traced, as I will try to show, in the Tiruccirāppaḷi representation of Gaṅgādhara, while the Gupta inscription introduces a motif that can be found in sculpture: the raised arm pointing to the sky, looking like a column, and proclaiming the prowess of the king.

Of course we will never know whether Mahendravarman Pallava had ever heard about the Allahabad *praśasti*, although the surmise may not be completely far-fetched. But it is obvious that the various authors of the *kāvya* inscriptions shared a common repertory of images and metaphors, which they liked to combine in their own individual way, without modifying their fundamental significances. In the Allahabad inscription, it is the column which is compared

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16 ln. 29.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16 ln. 30.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9 ln. 30.

to the raised arm of the earth pointing to the sky, while we witness a somewhat reverse process in sculpture. The upright figures of Gaṅgādhara or Varāha, reaching for the sky, implicitly refer to a column connecting earth to heaven, as suggested by the Tirucirāppaḷḷi inscription, but also, concerning Varāha, by the Eran inscription of Toramāna:

jayati dharany-uddharāṇe ghana-ghoṇa-ghāta-ghūrṇita-mahīddhrah  
devo varāha-mūrtis trailokya-mahā-grha-stambhaḥ<sup>59</sup>

Victorious is the Lord in the form of Varāha!

Who in the act of lifting up the earth caused the mountains to tremble  
with the blows of his hard snout,

Who is the supporting pillar for the great house that is the three worlds.<sup>60</sup>

According to a rather similar process of alternate borrowings and innovations, the Pallava Gaṅgādhara recalled the two earlier examples of Elephanta (Fig. 64, p. 240) and Aihole (Rāvaṇa Phaḍi cave, Fig. 65, p. 242), but introduced a few changes. Although at Elephanta, and especially Aihole, the emphasis was laid on the verticality and the immobility of Śiva, in accordance with the term *sthānu* used in the Lalitāṅkura cave's inscription, as in the Kasakudi plates, the images also gave a certain importance to the subsidiary theme of Pārvatī's jealousy, especially in Elephanta, where Pārvatī, as stressed for the first time by GOPINATHA RAO,<sup>61</sup> moves away from Śiva. The allusion to Pārvatī's jealousy appears more clearly when one realises that the sculpture is in both monuments symmetrically opposed to Ardhanārīśvara, the androgyne form of Śiva that embodies the perfect harmony of the divine couple. In the Tirucirāppaḷḷi relief,<sup>62</sup> the goddess Pārvatī has disappeared. As shown earlier, the main significance here highlighted is the fact that Śiva, and with him the king, are mediators between heaven and earth.

Like a pillar that connects both, they are *sthānu*, but in contrast with the epithet *Sthānu* used in the inscriptions, the posture is not as rigid and frontal as in Elephanta and Aihole, it is rather dynamic, and actually recalls the *ālīḍha* posture often used for the Varāha *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in Cālukya sculpture (Fig. 66, p. 244). Most of the Pallava Gaṅgādharas dated in the 8th century adopted later

<sup>59</sup> (Fleet, 1888c), p. 159.

p. 317.

<sup>60</sup> (Willis, 2009), p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> See (Brocquet, 2021), Fig. 26,

<sup>61</sup> (Gopinatha Rao, 1914–16), II, I, p. 226.



the same stance, from the Mahābalipuram Dharmarājaratha's to the temples of Kāñcīpuram. The Tiruccirāppaḷḷi Gaṅgādhara with its bent knee could recall the dynamic posture of Varāha, as it was a sort of Śaiva substitute for it, while the relief in the Ādivarāha cave kept close to the Elephanta Śiva, because it was not meant to replace Varāha, but to accompany him, since the main image of the temple where it stood was devoted to that form of Viṣṇu. The slight innovation introduced in the iconography of the Tiruccirāppaḷḷi Gaṅgādhara was thus in keeping with the parallel drawn by the Kasakudi inscription between the descent of the Gaṅgā and an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, but also with the theme of the cosmic pillar which appeared equally in the Eran epigraphical description of Varāha and in the Tiruccirāppaḷḷi inscription, although in the latter the theme was however not openly expressed but suggested. The two figures follow a reverse direction: while Varāha, like a pillar, bore the earth and raised it out of the primeval waters, Gaṅgādhara let the celestial waters of the Gaṅgā flow on earth.

We notice also that for the first time Śiva's arm is raised, while both hands were on the same level on the earlier images (Figures 64 & 65). In the Pallava sculptures of the 8th century, the movement will become more and more assertive, and in some, the arm is almost vertical (Fig. 67, p. 248), as if it were a column, recalling the metaphor used in the Allahabad *praśasti*. The change was not insignificant: just as the Tiruccirāppaḷḷi Śiva's posture could recall the attitude of the Viṣṇu *avatāra*, the raised arm could refer to the icon of Kṛṣṇa supporting the Govardhana mount (Fig. 68, p. 251), which in its Mahābalipuram version becomes nearly vertical.

The representation of Gaṅgādhara was, in a way, the equivalent in Śaiva iconography of Varāha or Kṛṣṇa.<sup>63</sup> Varāha rescued the earth from the ocean, a metaphor for the threat of a flood; Kṛṣṇa held it up, in order to protect the *gopas* from the heavy rains caused by Indra; Gaṅgādhara checked the violence of the heavenly river; so that one can say that the three gods, each in his own way, shared the common role of controlling the waters. The raised arm

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<sup>63</sup> About the connexion between Kṛṣṇa Govardhanadhara and Gaṅgādhara in relation to the theme of the royal consecration, see (Schmid, 2006), pp. 497–9. ASHER was one of the first to emphasise the symbolical complementarity between the two great reliefs of Mahābalipuram representing Kṛṣṇa Govardhanadhara and the fall of the Gaṅgā, with respect to the control of the water: (Asher, 1983), pp. 65–6.

of Gaṅgādhara, and of Kṛṣṇa Govardhana, echoed the gesture of the *Cakravartin* in the Amarāvātī reliefs, which brings a shower of gold coins.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, it could recall the Kuṣāna sculptures of Nāga kings, copied in some of the Balarāma effigies,<sup>65</sup> which was probably meant to call the rain, if we rely on their analogy with the Cakravartin's iconography, as suggested by VOGEL in his pioneering work on the art of Mathurā.<sup>66</sup> But Gaṅgādhara encompasses a wider range of meanings than each of these mythological figures, since he at the same time provides water to the Earth and protects her from the violent flood that the direct fall of the Gaṅgā would have caused.

We may surmise that the Gaṅgādhara of Tiruccirāppallī was most probably responding to the Varāha that the Cālukya claimed as their tutelary god and which they had represented several times in their monuments, particularly in Bādāmī, in cave 3, dated by its inscription from 578. In Mahābalipuram, Gaṅgādhara is significantly the only Śaiva image inserted in the Vaiṣṇava iconographic program of the Ādivarāha cave,<sup>67</sup> a temple dedicated to Varāha,<sup>68</sup> whom the Pallava had most probably chosen to favour, on account of their victory over the Cālukyas. Furthermore, the art historian ASHER argued convincingly that the choice of Varāha by the Cālukyas might refer to the importance that this *avatāra* seems to have assumed during the Gupta period.<sup>69</sup> Actually, the Gaṅgādhara of Tiruccirāppallī occupies, in the history of South Indian art, a position somewhat similar to the Udayagiri reliefs of Anantaśayin and Varāha, which were the first great mythological Hindu cave-sculptures carved in Northern India.<sup>70</sup> The Lalitānkura cave is a much less ambitious project than Udayagiri, but one could say that it would have a sort of continuation in the impressive iconographic program of Mahābalipuram, which could compete with the Udayagiri program, and would ultimately surpass it.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> (Knox, 1992), p. 122. For image, see *ibid.*, pl. 62, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> For an image, see, for instance, the sculpture of the Norton Simon Museum: <https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/F.1975.15.1.S> See also (Schmid, 2010), fig. 18, p. 585.

<sup>66</sup> (Vogel, 1930), p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. (Schmid, 2006), pp. 499–501.

<sup>68</sup> (Srinivasan, 1964), pp. 166–8.

<sup>69</sup> (Asher, 1983), p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> On the relationship of these two representations, see (Willis, 2009), pp. 55–6.

<sup>71</sup> On the similarities between these two sites, a subject which still remains to be explored, see (Willis, 2004), p. 40,

## XVIII.5 CONCLUSION

Epigraphical poetry is often essential in providing the metaphorical meaning of the myths represented in visual arts. But, as we tried to show here, it may also explain the particular rendering of the myths which was favoured in the various reliefs and the aspects on which they chose to focus. We may again refer here to the passage from the Allahabad Samudragupta's inscription already mentioned; it sheds light on the significance of the specific gesture made by Śiva, which reinforces and reduplicates the general meaning of Gaṅgādhara. The raised arm of the god is an *axis mundi*, as is the entire figure. Just like the different elements of Mahendravarman's poem, the various particulars of the sculpture mirror each other. In a comparable way, we could say that the diverse *mūrtis* of Gupta, Cālukya, Kalacuri and Pallava art echo each other, just like the *praśastis* of the sovereigns under whose reign they were conceived. The Tiruccirāppaḷḷi inscription prompts us to look at images as elements of a common language shared by visual arts and by epigraphical poetry, both of which are best understood in relation to each other.

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