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Cover details:

(Front): "Maharana Jagat Singh II bathing with his nobles at Jagnivas". Attributed to Jainam, c. 1746-50, Udaipur. *Ganache on paper*, 46.9 × 81.3 cm. (Photos: San Diego Museum of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection, 1990: 624, <http://usmivm.thesandiegoartmuseum.org>.)

(Back) *Eripata Nāgarāja, Bharhut, 2nd century BCE*, courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies.



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The Long Arc of South Asian Art

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The Long Arc of South Asian Art

Essays in Honour of Vidya Dehejia



EDITED BY ANNAPURNA GARIMELLA

The long arc of art historical enquiry in the Indian subcontinent spans several centuries, and virtually all the arts, from temple architecture and sculpture to the striking of coins.

The 22 essays in this volume, a tribute to the pioneering work of Vidya Dehejia, cover ancient Buddhist architecture, temple design and construction, Rajput and Mughal paintings and manuscripts, colonial-era photography, ornament, and museology.

Each author traverses or furthers a field that Dehejia herself may have opened up for examination, moving beyond contemporary conceptual questions in art history and offering fascinating insights into, for example, Indo-Roman trade and the Dakshinapatha, or the Indic carvings of Quanzhou; the transformation of the body through ritual discipline, or physical attribution; colonial representations of the "native subject" and what they reveal about the colonising project. The volume's eclecticism extends to questions of materiality and agency; the politics and aesthetics of archaeological restoration; and the forming of divinity by human makers.

The contributors, thus, not only refer to Dehejia's vast art historical canvas, they situate their rich archival research and fieldwork such as to contribute to the very framing of conceptual issues that she raised; and to current scholarship in the field.

The Representation of a Mythical Monarch in Early Buddhist Andhra¹

KALYANI MADHURA RAMACHANDRAN

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE excavated at Phanigiri constitutes a key discovery in the history of early Buddhist art. Situated on a hill in the northern reaches of the fertile delta formed by the Krishna and Godavari river systems, the site was a flourishing centre of Buddhist activity from at least the 1st to the 4th century CE. Although Phanigiri was known in the mid-20th century, excavations conducted over the last two decades have revealed an extensive monastic complex comprising a range of structures densely packed on the flat hilltop. These include a heavily restored mahāstūpa (great burial mound), smaller votive stūpas, several viharas (monastic residences), apsidal caityaḡṛhas (prayer halls), pillared mandapas (congregation halls), and a refectory. There is no doubt that ongoing excavations will yield even more archaeological evidence in time.

The material unearthed at Phanigiri so far reflects “a new and vigorous plastic idiom within the Andhra style.”² The sculptural finds are comparable in type to evidence from major sites in the region such as Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, and Kanaganahalli, but their visual programme is distinctive. The site has also yielded architectural elements which have never been seen in Andhra before. This includes post-and-lintel toraṇas (gateways) with complex narrative scenes represented on the architraves. In addition, the remains of an octagonal pillar bearing a bilingual donative inscription furthers our understanding of the development of Buddhism in Andhra. The dated inscription expands the chronology of the site and provides rare evidence of the later period of early Buddhism in the subcontinent.

At the time Prof. Dehejia and I visited the site in July 2019, there was limited art historical analysis of Phanigiri.³ Scholarship on the site mainly comprised archaeological reports and epigraphic studies.⁴ Recent and forthcoming publications contribute to a growing body of art historical engagement with the excavated material which focus on its unique visual elements.⁵ This short

essay aims to situate the evidence from Phanigiri within the context of artistic development in Andhra. It will do so by identifying a figure on site as the Māndhātār cakravartin, a mythical monarch who has long been depicted in the art of the region.

Phanigiri or “serpent hill” is named after the distinctive shape of the granite rock on which the monastic complex is built. This inland site is located on the left bank of the Aleru river which connects the lower Krishna and the mid-Godavari river valleys, both of which are dotted with pre-existing early historic sites. The presence of megalithic burials in the vicinity suggests that the region around Phanigiri was heavily populated prior to the establishment of the Buddhist monastery there. It is conceivable that the long history of habitation in the region determined the choice to construct a monastery in this setting.

The only extant written record that provides a date for monastic activity at Phanigiri is an epigraphical poem in ten lines carved on an octagonal pillar on site.⁶ The inscription records a chief physician’s sponsorship of the free-standing pillar on which it is carved as well as the donation of a dharmacakra (wheel of the law) by a general. As depicted in carved reliefs on site, the dharmacakra would have originally crowned the pillar but it does not survive today.

The inscription has major implications for the study of early Buddhist art—it provides a new date for the rule of the last known Ikshvaku king, Rudrapuruṣadatta. A translation of the introduction reads,

Success! In the eighteenth year, in the third fortnight of winter, on the third day/
the chief physician of King Śrī-Rudrapuruṣadatta of well-known blazing fame
carried out this erection of a Dharma wheel.⁷

Previous analysis based on inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda and Gurzala had variously assigned the possible end of the king’s rule to well before the eighteenth regnal year as recorded at Phanigiri.⁸ By mentioning a 4th century CE date, the inscription revises and lengthens the chronology of the site. Since there is little information about the Ikshvaku dynasty following the reign of Rudrapuruṣadatta, this evidence successfully extends the period in which Buddhism is known to have flourished in Andhra.

The Phanigiri inscription not only provides important chronological information but also reflects a changing cultural milieu. The extended chronology of the site coincides with the rise of Sanskrit as the dominant mode of public political expression.⁹ While the inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda and Gurzala referenced above are written in Prakrit, the Phanigiri inscription is written in a combination of Prakrit and Sanskrit using an elongated script typical of the Ikshvaku period. The first part of this inscription, which includes the date, is inscribed in Sanskrit while the latter is in Prakrit. The bilingual nature of the inscription mirrors the growing use of Sanskrit in the sphere



Fig. 1: A collection of limestone sculptures in the sunken courtyard. (Photo: Catherine Becker, 2003; courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh.)

of elite self-representation at the time. The inscription was excavated in a courtyard alongside an exceptional collection of limestone sculptures (Fig. 1). It is rare to find narrative reliefs such as these carved on either side of toraṇa architraves. Additionally, a large free-standing torso excavated in this area, tentatively called a princely figure, is unparalleled in the art of Andhra.

The visual programme of the site is such that the southern section is on a higher elevation and more sculpturally rich than the north. A mahāstūpa, the key architectural feature of any Buddhist monastic complex, is located on a brick platform on the southern edge. Measuring 18 metres in diameter, it is located on the highest point of the hill and is abutted by seven smaller votive stūpas. Given its elevated status and position, the mahāstūpa is visible from the village below. While visitors today ascend the eastern slope and walk through an entrance located at the northern end of the site, the mahāstūpa may have been directly accessible from the southern slope. This would have allowed laypeople to circumambulate it while also limiting their access to the structures in its immediate vicinity. To the north of the mahāstūpa is the primary residential area of the complex, comprising pillared halls and monastic cells which are constructed on a lower elevation.



Fig. 2: A limestone panel with railing pattern and carved medallions bordering the courtyard. (Photo: Catherine Becker, 2003; courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh.)

The central region between the public stūpa in the south and the private residences in the north is a sunken courtyard bordered by carved panels. As mentioned previously, it is here that the octagonal pillar inscription and the majority of sculptural material have been found. This region is connected to the public structures located on the north-western elevation, including two apsidal caityagrhas, by means of a staircase with ornate balustrades. The courtyard would likely have seen an interaction between the public and private activities of the complex. Bordering the space are rectangular panels carved with a distinctive railing pattern on either side (Fig. 2). The panels divide the courtyard and, in this respect, are unlike other such examples from Andhra.

The sculptural material found in this intermediate region is of interest. Interspersed within the railing pattern of the panels are carved roundels bearing reliefs. One such roundel is located on a railing that faces inward and measures about 24 inches in diameter. It would have been visible at eye level to a visitor entering the courtyard, thus marking a transition from the outside world to the interior of the monastic complex.

The relief depicts a centrally positioned, frontal facing, standing male figure (Fig. 3). The bare-chested torso is elegantly carved with subtle delineations of mass, muscle, and movement, as the body sways gently to the right. The figure's left hand is clenched against his chest while his right arm



Fig. 3: Cakravartin flanked by saptaratnās at Phanigiri. (Photo: Kalyani Madhura Ramachandran, 2019; courtesy of the Department of Heritage, Government of Telangana.)

is raised to the sky. The visible fullness of the figure's stomach, which rests comfortably over ornamental waistbands, complete with thick tassels, is in contrast to the narrow upper torso and broad shoulders. The lower garment wraps tightly around the legs and is tucked into the waistbands, from where it gathers in a serpentine fashion and falls dramatically to the floor. Flanking this figure are a number of characters and symbols. From the top, clockwise, are a gem located on a pillar, a lotus medallion, an elephant, a wheel, a horse, and a female figure. From the top, anti-clockwise, are a conch shell, and five male figures. Of these, four are in monk's robes, and the fifth, who is closest to the central figure, is dressed in an elaborate turban and is clutching a manuscript.

On the basis of the figure's gesture and the subsidiary elements surrounding him, he may be identified as a cakravartin, a mythical "wheel-turning emperor" or "universal monarch".¹⁰ A cakravartin is said to possess 32 mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa (signs of a Great Man). It is believed that when Prince Siddhārtha, the future Buddha, was born with these distinguishing marks, seers predicted that he would either become a cakravartin if he remained in the world of men or a Buddha if he renounced it.

The term cakravartin appears often in the Buddhist Pali canon.¹¹ It was also known in the early Brahmanical context as supported by texts such as the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*. The Buddhist ideal differed from its Brahmanical

counterpart in that it was not associated with cosmic creativity. Instead, it was tied to the *saptaratnās* (seven jewels), which were referents to ideal and ethical kingship.¹² These seven jewels were the *cakra* (wheel), *gaja* (elephant), *aśva* (horse), *maṇi* (wish-granting gem), *strī* (woman), *grhapati* (citizen householder), and the *nāyaka* (counsellor). The conceptualisation of the *saptaratnās* developed in the Buddhist tradition and is distinct from royal insignia. The *cakravartin* is said to acquire these jewels not by the performance of Vedic sacrifices but rather through the practice of *dhamma* (doctrine).

The pictorial representation of the *cakravartin* with his *saptaratnās* originates in early Buddhist art and proliferated widely in early Andhra. This region saw the vigorous construction of Buddhist sites between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE. Images of *cakravartins* began to be deliberately included in the carved narratives at these sites and sometimes even replaced depictions of key episodes in the life of the Buddha. For instance, three scenes of the Great Departure episode at Amaravati were replaced with such images.¹³

A *cakravartin* figure from the early Amaravati school found at Vemavaram



Fig. 4: Amaravati school *cakravartin*. (Photo: Musée National des Arts Asiatiques–Guimet.)

(ca. 1st century CE), currently in the permanent collection of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet in Paris, resembles the Phanigiri example (Fig. 4).¹⁴ The image is depicted on a drum slab measuring about 44" in height. The cakravartin is frontal facing, dressed in ornate earrings and heavy garment, with his left hand clenched against his chest and right arm raised to the sky. Due to damage, not all the *saptaratnās* survive today. To the right is a tall column, which would have been depicted surmounted by a gem, and a minister at whose feet the tip of an elephant's ear is just about visible. To the left is a wheel atop a pillar encircled by a *vedika* (railing), a minister paying respect in *anjali* *mudrā* (gesture of adoration), and a heavily harnessed horse. At the extreme left of the broken panel is a female figure standing on a *makara* (pan-Indic sea creature) and holding the branch of a tree. The central cakravartin figure is rendered in a flat style that is common to the depiction of such scenes in early Andhra.

The Amaravati-school cakravartin is reminiscent of an older and more celebrated example from Jaggayyapeta (ca. 150-100 BCE) which today



Fig. 5: Jaggayyapeta cakravartin. (Photo: Akg-images.)

is in the collection of the Government Museum in Chennai (Fig. 5).¹⁵ The figure is depicted on a slab from the enclosing wall of the stūpa.¹⁶ Similar to the Amaravati-school cakravartin but unlike the Phanigiri example, the Jaggayyapeta cakravartin is shown standing on a cushion. He is also depicted under a parasol which marks his rank. The figure is characteristically frontal facing, embellished with heavy jewellery, dressed in a garment tied elaborately at the waist, and is flanked by saptaratnās. To the right is a pair of male figures paying their respects while a heavily adorned woman is depicted on the left. On either side of the figure's feet are a decorated elephant and a harnessed horse that face him. In addition to the flat and shallow rendering that is typical of these early scenes, the body of the Jaggayyapeta cakravartin is exaggeratedly angular and attenuated.

A key characteristic of this example is the fact that the figure's right arm is raised towards a cluster of clouds from where he summons the rain of square punch-marked coins.¹⁷ The interest in this type of imagery highlights not only "the king's divine status, but also the mythical character of money".¹⁸ There exist no known depictions of cakravartin figures on coinage but the inclusion of coins in cakravartin imagery demonstrates an association of the site with specific stories and notions of kingship.

The rain-summoning gesture confirms the identity of the figure as Māndhātara, a cakravartin long depicted in the art of early Buddhist Andhra. The *Māndhātara jātaka* tells the story of the protagonist who was born a cakravartin, along with his saptaratnās, and could summon a shower of coins for the prosperity of all. Through his moral strength, Māndhātara conquered the world and the gods pledged their allegiance to him. When he arrived at the Trāyastriṃśa heavens, fighting the nāga who attempted to stop his passage, Indra bequeathed half his seat and realm to him.¹⁹ Following a period of peace, at which time he preached a sermon to his subjects, Māndhātara questioned why he was sharing the kingdom alongside Indra. At that moment, he fell from the heavens, became sick, and died. This tale warned against greed and was depicted widely in the art of early Andhra.²⁰ It served a didactic function rather than simply a decorative one.

The Phanigiri cakravartin may be identified as Māndhātara. The figure is carved in higher relief than the examples from the early Amaravati school and Jaggayyapeta but is rendered in a typical monoscenic mode.²¹ On either side of the cakravartin's raised right arm are a shankha (conch shell) and padma (lotus) from within which a cascade of round coins is depicted falling to the earth. This is a characteristic feature of Māndhātara's rain-summoning gesture. This detail not only establishes the identity of the main figure but also points to the long history of depicting cakravartin, particularly Māndhātara, in the art of early Buddhist Andhra.

The shankha and padma symbols are visibly absent in the examples of cakravartin figures from the Amaravati school and Jaggayyapeta. They do not represent traditional Buddhist sapataratnās and so their inclusion in the Phanigiri roundel is notable. This may constitute visual evidence of the growing dominance of Brahmanism in the later period of early Buddhism as reflected in the bilingual inscription on site.

The relationship between and network of early Buddhist sites in the region circumscribed by Phanigiri, Amaravati, and Jaggayyapeta is yet to be studied. Nevertheless, it can be said that the choice to depict the Māndhātara cakravartin at Phanigiri points to the continuation of a long iconographic history in the region. The placement of the image at eye level, in a courtyard marking an intermediate space between the outside world and the interior space of the complex, clarifies its didactic rather than exclusively decorative function. While the excavated material at Phanigiri is certainly unique and perhaps localised in terms of style and visual programme, it may be better understood in relation to the historical context of artistic development in Andhra.

Prof. Vidya Dehejia and I visited Phanigiri in July 2019. I greatly valued her detailed observations as we examined material on site and in the storage. This essay is dedicated to her and is written in gratitude of her exceptional guidance and kind friendship over the years.

Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank the Department of Heritage, Telangana, for permission to visit the site and storage. I thank Siva Nagi Reddy and Mallu Naik for their company and expertise during the trip. Surjit Vikraman and driver Sabair were crucial in organising the journey. I thank Catherine Becker for allowing access to her photographs, Maud Leclair for assisting with French sources, Parul Pandya Dhar for sharing her recent publication, Shailendra Bhandare for answering questions with regard to coinage, and Naman Ahuja and Mrinalini Vasudevan for ensuring accuracy in references. My gratitude to Akira Shimada for kindly reading drafts and offering constructive comments.
- ² Peter Skilling, "New Discoveries from South India: The Life of the Buddha at Phanigiri, Andhra Pradesh", *Arts Asiatiques*, 63 (2008): p. 97.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ahmed K.M. Khan, *Phanigiri Bouddhaarama Sidhilau* (Telugu), 1950; V.V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh* (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1983); K. Munirathnam, "Rudrapurisdatta Inscription from Phanigiri", *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, 32 (2005): pp. 78-81; B. Subrahmanyam, et al., *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh (An Interim Report 2001-2007)* (Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 2008); Oskar von Hinüber, "A Second Inscription from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh): Dhammasena's Donation", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, 15 (2012): pp. 3-10; Oskar von Hinüber, "Again on the Donation Made by the Vinayadhara Dhammasena and on other Inscriptions from Phanigiri", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, 16

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- ⁵ Parul Pandya Dhar, "Piecing a Puzzle: A Unique Torāṇa from Phanigiri, Telangana", in Shrikant Ganvir, Hemant Dalavi, and Harshada Wirkud (Eds.), *Telangana Through Ages: Perspectives from Early and Medieval Periods* (Hyderabad: Department of Heritage, Telangana, 2019), pp. 48-62; Naman P. Ahuja (Ed.), *Phanigiri: Interpreting an Ancient Buddhist Site in Telangana* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2021).
- ⁶ A total of 42 inscriptions have been found at Phanigiri. See Subrahmanyam, et al., op. cit., p. 32.
- ⁷ Stefan Baums, Arlo Griffiths, Ingo Strauch, and Vincent Tournier, "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa", op. cit.: p. 371.
- ⁸ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "Gurzala Brahmi Inscription", *Epigraphia Indica*, 26 (1941-42): p. 125; S.K. Dikshit, "Gurzala Pillar Inscription of the Earliest Ikshvaku Ruler Sri-Rudrapuruṣa-datta", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 16 (1953), p. 363; Elizabeth Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), pp. 4-9; Kotra Raghunath, *The Ikṣvākus of Vijayapuri* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 2001), pp. 182-184.
- ⁹ Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology", in Jan E.M. Houben (Ed.), *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 203.
- ¹⁰ Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 163.
- ¹¹ *Mahāśudassanasutta* (Dīghanikāya XVII), *Brahmāyusutta* (Majjhimanikāya XCI), *Mahāpadānāsutta* (Dīghanikāya XIV), *Lakkhanasutta* (Dīghanikāya XXX), *Cakkavattisīhanādasutta* (Dīghanikāya XXVI), and *Cakkavattisutta* (Saṃyuttanikāya XLVI.5.2). See Monika Zin, "Māndhātā, the Universal Monarch, and the Meaning of Representations of the Cakravartin in the Amaravati School, and of the Kings on the Kanaganahalli Stūpa", in Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel (Eds.), *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond* (Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), pp. 149-150.
- ¹² Balkrishna G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 26, 1 (1966): pp. 15-22; Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 39-53; John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 44-56.
- ¹³ Akira Shimada, "Formation of Andhran Buddhist Narrative: A Preliminary Survey", in Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel (Eds.), *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond*, op. cit., p. 23.
- ¹⁴ Douglas Barrett, "Two Unpublished Sculptures from the Āndhradeśa", *Arts Asiatiques*, 3, 4 (1956): p. 291; Gilles Béguin, *L'Inde et le Monde Indianisé au Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992), p. 23; Amina Okada, *Sculptures Indiennes du Musée Guimet* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), pp. 39-41.
- ¹⁵ James Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta in the Krishna District, Madras Presidency, surveyed in 1882* (London: Trübner, 1887; reprint New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1996), p. 109; Debala Mitra, "Observations on the Buddhist Remains at Jaggayyapetta", *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, 35 (1956): p. 275; P.R. Ramachandra Rao, *Andhra Sculpture* (Hyderabad: Akshara, 1984), p. 78.

- ¹⁶ A.K. Coomaraswamy, "A Royal Gesture and Some Other Motifs", *Feestbundel Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (1929): p. 57.
- ¹⁷ Prithvi Kumar Agarwala, "The Depiction of Punch-Marked Coins in Early Indian Art", *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, 27 (1965): p. 174; James Burgess has compared the depiction of these coins to that in the roundel at Bharhut, showing the purchase of Jetavanā at Śrāvastī. See Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta*, op. cit., p. 109.
- ¹⁸ Akira Shimada, *Early Buddhist Architecture in Context: The Great Stūpa at Amarāvati (ca. 300 BCE-300 CE)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 190.
- ¹⁹ While the story appears in the Pali canon, Vidya Dehejia notes that the episode pertaining to the nāgas appears only in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. See Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), p. 169.
- ²⁰ According to Monika Zin, there are 62 representations of Māndhātār in Amaravati alone. See Zin, "Māndhātār, the Universal Monarch", op. cit., p. 149.
- ²¹ Vidya Dehejia, "On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art," *The Art Bulletin*, 72, 3 (Sept. 1990): p. 378.