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Publication Date

2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Courtly Culture and Visual Art in India:

Ramayana Reliefs on Hindu Temples of the Sixth to Eighth Century

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Julie Marie Romain

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Courtly Culture and Visual Art in India:

Ramayana Reliefs on Hindu Temples of the Sixth to Eighth Century

by

Julie Marie Romain

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Robert L. Brown, Chair

The earliest extant depictions of the *Ramayana* in Indian art are found on narrative reliefs on Hindu temples dated to the sixth to eighth century, and are located primarily in the region governed by the Early Western Chalukyas (a.k.a. Chalukyas of Badami), who ruled from circa 550-750 CE in much of the Deccan and southern Maharashtra. The sixth to eighth century is significant as the period immediately following the florescence of a shared courtly culture, and the establishment of regional dynasties across the Indian subcontinent. The political culture of the court was highly aestheticized, and heavily informed by the Sanskrit literary tradition of eulogistic inscriptions, epic poems, and dramatic performances. The Valmiki *Ramayana* was among the most popular heroic narratives; the story of Rama, an avatar of the god Vishnu, was considered a paragon of Hindu kingship. The goal of this dissertation is to understand how Rama's life was represented in literature and visual art, and what it signified for the king and members of his royal entourage. Through a comparative analysis of narrative depictions of the *Ramayana* in plays and temple reliefs dated to the sixth to eighth century, I identify a shared

visual lexicon that reflects a courtly worldview. The methodology employed in my analysis emphasizes the social history underlying the monuments in order to think about their secular meaning. This dissertation is a reconsideration of material that has primarily been studied in terms of its religious function, iconographic meaning, and stylistic attributes. Chapter 1 provides a historiography of the study of Hindu temples, and the impact of previous scholars' emphasis on the religious symbolism of the temple. My analysis of literary and art historical evidence is presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 looks at the literary evidence of aesthetic treatises and plays that informed the artists who produced the relief sculptures that are the subject of Chapter 3.

The dissertation of Julie Marie Romain is approved.

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2015

In memory of Milton and Sylvia Snyder, Peter Sifton, and Hilary Brown.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AMAI</i>	E.B. Havell. <i>Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India</i> . Delhi, 1976.
<i>AD</i>	Nandikesvara. <i>The Mirror of Gesture, Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara</i> . Translated by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Duggirala Gopalakrsna. New York, 1936.
<i>EIA</i>	Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Michael Meister, <i>Essays in Early Indian Architecture</i> . New Delhi, 1988.
<i>HIEA</i>	James Fergusson, James Burgess, and Richard Phene Spiers. <i>History of Indian and Eastern Architecture</i> . Delhi, 1967.
<i>NS</i>	Bharata-Muni. <i>The Natya Sastra: Ascribed to Bharata-Muni</i> . Translated by Manomohan Ghosh. Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1956.

NOTE TO READER ON DIACRITICS AND SELECTED TERMS

For the purposes of the dissertation, the use of Sanskrit terms, titles, and characters in plays have been transliterated and printed in italics without diacritical marks; proper nouns (place names, historical figures, authors, and temple sites) have been romanized. Correct spelling of Sanskrit terms with diacritical marks is provided in the following list of selected terms.

<i>Abhishekanatika</i>	(Abhiṣekanāṭīkam)
<i>adisthana</i>	(adhiṣṭhāna)
<i>Agamas</i>	(Āgamas)
<i>alidhapada</i>	(ālīḍhapada)
<i>amalaka</i>	(āmalaka)
<i>amritakailasa</i>	(amṛtakailāsa)
<i>amrtamanthana</i>	(amṛtamantha)
<i>antarala</i>	(antarāla)
<i>anubhava</i>	(anubhāva)
<i>apsaras</i>	(apsarās)
<i>Aranyakanda</i>	(Aranyakāṇḍa)
<i>Aranyaparvan</i>	(Āranyaparvan)
<i>Artha Sastra</i>	(Arthaśāstra)
<i>asvamedha</i>	(aśvamedha)
<i>Ayodhyakanda</i>	(Ayodhyākāṇḍa)
<i>Balakanda</i>	(Bālakanda)
<i>bhava</i>	(bhāva)
<i>bhayanaka</i>	(bhayānaka)
<i>Bhubaneswar</i>	(Bhubaneśvara)
<i>bibhatsa</i>	(bībhatsa)
<i>brahmana</i>	(brāhmaṇa)
<i>citrasala</i>	(citraśala)
<i>Culavamsa</i>	(Cūlavamsa)
<i>Dasharatha</i>	(Daśaratha)
<i>devakoshta</i>	(devakōṣṭha)
<i>dhiralalita</i>	(dhīralalita)
<i>dhiraprasanta</i>	(dhīpraśānta)
<i>dhiroddhata</i>	(dhīroddhata)
<i>dhirodatta</i>	(dhīrodātta)
<i>Dharma Sastras</i>	(Dharmaśāstra)
<i>dravida</i>	(drāviḍa)
<i>garbanka</i>	(garbāṅka)

<i>garbagriha</i>	(garbhagr̥ha)
<i>hasya</i>	(hāsyā)
<i>Ikshvaku</i>	(Ikṣvāku)
<i>itihasa</i>	(itihāsa)
<i>Jrimbhaka</i>	(Jṛmbhaka)
<i>Kadambari</i> of Bana	(Kādambarī)
<i>Kalidasa</i>	(Kālidāsa)
<i>Kailasa, Kailasanatha</i>	(Kailāsa, Kailāsanātha)
<i>karuna</i>	(karuṇa)
<i>Kausalya</i>	(Kausalyā)
<i>kavya</i>	(kāvyā)
<i>Kishkindakanda</i>	(Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa)
<i>kshatriya</i>	(kṣatriya)
<i>kuti</i>	(kuṭi/kuṭī)
<i>Lakshmana</i>	(Lakṣmaṇa)
<i>lokapalas</i>	(lokapālas)
<i>Mahabharata</i>	(Mahābhārata)
<i>mahakavya</i>	(mahākāvyā)
<i>Mahaviracarita</i>	(Mahāvīracarita)
<i>mandala</i>	(maṇḍala)
<i>mandapa</i>	(maṇḍapa)
<i>Manthara</i>	(Mantharā)
<i>Meghaduta</i>	(Meghadūta)
<i>moksha</i>	(mokṣa)
<i>nagara</i>	(nāgara)
<i>nagaraka</i>	(nāgaraka)
<i>Nandi</i>	(Nandī)
<i>nataka</i>	(nāṭaka)
<i>natya</i>	(nāṭya)
<i>Natya Sastra</i>	(Nātyaśāstra)
<i>nayaka</i>	(nāyaka/nāyikā)
<i>netra moksha</i>	(netra mokṣa)
<i>nibhrta</i>	(nibhṛta)
<i>pancayatna</i>	(pañcāyatana)
<i>Parasurama</i>	(Paraśurāma)
<i>Prajapati</i>	(Prajāpati)
<i>prakarana</i>	(prakaraṇa)
<i>Pratimanatika</i>	(Pratimānāṭika)
<i>prasada</i>	(prāsāda)
<i>prashasti</i>	(praśasti)
<i>prekshaka</i>	(prekṣaka)
<i>Puranas</i>	(Purāṇas)
<i>Raghuvamsa</i>	(Raghuvamśa)
<i>rakshasas</i>	(rākṣasa)

Rama	(Rāma)
<i>Ramayana</i>	(Rāmāyaṇa)
<i>Ramopakyaana</i>	(Rāmopākhyāna)
<i>sabha</i>	(sabhā-maṇḍapa)
<i>sandhara</i>	(sāndhāra)
Satrughana	(Śatrughana)
<i>sattvika</i>	(sāttvika)
<i>Shakuntala</i>	(Śākuntala)
<i>shikhara</i>	(śikhara)
Shiva	(Śiva)
<i>Silpa Sastras</i>	(Śilpaśāstra)
Sita	(Sītā)
<i>sringara</i>	(śrīṅgāra)
<i>sthayibhava</i>	(sthāyibhāva)
<i>stupa</i>	(stūpa)
Sugriva	(Sugrīva)
<i>Sundarakanda</i>	(Sundarakāṇḍa)
Surpanakha	(Śūrpaṇakhā)
<i>tirtha</i>	(tīrtha)
<i>Uttarakanda</i>	(Uttarakāṇḍa)
<i>Uttaramacarita</i>	(Uttararāmacarita)
Valin	(Vālī)
Valmiki	(Vālmīki)
<i>vastupurushamandala</i>	(vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala)
<i>vibhava</i>	(vibhāva)
Vibhishana	(Vibhīṣaṇa)
<i>vidushika</i>	(vidūṣaka)
<i>vimana</i>	(vimāna)
<i>vira</i>	(vīra)
Viradha	(Vīrādha)
Vishnu	(Viṣṇu)
Vishvamisra	(Viśvāmitra)
<i>vithika</i>	(vīthikā)
<i>yajamana</i>	(yajamāna)
<i>Yuddhakanda</i>	(Yuddhakāṇḍa)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Robert L. Brown for his unwavering support and guidance throughout this endeavor. He has been an incredible advocate and mentor both academically and professionally. I am also grateful for the insightful comments and conversations I enjoyed with the other readers of my dissertation – Alka Patel, Irene Bierman, and Daud Ali – and to Saloni Mathur and the late Donald McCallum for serving on my committee in the early stages of my project.

There are many individuals to thank who have helped me throughout the research and writing phase of the dissertation. I thank the UCLA Art History department for granting me the Edward A. Dickson and Yvonne Lenart fellowships that allowed me to complete fieldwork for my dissertation in India. I am indebted to Rick Asher at University of Minnesota, and Purnima Mehta of the American Institute for Indian Studies in Gurgaon for connecting me to officials at the Archaeological Survey of India, who provided access to and granted permission to photograph the various temples in my study. Hemanth Kadami generously assisted me with reading of Old Kannada inscriptions on the Papanatha temple. I would also like to thank Stephen Markel at Los Angeles County Museum of Art for giving me the flexibility that allowed me to pursue a doctoral degree, and my colleagues Bindu Gude and Nancy Fox for their support and encouragement.

Finally, I wish to thank my extraordinary circle of family and friends, without whom this would have been impossible. My mother, Martha Stevens, and my brother Brian Rosenberg, who have always been there for me. My extended family – Bonnie Sturner, Debbie and Scott McCann, Stan Romain, and Sharon Lerner – who welcomed me with open arms. My dear friend Nina Eidsheim, for cheering me on to the finish line. My loving husband Tony Romain, who has

the patience of a saint, and my beautiful son Seth, who has given me joy and inspiration to carry on.

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INTRODUCTION

When scholars have considered the meaning of ancient Hindu temples and their iconographic program, the tendency has been to view them either as religious symbols, or in terms of the ritual functions they served. That Hindu temples are embedded with theological significance is a given, but it can also be shown that these same edifices reflect the secular, aesthetic culture in which they were built. Just as is in modern times, the ancient Hindu temple was a multi-use space for social transactions where the sacred and secular converged. The temple provided a venue for communal court festivals honoring deities and rulers, and celebrated their heroic exploits through the recitation of poetry, and the performance of music, dance, and drama. Heroic figures were also carved in stone relief on the walls of Hindu temples, and perhaps it is possible to view these tableaux as serving a similar purpose of venerating deities and kings, in a mode that would benefit the community in perpetuity.

Among the most popular heroic figures depicted on sixth to eighth century temples is Rama. Rama is the seventh avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, preserver of the cosmos, born into royalty as the heir to the throne of Ayodhya, and sent into exile for fourteen years, destined to do battle with Ravana, the lord of the demon *rakshasas*. A gallant hero who bravely fought against adversaries and rescued his wife Sita from captivity, Rama also restored order to the forest ashrams where the *rakshasas* had reeked havoc, preventing the royal ascetics from performing their required rituals for the king. Rama also reigned peacefully over the kingdom of Ayodhya that prospered for ten thousand years.

The earliest account of Rama's life is the *Ramayana*, written in the fourth century BCE by Valmiki, who is considered the progenitor of the Indian epic poetry tradition known as *mahakavya*. Along with the *Mahabharatra*, the *Ramayana* is the most widely known of the India epics with a long-standing tradition of visual representations in art across South and Southeast

Asia. More importantly, Hindu kings of sixth to eighth century identified with Rama and his story inspired awe in members of the court. The poem is replete with scenes from courtly culture, particularly the lives of king and his court.

Among the earliest images of Rama found on Hindu temples are a series of relief carvings from the sixth century Vishnu temple at Deogarh in Madhya Pradesh. These reliefs depict scenes from the life of Rama that closely follow episodes from the *Ramayana*. Chronologically following these are several relief carvings of Rama found at a various seventh and eighth centuries Hindu temples located in the Deccan several hundred miles south of Deogarh, in an area of northern Karnataka that was formerly associated with the court of the Chalukyas of Badami (ruled circa 550-750 CE). The latest reliefs from this period are found on the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, a site located between Badami and Deogarh that is associated with the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed, who succeeded the Chalukyas in ruling the Deccan through the tenth century.

In this dissertation, I will consider the *Ramayana* reliefs on Hindu temples of the sixth to eighth century as a reflection of a secular, courtly culture. Recognizing the term secular is problematic for ancient India, it will be used here heuristically to consider alternate readings of Hindu temple sculpture, and to understand what it may have signified for lay worshippers. This will be illustrated through a cross-study of literary and art historical evidence that compares the representation of Rama's life story in Sanskrit dramas produced for the ancient Indian court to the sculptural depiction of Rama in Hindu temples. In this study, I will conduct a comparative analysis of heroic narrative in Sanskrit plays and Hindu temple sculpture of the sixth to eighth century, looking at temple sites primarily in the Deccan where *Ramayana* reliefs are still in situ.

The Chalukyas of Badami were one of the major dynasties to emerge in South Asia following the demise of the Guptas and the Vakatakas in the sixth century CE.¹ Pulakeshi I (ruled circa 540-567 CE) first claimed sovereignty for the Chalukyas through performing the *asvamedha* (horse sacrifice) and the *hiranyagarbha* (golden embryo ceremony), and made his capital at Badami (the ancient town of Vatapi).² The solidification of the Chalukya's dominance over the region took place gradually through his successors Kirtivarman I (ruled circa 567-593 CE), and Mangalesha (ruled circa 593-610 CE). The Chalukyas attained quasi-imperial status during the reign of Pulakeshi II (ruled 610-643), who invaded the Pallava capital of Kancipuram and defeated King Harsha of Kanauj (ruled circa 590-647) to the north.³ Then in 642, the Chalukyas were forced out of their capital, resulting in major losses of territory. The end of Pulakeshi II's reign around marked the beginning of a so called dark period for the Chalukyas which lasted until they managed to recapture their capital around 654 under Vikramaditya I (ruled circa 655 – 681). Vikramaditya I had successfully driven the Pallavas out of Chalukya territory by around 671, and through forming an alliance with the Pandyas of Tamil Nadu, captured Kancipuram forcing the Pallava king Parameshavarman I (ruled circa 672-700) to flee his capital. Clashes between the Chalukyas and Pallavas continued through Kirtivarman II's reign (ruled circa 745-757 CE) until the Rashtrakutas took over control of the Deccan.

Chalukya sites are found along the Malaprabha River Valley in the Bagalkot district of Karnataka at Badami, Aihole, Mahakuta, and Pattadakal, and at Alampur in Andhra Pradesh.⁴ Previous scholars have identified distinct phases in the history of Chalukya temples, beginning

¹ For a detailed account of the Chalukya dynasty, see Durga Prasad Dikshit, *Political History of the Chalukyas of Badami*.

² Ali, "Royal Eulogy as History: Rethinking Copper-Plate Inscriptions in Cola India," in *Querying the Medieval: The History of Practice in South Asia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 186-187.

³ At one point the Chalukya kings had established members of the royal family as vassals to outposts as far north as Gujarat, and as far east as Vengi near the coast of Andhra Pradesh.

⁴ The Malaprabha River is a tributary of the Krishna River that runs through Andhra Pradesh.

with the rock-cut cave temples at Badami and Aihole built in the second part of the sixth century, shifting to freestanding architecture in stone in the seventh century that reached a high level of sophistication in the eighth century.⁵ Modern scholars believe Aihole was a major center for religious pilgrimage and education, with the most significant concentration of multiple Jain and Hindu sites produced during the Chalukya period. The later phase of temple building primarily took place at Pattadakal, and of particular importance here are the Virupaksha and Mallikarjuna temples commissioned by Vikramaditya II's queens in honor of his victory over the Pallavas. The development of Alampur in the late seventh century as a site on the eastern periphery of Chalukya territory attests to their expansionist ambitions into Pallava territory, while temple building continued to evolve at the previous sites of Badami, Aihole, and Mahakuta.

Following the Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas took over these sites and continued to build temples here as well as rock-cut caves in the southern Maharashtra site of Ellora. Previous scholars have argued on the basis of stylistic and iconographic evidence that the Virupaksha temple provided the model for the Kailasa temple at Ellora.⁶ Significantly, the same scenes from the *Ramayana* that are depicted in niches of the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal also appear on the Kailasa temple at Ellora, completed around the middle of the eighth century while the area was controlled by the Rashtrakutas.

The *Ramayana* reliefs are placed on various parts of the sixth to eighth century Hindu temples including the plinth, within architectural niches on the outer walls, and on the face of pillar columns inside the *mandapa*. The assumption has always been that these reliefs were placed there to serve didactic purposes. However, I will argue that this material may also have

⁵ Gary Tartakov, "The Beginning of Dravidian Temple Architecture in Stone," *Artibus Asiae* 42, no. 1 (1980): 39-99.

⁶ Doris Chattam Clark, "Pratiharas from Pattadakal to Ellora: the Early Western Chalukya Basis for the Sculpture Style of the Kailasa Temple," in *Chhavvi-2: Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume*, ed. Rai Krishnadasa (Banaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981), 71-79. See also Edith Parlier- Renault, "Le Programme Iconographique du Temple de Kailasanatha à Ellora," *Arts Asiatiques* 56 (2001): 5-23.

served an honorific function. Rama is considered a model of ideal kingship. His actions are worthy of the king and his court, as well as the deities housed in the temple. In this study, I argue that images of Rama were placed within the architectural framework of the Hindu temple to underline his significance as a courtly hero.

It is difficult to find descriptions of Hindu temples in this early period from the perspective of courtly audiences. Even more challenging is to reconstruct the views of the architects who designed Hindu temples, and the artisans who produced sculptural decorations, beyond the codified language of architectural treatises. However, there is a rich corpus of Sanskrit literature and inscriptions that reflect the worldview of rulers and the elite members of the court who frequented Hindu temples, and presumably these were the people who allocated resources for building temples and honoring Hindu deities. This corpus can be mined for clues as to how this highly refined group of lay worshippers may have experienced Hindu temple art.

Recent studies on ancient Indian polity and aesthetic culture are instructive here, and have helped me formulate a methodology for this study. In particular, Sheldon Pollock's study of the diffusion of Sanskrit in royal courts of South and Southeast Asia, and Daud Ali's study of ancient Indian courtly culture have shown different ways in which a shared aesthetic tradition developed between the first and fifth centuries of the first millennium CE.⁷ The first to fifth centuries are also significant as the period was when the textual tradition of mythological *itihasa* (comprised of the *Mahabharata* (The Great Epic of the Bharatas), the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas*) became standardized through the use of Sanskrit verse. Pollock sees Sanskrit as a major catalyst in the diffusion of a cosmopolitan worldview across India and Southeast Asia.

⁷ Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology," in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996): 197-247. For an expanded discussion of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, see Pollock's recently published *Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*.

Pollock tracks the “aestheticization of power” through the use of Sanskrit poetic conventions, particularly as they are recorded in the eulogistic *prashasti* or eulogistic inscriptions included in royal land charters.⁸ Formerly considered a “language of the gods” for the exclusive use of Brahmin priests, Sanskrit verses were now placed at the opening of royal land charters, preceding the terms of the grant.⁹ Pollock argues these laudatory statements were not only considered a type of court poetry, but were also a mode of communication, as messages of power between opposing rulers. These verses also included references to figures of Indian mythology, and emulated the language of epic poetry such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Unfortunately, the inscriptions provide little in the way of descriptions of actual Hindu temples, or what visitors experienced in viewing sculpted representations of epic heroes. It is necessary to look to other kinds of literary evidence for clues, and Ali’s study of courtly culture is informative here. Ali is interested in the “affective life in courtly literature,” and considers the behavioral codes of ancient Indian courtly culture as they are outlined in aesthetic treatises, and as they are depicted in characters of Sanskrit drama.¹⁰ The dramas reveal something of the courtly attitude dramatic episodes. Using Pollock and Ali as a point of departure, my study considers Hindu temple sculpture of the sixth to eighth centuries as an expression of ancient Indian courtly culture.

Methodology and Chapter Outline

In this study, I have adopted a multidisciplinary approach that cross-references visual, literary, and inscriptional evidence. Previous studies of Chalukya temples and sculpture by Gary

⁸ Pollock, “Sanskrit Cosmopolis,” 198-199.

⁹ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 39-50.

¹⁰ Ali, *Courtly Culture in Early Medieval India*, 184.

Tartakov and Carol Radcliffe Bolon serve as the foundation for my study of narrative reliefs.¹¹

The temples built between the late seventh and middle of the eighth century in an area controlled by the Chalukyas of Badami represent a concentrated sample of *Ramayana* reliefs still in situ that allow for a close examination. Notably, the *Ramayana* reliefs are often found on Shiva temples, indicating the iconographic program of the Hindu temple was not strictly determined by sectarian affiliation. The eighth century dramas of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti have also been the subject of detailed examination.¹² Inscriptions of the Chalukyas are accessible through their publication in epigraphic journals from the late nineteenth century onward. During fieldwork conducted in India between 2007-2012, I travelled not only to extant Chalukya temple sites, but viewed comparative material at sixth to eighth century temple sites in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh.

In making new observations, it is necessary to evaluate existing models. The first chapter of my study reviews how previous scholars have interpreted the Hindu temple and its iconographic program. Previous studies have been grouped under two main approaches – the archaeological and symbolic. The roots of the archaeological approach to the study of Hindu temples are examined in the work of James Fergusson. Challenges to the archaeological approach by colonial reformist E.B. Havell mark a shift towards interest in the symbolic meaning of Hindu temples and their origins in ancient Indian religions, philosophy, and shrine forms. The symbolic approach is explored at length in the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch. Although recent scholars have begun questioning these two dominant approaches, the meaning of the Hindu temple and its iconographic program as a representation of the cosmos

¹¹ Carol Radcliffe Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture” (PhD diss., NYU, 1981) and Gary Tartakov (a.k.a. Tarr), “The Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas” (PhD diss., UCLA, 1969). A complete list of publications by these authors is provided in my bibliography.

¹² For Bhasa, see Woolner and Sarup, *Thirteen Plays of Bhasa*, Pusalker, *Bhasa: A Study*, and Tieken, “The So-Called Trivandrum Plays Attributed to Bhasa. For Bhavabhuti, see Pickford’s translation of the *Mahavaracarita*, and Pollock’s translation of the *Uttaramacarita*.

has remained intact. To challenge the prevailing view of Hindu temple architecture, this dissertation calls for a new approach to the material.

Chapters 2 and 3 form the main portion of my analysis. Through comparing dramatic presentations of Rama's life on stage to sculpted narrative reliefs, I look for clues as to how the courtly audience may have experienced the viewing of Hindu temple sculptures. In chapter 2, I begin by considering the dramatic conventions outlined in aesthetic treatises with regard to characterization, plot development, and aesthetic appreciation. Here I examine the different plays and character roles typically found in Sanskrit plays. Of particular interest to me are the *nataka* plays based on heroic characters from *itihasa*. These heroic dramas seemed the closest parallel to the narrative tradition in Hindu temple sculpture of representing heroic deeds of the gods.

Among the literature of the sixth to eighth century, there were four plays based on the *Ramayana* by two of the major court playwrights, Bhasa and Bhavabhuti, all based on episodes from the *Ramayana* – the *Abhishekanatika* (The Consecration Play) and the *Pratimanatika* (The Statue Play) by Bhasa, and the *Mahaviracarita* (The Life of the Great Hero) and the *Uttaramacarita* (Rama's Last Act) by Bhavabhuti. These four plays will be analyzed in terms of heroic themes. Significantly, the *Pratimanatika* and the *Uttaramacarita* use descriptions of royal portraiture and narrative paintings in the storyline that provide insight into how the members of the court engaged with visual art.

In chapter 3, I apply observations gathered from the treatises and dramas discussed in chapter 2 to analyze scenes from the *Ramayana* in sculpted reliefs from sixth to eighth century temple sites, beginning with the fifth century Vishnu temple at Deogarh, and ending with the eighth century Kailsasnatha temple at Ellora. Chronologically, the Chalukya temples of the seventh to eighth century fall between these two sites, and are all clustered within the Bagalkot district of northern Karnataka along the Malaprabha river basin. Here I will look for similarities

and differences between the representation of Rama's life in dramas and visual narratives. Only through careful tracking of sequences is it possible to identify patterns. I will show how certain characters and episodes from the *Ramayana* were used repeatedly in order to highlight heroic themes of bravery, loyalty, and righteousness.

CHAPTER 1

Interpreting the Hindu temple: A Review of Scholarship

Introduction

Before considering the relationship between courtly culture and Hindu temple sculpture in the sixth to eighth century, it is necessary to review how previous art historians have interpreted Hindu temples. In general, scholars have approached their research and teaching about Hindu temples with an emphasis on their function as a religious structure and place of worship. This tendency towards the sacred interpretation of Hindu temples has its roots in studies from the early twentieth century by some of the most influential Indian art historians, and these remain the fundamental texts for students of Hindu temple architecture. In recent years, scholars have begun looking at the broader function of the temple as a multi-use space where myriad social transactions took place, and where various types of temple worshippers convened. My dissertation situates itself within this new line of inquiry by looking at the manner in which courtly culture influenced the creation and reception of religious Hindu temple sculpture in sixth to eighth century India.

The study of Hindu temples by art historians can be broadly divided into three interpretive strategies. The first approach is primarily concerned with the dating and classification of architectural style. The second approach is concerned with the symbolic meaning of the temple form and its function as a sacred space for ritual transcendence. The third approach builds upon the symbolic approach, but is more concerned with the social meaning of the Hindu temple and its ability to communicate through its iconographic program stories from popular epics to a diverse community of worshippers. In what follows, I consider the development of these three approaches chronologically as represented by selected scholars who have greatly impacted the field of Indian art history. I begin by looking at the nineteenth-century scholar James Fergusson

(1808-1886), who led a campaign to identify, date, and categorize Hindu temples and published the first comprehensive study of ancient Indian architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876).¹³ I then consider the shift in interest from archaeological evidence to textual sources and symbolism of forms promoted by scholars such as E.B. Havell (1864-1937), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), and Stella Kramrisch (1896-1993), who were deeply influenced by the growing discourse of “Indian-ness” underlying the Indian nationalist movement of the early twentieth century. These scholars contributed to what is now the standard interpretation of the Hindu temple that continues to dominate the field of art history. Finally, I consider recent articles that have challenged this standard interpretation, and serve as a point of departure for my dissertation. These articles strive for a greater understanding of the lay elite temple patrons who brought to their experience a certain set of values based on their knowledge of classical Sanskrit poetry, plays, and inscriptions that circulated in the ancient Indian court.

The Archaeological Approach: James Fergusson’s History of Indian and Eastern Architecture

The study of Indian architecture began in the late eighteenth century with European scholars and travelers who came seeking ancient texts and monuments.¹⁴ When India became a colony of the British Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, a new wave of interest in Indian monuments arose along with the desire of the British rulers to excavate, restore, and map Indian archaeological. Scholars of the day such as James Fergusson, Alexander Cunningham (who established the Archaeological Survey of India in 1865), and James Burgess, were concerned with reconstructing the history of ancient India through architectural monuments and

¹³ James Fergusson, James Burgess, Richard Phene Spiers, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 2nd edition (1910; repr., Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), vii-viii. Hereafter referred to as *HIEA*.

¹⁴ Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 10.

inscriptional evidence.¹⁵ Of these scholars, it was Fergusson who was the most concerned with the study of Indian architecture.

James Fergusson was a self-trained architectural historian who initially came to India in 1835 to help run a business in Calcutta with his brother, and then became an indigo plantation owner. Fergusson wrote several influential publications on Indian architecture, and these continue to be of importance to scholars today. His book on the *Cave Temples of India* (1880) created the framework for the study of rock-cut monuments as architecture that is still used by art historians. Fergusson's major opus, *History of Architecture of All Nations* (1866), included a 300-page volume on India. This was expanded to a separate publication of the *HIEA* that provides a chronology of the evolution of free standing stone architecture in India and a typology of temple styles. Although Fergusson's work covered the range of Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, and Islamic architectural traditions, for the purposes of my discussion I will focus on his treatment of Hindu temples.

Taking advantage of newly uncovered material from Alexander Cunningham's series of Archaeological Survey Reports as well as extensive documentary photography of the temple sites, Fergusson created his own methodology for the study of Indian architecture. This approach consisted of the survey, sketching, drawing plans, and classifying ancient Indian architectural monuments using the "principles of science" widely practiced by European archaeologists at that time.¹⁶ Fergusson relied on stylistic analysis as his primary evidence for dating Hindu temples, supported wherever possible by inscriptional evidence.

¹⁵ Chandra, 16.

¹⁶ *HIEA*, vol. 1, xii.

The *HIEA* was originally divided into two volumes with nine books.¹⁷ The first seven books focused on South Asia. Book I was dedicated to Buddhist architecture in India and Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Book II was concerned with both Hindu and Buddhist architecture in the Himalayas. Books III – VI focused on all “Brahmanical” (Hindu and Jain) temple architecture including rock-cut architecture. Books VII surveyed “Indian Saracenic Architecture,” which consisted of Muslim architecture of the Sultanate and Mughal periods of the eleventh to eighteenth centuries. His surveys of architecture in Further India (Southeast Asia), which included sections on Thailand (Siam), Myanmar (Burma), Java, and Cambodia, and China in Books VIII and IX are brief by comparison to the chapters on Indian architecture.

Fergusson classified Hindu temples into three major styles: the “Dravidian” and “Indo-Aryan” styles were defined by geographical boundaries and ethno-linguistic groups, while the “Chalukyan” style was named for the Later Chalukya dynasty that ruled in Karnataka between the tenth and twelfth centuries.¹⁸ Chalukyan style was considered an outgrowth of the Dravidian style, but it was also noteworthy as a style “occupying a borderland between the other two [Dravidian and Indo-Aryan].”¹⁹

To formulate a typology of temple styles, Fergusson used the superstructure of the Hindu temple as the defining characteristic of northern or southern style. The Dravidian style was identified by the “storeyed pyramidal” superstructure built above the main shrine of the temple, also referred to as the *vimana*. In contrast to the multi-tiered form of the Dravidian style *vimana*,

¹⁷ In the second edition of the publication (1910), Burgess expanded the sections on Indian art. Another colleague and collaborator of Fergusson, R. Phene Spiers, edited the sections on Further India, Java and China and added a chapter on Japan.

¹⁸ Today the term Indo-Aryan or Indic refers not to a particular race, but to a branch of Indo-European language groups spoken on the Indian subcontinent.

¹⁹ *HIEA*, vol. 2, 21.

the Indo-Aryan *shikhara* is a curvilinear form that tapers toward its summit, and is topped by a copingstone known as the *amritakailasa*.²⁰

Dravidian style is discussed in five chapters of Book III including rock-cut and freestanding Hindu and Jain temples, and civil architecture (royal palaces and pavilions). Fergusson coined the term “Dravidian style” from the Dravidian language groups that originated in south India such as Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, and Malayalam.²¹ Fergusson defined Dravidian style geographically by areas to the south of the Krishna River, in what are now the modern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.²²

Following a chapter on rock-cut architecture of the seventh-century monolithic temples at Mamallapuram, and the eighth-century Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, Fergusson tracks the evolution of Dravidian style architecture in a sweeping survey of sites ranging in date from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries. Fergusson’s survey begins with eighth century temples associated with the Early Western Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchipuram, including the Virupaksha and Sangameshvara temples at Pattadakal, the Malegitti Shivalaya temple at Badami, the Jain Meguti temple at Aihole, the Kailasanatha and Vaikunta Perumal temples at Kanchipuram, and the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram, which he attributed to the ninth century (current scholarship now attributes the temple to the early eighth century). The survey continues chronologically through various sites where the main temple complexes begun in the eleventh century were expanded between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, and augmented to include large-scale *gopura* (gateways) and *chaultris* (large pillared halls).²³

²⁰ For south Indian temples, the term *shikhara* refers to the finial of the *vimana* superstructure.

²¹ *HIEA*, vol. 1, 302.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 360-410. Sites in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka covered by Fergusson include Kanchi, Tanjore, Tiruvallur, Srirangam, Chidambaram, Ramesvaram, Madurai, Tinnevely, Vellore, and ending back in northern Karnataka with the Vijayanagara temples at Hampi.

Fergusson acknowledged a lacuna in his survey of temples built in the Dravidian style in the former territory of the Nizam of Hyderabad in the modern state of Andhra state, as the lands were inaccessible to foreign scholars during this time.²⁴ Thus he was not able to study important early Chalukya sites such as Alampur that contained elements of both northern and Indian style Hindu temples, nor was he able to survey rock-cut temples in this region built between the sixth to eighth century. This is significant because it compounded the problems he had with classifying this third style that he called “Chalukyan.” The process or situation that led to the so-called hybrid temple forms that only lasted briefly in the seventh and eighth century and predominantly at sites associated with patronage of the Early Western Chalukyas of Badami has never been fully clarified. There is no evidence linking it to aesthetic proclivities of patrons, but we know that the Chalukyas established feudatories and regions in territories as far north as Gujarat and as far east as the Coromandel Coast, and had intense rivalry not only with the Pallavas in Tamil Nadu, but King Harsha of Kanauj (ruled circa 590-647 CE). This interaction through political conquest may have been a factor in the development of Chalukyan temple hybrid mix of *nagara* and *dravida* components, and it is possible that artists from both traditions worked side by side in the Chalukya atelier. However, this history still needs to be traced, and is outside the scope of my project.

Indo-Aryan style temples are discussed in five chapters in Book VI, following the same format as Book III of separate chapters for rock-cut, temple, and civil architecture. Fergusson coined the term “Indo-Aryan” for all north Indian Hindu and Jain temples built from the seventh century onward and located geographically between the Himalayas south to the Vindhya mountain range, and from Orissa on the east coast to Maharashtra on the west coast.²⁵ An

²⁴ *HIEA*, vol. 1, 422.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 26.

exception was made south of these boundaries for rock-cut Hindu temples at Ellora and Badami, and freestanding temples built in the Indo-Aryan style located in Karnataka.

Fergusson's survey of the Indo-Aryan style focuses heavily on East Indian temples in the modern state of Orissa, which he considered the most representative sample of how the Indo-Aryan style evolved. Fergusson surveyed Orissa temples chronologically from the sixth to the twelfth centuries, beginning with the Parasurameshvara temple at Bhubaneswar, which he dated to circa 500 CE, and the Jagannath temple at Puri, dated 1194 CE.²⁶ Fergusson cited the Sun temple at Konarak in Orissa "as a typical example of the [Indo-Aryan] style" *shikhara*.²⁷ Following his chapter on Orissa, Fergusson's survey of Indo-Aryan style turns from a detailed regional study to looking at individual temples in the modern states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Bengal dating from the eleventh to the nineteenth century. Fergusson does not address temples built prior to the eleventh century in these areas and completely excludes the architectural tradition of Gujarat, Jammu, and Kashmir, and other parts of northeast India.

Fergusson does not adequately address the presence of both *nagara* and *dravida* style temples being built in what is now northern Karnataka during the seventh and eighth centuries. He considered these Karnataka temples to be less unified and less elaborate than Orissa and therefore inferior:

If the province of Orissa is interesting from the completeness and uniformity of its style of Indo-Aryan architecture, that of Dharwar, or, more correctly speaking Maharashtra [what is now Karnataka] is almost exactly the opposite. In the western provinces, the Dravidian style struggles with the northern for supremacy during the earlier stages of their growth...the western can never pretend to rival the eastern province. There are more and far finer buildings in the one city of Bhubaneswar alone than in all the cities of

²⁶ The Parasurameshvara temple is now dated to the mid-seventh century.

²⁷ *HIEA*, vol. 1, 322.

Maharashtra put together, and the extreme elaboration of their details cannot pretend to rival.²⁸

Thus Fergusson singled out the Papanatha temple at Pattadakal as the only noteworthy example of Indo-Aryan style structures in Karnataka, moving quickly to a discussion of Brahmanical temples at Badami and Ellora. Why these are separated from the chapter on rock-cut architecture in the chapter on Dravidian style is left unclear.

Chalukyan style was the subject of Books IV and V. Fergusson employed the term “Chalukyan” to define what was then a recently discovered regional temple style that developed in Karnataka between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Fergusson believed the Chalukyan style evolved from the earlier Dravidian style temples at Badami and Pattadakal into a new style that included a star-shaped plan, a high plinth, and a stepped-pyramid tower.²⁹ Fergusson’s analysis of the Chalukyan style was heavily focused on temples in Mysore, Halebid, and Belur in southern Karnataka, built during the reign of the Hoysala dynasty.

From this brief review of the *HIEA*, it is apparent that Fergusson’s survey produced the foundation of the archaeological approach to the classification and dating of Hindu temples that remains the cornerstone of Indian architectural history. One of the main issues with the archaeological approach is that it does not address the meaning of the Hindu temple form. Other than classifying them as religious architecture, Fergusson does not discuss the ritual function or the iconographic program of the Hindu temples. With the exception of brief mention of historical monarchs who commissioned specific temples, Fergusson was primarily concerned with establishing the origins and evolution of Hindu temple styles among various ethno-linguistic groups that occupied the subcontinent over time.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 52.

²⁹ *HIEA*, vol. 1, 423.

The Symbolic Approach of E.B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Stella Kramrisch

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a new generation of scholars was dissatisfied with the archaeological approach to the Hindu temple on the grounds that it was ethnocentric. One of the leading proponents for a new approach was E.B. Havell, (1864-1937), an English artist, teacher, and scholar heavily involved in the development of a colonial Indian art education system that supported the revival of traditional Indian handicrafts in the late nineteenth century. Havell's contributions to the study of Indian art can be divided into two phases - first as an educator and lobbyist for the Swadeshi independence movement while residing in India; and second as an art historian who put forth his own theories on meaning of Indian art in reaction against the archaeological approach of Fergusson and his successors in a series of books on Indian art written after his return to England in 1905.

Havell's writings on Hindu temple architecture reflect his views on Indian art expressed in earlier works – that Indian art should be judged on its own merit, and that it could only be appreciated through understanding “the spiritual principles behind ancient and medieval Indic art.”³⁰ Havell believed that “in order to gain an insight into Indian art it was essential to correlate archaeological evidence with the spiritual impulse.”³¹ In particular, Havell looked to Vedic philosophy and traced the origins of Hindu temple architecture to Aryan civilization.

Havell wrote two books on Indian architecture. The first, *Indian Architecture, its Psychology, Structure, and History from the first Muhammadan Invasion to the Present Day* (1913), was written with the architects on the planning committee for the building of the New Delhi capital in mind, highlighting indigenous attributes in Indian architecture from the sixteenth to nineteenth

³⁰ Banerji, “The Orientalism of E.B. Havell,” 47. Havell's earlier works include *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (1908), *Ideals of Indian Art* (1911) *Indian Painting* and *Indian sculpture* (1911).

³¹ Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 274.

century, and separating out Islamic architecture as a foreign tradition that came with the arrival of Muslim rulers on the subcontinent. The second book, *Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India* (1915), analyzed the symbolic meaning of architectural forms and asserted the contribution of Indo-Aryan culture to the development of ancient Indian Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu monuments from BCE to tenth century.³² My discussion of Havell focuses on this second publication.

Havell's main object in writing *AMAI* was to critique Fergusson's archaeological approach to the analysis of Indian architectural forms and classification of Hindu temple styles.³³ Havell rejected Fergusson's categories of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Chalukyan style Hindu temples and his division of monuments according to religion and race as "false" and "misleading."³⁴ In Havell's own words, the *AMAI* is "a study of the political, social, religious, and artistic aspects of Indo-Aryan civilization, as revealed in the ancient and medieval monuments of India."³⁵ Havell wanted to assert the influence of Indo-Aryan civilization and Vedic religious symbolism as primary to the development of all Indian architectural forms.³⁶ Each chapter is dedicated to the origins, symbolism, and development of a particular architectural form, such as a Buddhist stupa, a Hindu *shikhara*, or a Jain *basadi*.

Havell believed that the origins of both the tapered form of the *shikharas* and the multi-tiered *vimanas* of south India could be traced to the Vedic religion of the Indo-Aryan civilization and ancient village shrines known as *kuti* – a square or circular cell with a thatched roof that served as a hut for an ascetic or Vedic priest and a gathering place for his disciples and served as a place

³² E.B. Havell, *Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India* (1915; repr., New Delhi: S. Chand, 1972). Hereafter referred to as *AMAI*.

³³ *AMAI*, viii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, viii.

³⁶ Havell relied heavily on Ram Raz's *Essay on the Architecture of the Hindus*, a translation of the *Manasara Silpasastra*, as a textual source for his ideas.

of worship after his death. Havell identified these rudimentary structures in the relief carvings on the second century BCE gateways of the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut in north-central India as the ancient prototypes for the Hindu temple. Havell argued that the village shrine was the “primitive form of the *antarala* or *garbagriha* (inner shrine) of the later Hindu temple,” the railing that demarcated the hut as a sacred space was the prototype for the plinth of a Hindu temple, and the verandah or assembly hall was the prototype for the *mandapa* preceding the *garbagriha*.³⁷

Havell believed that the *shikhara* and the *vimana* symbolized the mountain abodes of the respective gods Vishnu and Shiva.³⁸ He believed the tapered shape of the *shikhara* symbolized Vishnu’s celestial residence of Mount Mandara, and the multi-tiered pyramid shape of the *vimana* symbolized Shiva’s celestial residence of Mount Kailasa. Thus his classification of temple styles was not based as Fergusson’s was on regional geography and ethno-linguistic groups but rather on the symbolic meaning of the temple form. Vishnu shrines were signified by the *shikhara* superstructure, and were always oriented to the east. Shiva shrines were signified by a dome-like superstructure, and were always oriented to the west. The *amalaka* finial of the *shikhara* was meant to signify a Vishnu shrine, and the dome-shaped cupola of the *vimana* was meant to signify a Shiva shrine.

This is how Havell accounted for the appearance of the northern style *shikharas* and southern style *vimanas* at the same temple site of Pattadakal, where he classified the Virupaksha temple as a Shiva shrine, and the nearby Kashivishvanatha temple as a Vishnu shrine. Havell inaccurately assumed the Kashivishvanatha temple was adjoining the Virupaksha temple based on a photograph reproduced in his publication as plate LIX that actually shows the Mallikarjuna temple with the Kashivishvanatha temple located just to the north of the Virupaksha temple.

³⁷ *AMAI*, 36-40, fig. 12-13, plate IXa.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-44.

Havell argued that the Virupaksha and Kashivishvanatha temples were built as contiguous Shiva and Vishnu shrines. In actuality it was the Virupaksha and Mallikarjuna temples that were built as twin Shiva temples by the queens of Vikramaditya II in 745; the Kashivishvanatha was built sometime in the late eighth century, perhaps after the Rashtrakutas had taken over the territory. Furthermore, the extant foundation of a smaller shrine facing the Kashivishvanatha temple resembling a Nandi *mandapa* suggests the temple was dedicated to Shiva and not Vishnu.

Leaving aside flaws in his observations, Havell used the temples at Pattadakal to illustrate the process by which temple complexes developed over time at places that were long identified with sacred pilgrimage sites.³⁹ Temples were built over these spaces and grew into larger religious centers over time. If Pattadakal represented the earliest example of this phenomenon, other sites such as the temple of Tiruvallur in Tamil Nadu represented the endpoint in the evolution from individual shrines to large-scale temple towns demarcated by the towering *gopuram*:

The successive enclosures [of the Tiruvallur Temple] are the record of the unbroken tradition of Indo-Aryan building craft from remote antiquity to the present day.⁴⁰

This note illustrates Havell's view that Hindu temple architecture was part of a continuous strand of Indo-Aryan culture throughout history.

Havell used the site of Ellora to further develop his discussion of sacred pilgrimage sites also known as *tirtha* – natural wonders such as mountains and rivers that are considered sacred pilgrimage sites and their significance for the development of Hindu temple sites. Havell's main point in his discussion of the Kailasa temple is to illustrate how the architecture is representation

³⁹ *AMAI*, 178.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

of Shiva's celestial abode.⁴¹ Thus Havell connected the development of Hindu architecture to sacred geography and its symbolic meaning, a method that heavily drives Kramrisch's inquiry into the meaning of the Hindu temple form.

Havell ends his discussion of Hindu architecture with temples dating from the eleventh and twelfth century. Although Havell considered the eighth to sixteenth century a period of "Hindu decadence," this did not interrupt the development of Hindu architecture and continued ingenuity of Indian craftsmen.⁴² This period was exemplified in north India by the eleventh-century Hindu temples at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, and in south India by the twelfth century temples at Dasasuram in Tamil Nadu.

Havell's investigations into the linkages between the Vedic religion and Hindu temples were significant in situating their history within the broader context of Indian culture, as part of a continuous tradition. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement of England and the growing discourse of Indian nationalism, Havell's contribution was to foster a greater appreciation for the pre-industrial, indigenous artistic traditions in India that existed prior to the arrival of Islam and British colonialism.

Ananda Coomaraswamy's Early Indian Architecture

After Havell, the next scholars to deal with Indian architecture in detail were Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) and Stella Kramrisch (1896-1993). Coomaraswamy promoted a kind of philological approach to the Hindu temple concerned with its visual etymology through intense engagement with primary textual sources - both archaeological and textual evidence. Kramrisch followed him with a comprehensive inquiry in the origin and symbolic meaning of the Hindu temple form.

⁴¹ *AMAI*, 194.

⁴² *AMAI*, 203-205.

Ananda Coomaraswamy was born in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) to a prominent Ceylonese legislator and an English mother.⁴³ Coomaraswamy left Sri Lanka at an early age for England, and spent his formative years there, beginning his career as a botanist and geologist. He returned to Sri Lanka as a grown man in 1905 to study mineralogy of the island and continued his career as a geologist before turning his attention to art history. While living in Kandy, Coomaraswamy studied the local craftsmen and the art traditions preceding the arrival of the British, and subsequently wrote *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, which was the point of departure for his lengthy career as an art historian, critic and social reformer. Coomaraswamy returned to England in 1907 where he came in contact with Havell.⁴⁴ He first travelled to India in 1909 as a guest of the artist Abanindranath Tagore in Calcutta, where he became heavily involved in the nationalist art movement and began to focus more on Indian art, notably with the publication of his important study of *Rajput Painting* (1916). During this time Coomaraswamy also compiled his own collection of Indian art, and was subsequently invited to found the first department of Indian art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (MFA), where he held a joint position as a professor at Harvard from 1917-1930. Throughout his scholarship, Coomaraswamy focused on the analysis of ancient Indian terms for aesthetics and architectural treatises. His later essays represent a turn towards the metaphysical, during which he became increasingly interested in the Vedic literature, Indian iconography, and philology, particularly Sanskrit and Pali.⁴⁵

Coomaraswamy developed a unique approach to the study of Indian architecture that combined the disciplines of art history and philology. To this end, between 1930-1931, Coomaraswamy wrote a series of four articles, titled “Early Indian Architecture, Parts I-IV,” that

⁴³ Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy*, vol. 3, 7.

⁴⁴ Havell’s book on *Indian Sculpture and Painting* was published in 1908, the same year as Coomaraswamy’s *Medieval Sinhalese Art*.

⁴⁵ Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy*, vol. 3, 162-164.

carefully analyzed the four main types of ancient Indian architectural forms – cities, gates, palaces, and huts over against textual sources and visual representation.⁴⁶ Parts I and II consider cities (*nagara, pura*), city gates (*dvara, gopura*), and temples of the Bodhi tree (*Bodhi gharas*), Part III considers palaces (*prasada*), and Part IV, considers the thatched hut or cottage (*kuti*) as the prototype for Hindu temple architecture. What Coomaraswamy did in these studies, and in many others, that had not been done before, was to trace the descriptions of ancient Indian architecture and architectural terms used in various textual sources written in Pali, Sanskrit, and Prakrit over and against visual representations in ancient Indian art, particularly relief depictions on early Buddhist monuments of Bharhut, Sanchi, and Amaravati.⁴⁷

In Part IV of *EIA*, Coomaraswamy revisits the concept of the ancient Indo-Aryan village or shrine or *kuti*, previously addressed in Havell's *AMAI*. Both Havell and Coomaraswamy viewed the *kuti* as the prototype for dome and cornice architecture found at both Buddhist and Hindu monuments. However, whereas Havell viewed the origins of the *shikhara* and the *vimana* towers as symbols of Vaishnava and Shaivaitic iconography, Coomaraswamy believed the *stupa*, the *shikhara*, and *vimana* were all derived from the same “principle of elaboration by the reduplication of roofing elements” used to construct two-story shrines such as those depicted on relief carvings at Sanchi and Bharhut.⁴⁸ Regardless of their structural complexity, all Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain buildings were derived from the *kuti* form. Coomaraswamy also found that the

⁴⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Essays in Early Indian Architecture*, ed. Michael Meister (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1992), hereafter referred to as *EIA*. Parts I-III were first published in the journal *Eastern Art* between 1930-31. Part IV was published posthumously after the manuscript for the article was deposited along with Coomaraswamy's papers that were donated to Princeton University by his son, Rama, and subsequently edited and published by Michael Meister *Res* 15 (1988). Meister later published the series together in this volume, along with Coomaraswamy's article on “Indian Architectural Terms” a critical review and annotation of P.K. Archarya's 1927 publication, *Indian Architecture according to the Manasarasilpasastra* (1927), originally featured in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* in 1928.

⁴⁷ *EIA*, 3 n. 1 A sampling of the textual sources mined by Coomaraswamy for these essays includes the *Kautilya Arthashastra*, *Baudhyana Dharma Sutra*, *Milindapanha* (Questions of the Buddhist King Milinda-Menander), *Mahavamsa*, *Dharma Sutra*, *Digha Nikaya*, *Grhya Sutra*, and the *Dhammapada*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107, fig. 5-6. This idea of a multiplicity of forms is first explored in Coomaraswamy's essay on ancient Indian palace (*prasada*, etc.) architecture in Part III.

same terms were used to describe both domestic and ritual architecture. For example, *grha* – the term for house – was also used to describe a temple – and *sabha* – the term for village assembly – was also used to describe the meeting hall preceding the main shrine of the temple deity.⁴⁹

Coomaraswamy considered various uses of the terminology culled from architectural descriptions in Vedic and Buddhist scriptures in relation to representations of architecture in reliefs and found “a continuity in architectural morphology and terminology.”⁵⁰

Following his *Essays in Indian Architecture*, Coomaraswamy became increasingly concerned with the symbolic meaning of Indian architectural forms – that is, how these ancient architectural forms were designed to express key ideological concepts. This is illustrated in later essays such as the “Symbolism of the Dome” (1938) and “An Indian Temple: The Kandariya Mahadeo” (1947), written as a review of Kramrisch’s *Hindu Temple*. Each of these articles is an extended analysis of the symbolic meaning of an architectural form. For example, in “The Symbolism of the Dome,” Coomaraswamy isolates the image of the dome and the oculus of Buddhist stupas and circular roof-plates known as the *kannika* found in various Indian architectural structures. In this article Coomaraswamy considered the symbolism of the dome and oculus at length, and concluded that it represented both the cosmic pillar of light emanated by the fire god Agni and the journey of the spiritual adept, the great Buddhist arhat’s ability to miraculously pierce through the rooftops of buildings in order to ascend to the heavens.⁵¹ In “An Indian temple” Coomaraswamy uses the Vedic sacrificial altar as the point of departure for further analysis of the cosmological symbolism of the *garbagriha* of Hindu temple as the *axis mundi*.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁰ *EIA*, 108.

⁵¹ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “Symbolism of the Dome,” *Indian History Quarterly* 14 (March 1938): 451.

⁵² Published in Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy* (1977).

In analyzing the origin and meaning of Indian architectural forms, Coomaraswamy relied on passages from religious texts and mythological narratives that only contain abstract or metaphorical descriptions of temples. Such passages mention the impressive scale and beauty of gilded temples, ornately decorated with lustrous jewels, but little about the rituals that took place there. Ultimately, Coomaraswamy's writings on the symbolic meaning of Indian architecture were tied to his larger goals of defining the universal meaning of all sacred structures as a microcosm of the universe.⁵³ He assumed that the Hindu temple was the visualization of philosophical concepts, and did not take into consideration the various social agents who engaged with the Hindu temple and what the structure meant for them.

Stella Kramrisch and The Hindu Temple

Along with Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch remains one of the most influential scholars on the field of Indian art history. Kramrisch created the interpretative framework for understanding the symbolism of the Hindu temple form. Kramrisch's interest in Indian art developed out of her studies at the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Society of Rudolf Steiner.⁵⁴ Whereas Havell and Coomaraswamy were self-educated in Indian art inspired in part by their desire to define Indian art on its own terms, Kramrisch's methodology evolved out of her intellectual training as a philologist and art historian in the Viennese tradition of Joseph Strzgowshki and Max Dvorak.⁵⁵ Another important influence was the art historian Ernst Cassirer, who drew on Kantian philosophy in his investigation of "man's symbolic activity."⁵⁶ She was still a graduate student of art history and philology (Sanskrit and Vedic) in Vienna when

⁵³ Coomaraswamy, "An Indian Temple," 9.

⁵⁴ Barbara Stoler Miller, "Stella Kramrisch: A Biographical Essay," in *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 17-18.

Havell and Coomaraswamy began publishing their studies of Indian art. In the early part of her career, Kramrisch lived and worked in India as a Professor of Art History at University of Calcutta, and moved within the same intellectual circles with Coomaraswamy and Havell. She later taught at the Courtauld Institute in London after which she was jointly appointed professor of art history at New York University and curator for Indian art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

It was Kramrisch's deep interest in the symbolic meaning of art coupled with her passion for philology that enabled her to embark on a detailed inquiry into the origins of the Hindu temple. *The Hindu Temple* (1946) constitutes the first comprehensive analysis of ancient texts related to Indian architecture. Published in 1946 with photographs by Raymond Burnier, *The Hindu Temple* is a detailed analysis of the symbolic meaning of the Hindu temple form as a sacred pilgrimage site specifically designed for the daily worship of the deity by the priests and lay practitioners who patronize the temple. Like Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch employed a syncretic approach to the textual sources drawing upon scriptural literature and architecture treatises from across the long durée of ancient Indian history.⁵⁷ Deborah Klimburg-Salter has characterized Kramrisch's approach as "a systematic formalist method where she attempted to identify and carefully analyze the morphology and semantic structure of the visual language [of the Hindu temple]." ⁵⁸

Kramrisch carefully spells out the meaning of the Hindu temple in eight sections of the

⁵⁷ The number of sources Kramrisch drew from in her analysis of the Hindu temple is dizzying and difficult to keep track of even with the meticulous footnotes provided in her publication. An Appendix at the end of her study is also provided a summary of the relevant sections of the *Vishnudharmottara* describing the various types of Hindu temples of the eighth century, calling it "a genealogical survey of the shapes of the temples at the time of its compilation," including proportions for 100 various temple types, most of which are not extant in the archaeological evidence.

⁵⁸ Deborah Klimburg-Salter, "Reflections on the contribution of art history to transdisciplinary research in Vienna: the example of the Nako Sacred Compound," in *Text, Image, and Song in Transdisciplinary Dialogue: PIATS 2003: Tibetan studies: proceedings of the tenth seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003*, ed. Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Kurt Tropper, and Christian Johada (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 10.

book, each focusing on a different aspect of the religious monument – the site, the ground plan, the cosmological imagery upon which the temple plan is based, the materials used to build the temple, the etymology of temple types and architectural origins, the superstructure above the central shrine, measurements, and the carved images that adorn the walls of the temple. The study is laid out methodically – it begins by describing the parts of the temple through textual sources, and then looks at visual evidence from actual Hindu temples. In this endeavor, Kramrisch produced a cohesive description of the origins of the Hindu temple form and what its structure means symbolically for the practitioner – from the consecration of the ground plan to the final *netra moksha* (eye-opening) ceremony, the Hindu temple is defined and reiterated by ritual.⁵⁹

The majority of the examples used to illustrate Kramrisch's symbolic interpretation laid out in *The Hindu Temple* are from north Indian *nagara* type temples, in particular the eleventh-century Kandariya Mahadeva temple at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. The temple is part of site with twenty extant Hindu and Jain temples built during the time of the Chandella dynasty, which flourished between 950 and 1050 CE. The Kandariya Mahadeva temple is the largest and most ornate examples at Khajuraho, and includes sexually explicit sculptures on the outside walls that have been the subject of fascination for foreign and Indian tourists alike.⁶⁰ Coomaraswamy spoke at length about the Kandariya Mahadeva temple in his review of Kramrisch's book (see above). Chronologically, the Kandariya Mahadeva represents a highly advanced point in Hindu temple construction, and there is evidence that the temple was built to celebrate the victory of a Chandella king over his political rivals. Thus the social and historical context in which the temple came into being is not germane to Kramrisch's study. Rather, her goal was to analyze and

⁵⁹ The *netra moksha* is a ceremony in which the temple's master architect and main priest ascend the *shikhara* with a golden needle to metaphorically open the eyes of the temple. See *The Hindu Temple*, vol. II, 359.

⁶⁰ See Niloufer Ichaporia, "Tourism at Khajuraho: An Indian Enigma," *Annals of Tourism Research* 10, no. 1 (1983): 75-92.

interpret the symbolic meaning of the Hindu temple form.

One of Kramrisch's arguments that is still popular in current scholarship is the theory that the ground plan and shape of the structure that houses the *garbagriha*, are both derived from the sacrificial fire altar used in Vedic rituals. Construction of a Hindu temple cannot begin without the ritual drawing of a "magic diagram" or *yantra* known as the *vastupurushamandala* (*Vastu* means plan; *purusha* means cosmic man; *mandala* is any closed polygon).⁶¹ The *vastupurushamandala* is a visualization of the cosmos created from the *purusha* who sacrificed his body so that the earth and the heavens could take shape.⁶² *Purusha* is also linked to Prajapati, the primordial man who figures in the Vedic ritual as the supreme sacrificer or *yajamana*, upon whose body the fire alter is constructed as a "likeness of the Universe."⁶³ The universe presented in the *vastupurushamandala* is a square subdivided by a grid into smaller squares that is oriented by the movement of the sun. The thirty-two squares of the outer border of the grid represent the lunar houses of the planetary deities and regents of the cardinal directions, while the center of the grid is usually occupied by Brahma, the lord of creation.⁶⁴ Although this *mandala* is subsequently covered over by the plinth as the temple is raised, its symbolism remains potent – architects must be familiar with how to draw the diagram, and construction cannot begin without performing this rite. According to textual evidence, this diagram gives birth to the three-dimensional architecture of the Hindu temple known as the *prasada* or *vimana* – a solid, four-sided structure that houses the sacred core of the *garbagriha* and springs forth from the ground

⁶¹ *The Hindu Temple*, vol. 1, 67.

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 32.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 30-39. The *vastupurushamandala* is also said to represent the eclipse of the sun and the moon, which is also a signifier of creation.

toward the heavens.⁶⁵ The *prasada* is comprised of three “constituent parts” – the *adisthana* (base), the *prasada* and the *garbagriha* (main shrine with its inner chamber), and the *shikhara* or *vimana* (superstructure).⁶⁶ Still at issue is the lack of physical evidence that architectural diagrams were ritually executed before construction of a temple was begun at a particular site.

According to Kramrisch, the three-dimensional form of the Hindu temple that is built on top of the *vastupurushamandala* is derived from an amalgam of sources including Vedic ritual altars, dolmens (flat-roofed shrines made from stone slabs), and the *mahavedi* (initiation shed), with its surrounding shelter made from the elongated curves of foliage that taper upwards like a *shikhara*.⁶⁷ The vertical axis that runs from the base through the superstructure of the central shrine symbolizes the *axis mundi*, and the edifice that surrounds this is likened to a mountain cavern. The cave and mountain symbolism of the Hindu temple is an allusion to the ancient residences of the gods.⁶⁸ In the ritual consecration of the Hindu temple, the *garbagriha* also represents a womb that is inseminated with a seed, out of which the *shikhara* emerges like a plant shoot from the ground.⁶⁹

Kramrisch’s discussion of Hindu temple sculpture in Part VIII of *The Hindu Temple* is primarily focused on the sculptural program on the outer walls of the *prasada* and *shikhara* of north Indian temples. It is here that Kramrisch theorized that the iconographic program of the Hindu temple was designed to enhance the religious devotee’s experience of spiritual release or *moksha*. Central to Kramrisch’s analysis is the idea that the iconographic program of carved images on the outer walls of the temple is a manifestation of that inner energy generated by the

⁶⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 131-138. Note Kramrisch’s remark here that the main terms used for the Hindu temple (*prasada*, *vimana*) suggest this structure is both the house and the body of god.

⁶⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, 144-145.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 145-160

⁶⁸ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 165.

deity that radiates out from the central shrine. The outer walls of the *prasada* each depict an aspect of the deity that resides within its sacred core; it is as though the deity is gazing out from the *garbagriha* in every direction:

On the outside of the temple, each of the closely set images on the perpendicular wall facets has to be dwelt upon by itself. For each is complete in its particular meaning and at its particular place. The main aspects, for example, of the God in the temple such as certain Avatars, in a Vishnu temple; or the divinities most closely related to Shiva, if the temple is consecrated to him; or the images of the three great gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are placed in ‘massive doors’ in three of the cardinal points, whereas the entrance itself, generally facing East, frequently has a small image of the main divinity carved at the center of the lintel.⁷⁰

The placement of sculptures on the Hindu temple was determined by the *mandala* – the deities represented are placed appropriately in their corresponding positions of the *vastupurushamandala*, and are depicted in accordance with rules of Indian iconometry.⁷¹ The placement of images also dictated the movement of practitioners within the temple space. Kramrisch describes the experience as procession from the outer world of form (images) to the inner world of formlessness.

When going to the temple (*abhigamana*) with speech, body and mind centered on the divinity whose presence is installed in the image or symbol, the devotee becomes part of the architecture of the *Mandapa* whose interior he traverses, in which he also may pause and gaze at the images that confront him; images which are carved on the pillars, the capitals and on the ceiling; guiding him onwards to the main image or symbol in the *garbagriha* or upward to the dome and its central point.⁷²

For Kramrisch, then, the meaning of the Hindu temple was ultimately constituted through the embodied experience of the practitioner who becomes one with the architecture.

Legacy of the Symbolic Approach: Michael Meister’s “Symbolic Morphology” of Hindu Temple

⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, 304.

⁷¹ Ibid., 307-308.

⁷² Ibid., 299.

Architecture

Scholarship on Hindu architecture since the studies of Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch has continued to use the symbolic approach. The literature on this subject is vast, but among these scholars Michael Meister has been one of the greatest proponents of the symbolic approach in the generation following Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, applying this approach to extensive field research on the evolution of Hindu architecture. Many of Meister's writings have expanded on the fundamental ideas laid out in *The Hindu Temple*, using archaeological field research and literary evidence "to decode the system of symbolism built into the architectural morphology of the Hindu temple."⁷³

The main goals for Meister are first, to explain the origins of the north Indian *nagara* temple and evolution of its morphology through detailed study of formal elements, and second, to explain this evolution as an expression of symbolic meaning rooted in "a consistent and integrated set of beliefs that had formal implications for the Hindu temple."⁷⁴ Thus the Hindu temple is a "symbolic surface" with its own visual language that is communicated by its ground plan, elevation, and ornamentation.⁷⁵

Although Meister has made important contributions to the understanding of ancient architectural practices, the sociological function of the Hindu temple remains divorced from the purely ideological function (i.e. symbolic meaning). He takes for granted Kramrisch's interpretation of the temple, and her theory that the selection and organization of the iconographic program is an outer manifestation of a cosmological diagram that generates the ground plan of the temple. This is perhaps justified since his concerns lie primarily with the

⁷³ Michael W. Meister, "On the Development of a Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture: India," *Res. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (1986), 33. See also "Fragments from a Divine Cosmology" in *Gods, Guardians, Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India, A.D. 700-1200*.

⁷⁴ Meister, "Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture," 33.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

structural development of an architectural form as a signifier of a sacred space. Yet, none of these consider what the iconographic program signified for lay devotees. Meister only sees temple sculpture in terms of an architectural symbolism and vocabulary, ignoring their symbolism in terms of cultural views they reflect.⁷⁶ This analysis is abstracted from sociological meaning of Sanskrit terminology culled from architectural treatises, and views the Hindu temple purely in terms of its formal elements or formal language. It is divorced from sociological function of the temple. It looks to the rooftops and plinths of the structure, rather than to why people are moving in and around the temple.

The problem with the symbolic approach of both Kramrisch and Coomaraswamy is that it is ahistorical. The symbolic approach assumes the religious practitioner only saw the temple and its iconographic program in terms of views expressed in the religious scriptures of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*, and disregards the sociological framework within which temples and their patrons existed. These scholars assumed the ancient Indian viewer's reception of the Hindu temple was only in terms of their quest for spiritual transcendence, and their experience of temple imagery was exclusively informed by their knowledge of religious scriptures. Furthermore, this type of approach presumes the symbolism of the Hindu temple was intended to convey the same message to all of its patrons.

New Approaches to Understanding the Iconographic Program of the Hindu Temple

While scholars continue to use Kramrisch's framework for understanding the symbolism of the Hindu temple's form and structure as a sacred space, recent scholars have begun to consider the symbolism of the Hindu temple beyond its religious function. There is now an interest in understanding temple sculpture beyond religious iconography and a conviction that these images

⁷⁶ See for example "Juncture and Conjunction: Punning and Temple Architecture," and "Symbol and Surface; Masonic and Pillared Wall-Structures in North India."

evoke different imagery for different viewers. These studies consider an alternate symbolism of the temple's iconographic program, while retaining the underlying principles of Kramrisch's *Hindu Temple*. This interest is motivated by a desire to understand other reasons why people came to visit the Hindu temple and also to acknowledge the diverse range of religious practices. The point here is that the temple was not simply a place for religious rituals. There were other reasons visitors came to the temples, including, for example, "the thrill of the crowds, the excitement of watching a new play, and the aesthetic pleasure afforded by the structure and its elaborate sculpture."⁷⁷

Much has been written on the social and political function of temples by discussing their roles in patronage and economic systems. The focus has not, however, been on the sculpture and architectural organization of the temples in terms of how the temples created a space for aesthetic and literary contemplation and meaning. I want to focus on two groups of scholars who specifically discuss the images in the temples. One group (Granoff, Van Kooij) seeks more nuanced interpretation of temple imagery from alternate textual evidence, especially the *Puranas*, *itihasa*, inscriptions, and hymns, texts that promote the "conceptual world of the temple, images and temple worship."⁷⁸ Another group (Asher, Kaimal, Huntington) seeks to understand an apparent dual significance of iconographic sculpture in Hindu temples as both expressions of the divine and as allegorical references to political realities and power-relations of patrons who commissioned the temples and images that convey messages of power to subjects under their control.

The first group of scholars I consider here wants to shift the emphasis in reading Hindu

⁷⁷ Phyllis Granoff, "Halayudha's Prism: the Experience of Religion in Medieval Hymns and Stories," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India A.D. 700-1200*, ed. Vishakha N. Desai and Darielle Mason (New York and Ahmedabad: Asia Society and Mapin, 1993), 72.

⁷⁸ Phyllis Granoff, "Heaven on Earth: Temples and Temple Cities of Medieval India," in *India and Beyond: Aspects of Literature, Meaning, Ritual and Thought*, ed. Dick van der Meij (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 173.

temples from ritual manuals such as the *Agamas* that largely reflect the perspective of the temple priests who maintained rituals performed for the deity in a highly regulated manner to focus on texts that represent the viewpoint of a diverse community of worshippers of all classes, elite and non-elite.

In “Heaven on Earth: Temples and Temple Cities of Medieval India,” Phyllis Granoff proposes a new model for understanding the Hindu temples and temple cities as a representation of the god’s celestial paradise or “the city and palace of the god.”⁷⁹ Granoff’s model is based on textual descriptions from the *Puranas* that portray a different “conceptual world of the temple, images and temple worship than that which is described in ritual texts” such as the *Shiva Agamas* as well as Vedic literature that Kramrisch depended so heavily on for her interpretation of the role of images in the Hindu temple.⁸⁰ Significantly, the *puranas* and inscriptions describe a god that has “a real concrete physical presence” and takes residence in the temple as a replication of their celestial abode on earth.⁸¹

Granoff is specifically interested in the symbolism of the temple as Mount Meru or the Golden Peak, which is considered the entrance to heaven. Thus instead of viewing the temple as representation of the cosmos, as Kramrisch and other scholars have, Granoff considers the temple form and structure as a “locus of the heavens, the abode of the gods.”⁸² Granoff draws comparisons between these “poetic descriptions” of the celestial abode of the gods and the physical structure of the temple, finding linkages between the sectors of heaven and walls demarcating the temple precinct, rivers in the textual descriptions and their figural representation in the iconographic program of the temple (i.e. door guardians representing the Ganges and

⁷⁹ Granoff, “Heaven on Earth,” 174.

⁸⁰ Granoff, “Heaven on Earth,” 173.

⁸¹ Ibid., 172-173

⁸² Ibid., 175.

Yamuna rivers flanking the doorways of the entrance to the audience hall and main shrine). In this way, Granoff views the temple as a “map of heaven,” using actual examples such as the temples at Khajuraho, where for the presence of planetary deities in the lintel above the doorway functions as “a simple topographical marker, telling us [the patron] that we have entered the lands of the gods.”⁸³ In the same way heaven is described in the *Puranas* as organized in a series of concentric regions leading from the periphery to the god’s palace in the center that suggests a social stratification similar to that found on earth, Granoff views the organization of the temple’s iconographic program - the placement of deities in niches, doorways, and the walls of the superstructure - as following a similar logic, where each deity occupies their own residency and the *garbagriha* represents not a womb chamber but a palace for the supreme ruler of the gods (i.e. Vishnu or Shiva).⁸⁴ Rather than the temple functioning as a place of transcendence, for the worshipper to move from the outer realm of the profane to the inner realm of the sacred, Granoff suggests that they make an “imaginative journey through heaven to reach the god in his sleeping quarters, where he is served only by his most faithful devotees and where he sports with his wife.”⁸⁵ The depiction of gods on the temple walls is not part of a cosmological diagram, but rather a representation of how they would have been found in heaven:

...just as temple walls teem with all sorts of living beings, heavenly damsels, sages and their wives, sages practicing austerities, copulating couples, gods, incarnations of gods, animals and plants, so is heaven full to the brim with every conceivable life form.”⁸⁶

Granoff’s analysis is extended to temple cities like Bhubaneswar, Khajuraho, and Pattadakal, a site to be discussed in chapter 3, speculating that further study of temple complexes

⁸³ Ibid., 183-184.

⁸⁴ This works nicely with theory of temple as a space occupied by various patrons, especially members of the court who would have appreciated this symbolic linkage between temple and heavenly abode, as it was also replicated in palace architecture. Unfortunately, it does not explain why certain stories from the epics were continually depicted on the temples that have nothing to do with heaven.

⁸⁵ Granoff, “Heaven on Earth,” 186.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 177.

that include smaller shrines clustered around a larger temple to the main deity of the precinct may reveal an organization that mirrors the descriptions of celestial heavens where subsidiary deities are housed in proximity to the deity who occupies the central region and the most elaborate palace within heaven. Hence temple cities could be equated with Granoff's proposed map of heaven, which could be judged by consulting contemporary pilgrimage maps. Finally, Granoff argues that if one accepts the notion of temple as heaven, the lack of consistency in the iconographic program from one temple to the next may be explained by the fluid characteristics of heavenly abodes of the gods as depicted in the *Puranas*.⁸⁷

Granoff's reconsideration of the Hindu temple as a map of heaven helps explain its appearance and sumptuous design – the towers mimicking the celestial mountains, the ornamental details reflecting the palatial architecture of heaven – as well as the reasons for which people from all walks of life were drawn to the temple for worship. In another article, Granoff compares medieval hymns written by religious worshippers to stories of temple worship from the *Puranas* to illustrate the diversity of religious experience in medieval India– the orthodox religious view of the temple priests, the quotidian view of commoners, and the aesthetic response of the elite and royalty.⁸⁸ Together these articles suggest that the Hindu temple and its iconographic program could elicit different responses within the viewer depending on their class and their religious affiliation.

Karel Van Kooij and "Indra's Heaven in early Hindu art"

Van Kooij like Granoff wants to reframe the symbolism of the Hindu temple in terms of its social meaning, moving away from textual sources that "reflect a Brahmanical, a priestly view

⁸⁷ Ibid., 188-189.

⁸⁸ See "Halayudha's Prism," in note 73 above.

with a one-sided focus upon ritual and meditation” towards sources that reflect the “worldly view of life,” and in particular the urban elite of early medieval India.⁸⁹ Van Kooij’s focus is on depictions of Indra’s heaven in Sanskrit *prashasti*, epics, *kavya*, and archaeological remains of Hindu temples from the fourth to sixth century, the period which witnessed the transformation of the royal courts that significantly impacted the evolution of Hindu temple art and architecture. Van Kooij’s analysis focuses on a specific group of elite temple visitors known as the *nagaraka*, the men of the world who were educated in the sixty-four *kalas* including the science of architecture outlined in the *Silpa Sastras*, and from which ideas about temples were reinforced by their experience of dramatic performances and poetic recitations of *kavya*, including *prashasti* and epics such as the *Mahabharata* that “bear ample testimony to their artistic taste, their intellectual standards and religious outlook.”⁹⁰ Ultimately Van Kooij wants to know how particular social groups within the Hindu court experienced the Hindu temple and what was their “religious behavior.”⁹¹

Van Kooij begins by looking at the Mandasor inscription, which records the donation of a guild of silk-weavers for the construction and renovation of a temple dedicated to Surya.⁹² The inscription further describes the features of this elite social group that would have recognized or perhaps even demanded that the features of their temple replicate those of the social milieu to which they were accustomed with images they were familiar with from courtly literature.

In his discussion of Arjuna’s journey to Indra’s heaven in the *Mahabharata*, Van Kooij underlines not only the physical features that distinguish it as a paradise – shining mansions, musicians and nymphs playing music, lotus ponds, and pleasure gardens – but also those subjects

⁸⁹ Karel R. Van Kooij, “Indra’s Heaven in Early Hindu Art,” in *Fruits of Inspiration: Studies in Honour of Prof. J.G de Casparis*, ed. Marijke J. Klokke and Karel R. van Kooij (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2001), 225.

⁹⁰ Van Kooij, “Indra’s Heaven in Early Hindu Art,” 228.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 228-229.

who are allowed exclusive access to Indra's city of Amaravati – those who perform the royal sacrifice, sages and heroes (i.e. those who perished with honor on the battlefield).⁹³ Elsewhere in the *Mahabharata*, descriptions of the Halls of the World Guardians (*lokapalas*) that surround and protect heaven and earth reflect the cosmological imagery and concentric formation of the *vastupurushamandala* underlying the consecration of Hindu temples.⁹⁴ These descriptions of Indra's celestial abode from the epics reflect the social hierarchy in ancient India that may have played itself out in the organization of space in the Hindu temple in terms of which members of society had access to which areas – notably distinctions between the temple priests' exclusive access to the *garbagriha*, and the rest of the temple being open to all worshippers. Another possible connection between the way in which viewers perceived the Hindu temple and images of Indra's heaven is attested by inscriptional evidence of Vedic sacrifices that continued to be performed by kings into the first millennium. Van Kooij suggests Indra's reputation as “the foremost performer of these sacrifices” suggests that Hindu kings continued to emulate this god. As patrons who commissioned many of the major Hindu temples of the period, it seems logical the kings would desire a structure that emulates that of the “king of the gods.”⁹⁵

Van Kooij also considers descriptions of the famous picture galleries or *citrasala* in literature from the same period, with perhaps the only extant example left at the fifth century site of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka.⁹⁶ Descriptions of picture galleries are considered in the ancient Sri Lankan chronicle, the *Culavamsa*, and Kalidasa's fifth century poem, *Meghaduta* (The Cloud

⁹³ Ibid., 232-233.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 234-235. Another major clue that supports the hypothesis of the temple as representation of heaven lies in the frequent naming of the larger temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu after Kailasa and Vaikunta, their respective celestial mountain abodes (see for example the two Pallava period temples in Kanchipuram, the Kailasanatha, and the Vaikunta Perumal). In “The temple and the Hindu chain of being,” Ron Inden has also noted that the *sarvotabhadra* temple type described in the *Vishnudharmottara* and referred to as the best and most impressive temple is alternately called a *Kailasa* temple. It is interesting that Granoff does not address this *purana* in her discussion.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 234.

Messenger), where they are noted among features of the heavenly residences (*prasada*) of Alakamanda, the city of the gods, with their “crystal-paved terraces and where paintings are to be seen, and concerts are given.”⁹⁷ Van Kooij also notes the presence in plays and poetry of picture galleries depicting scenes from heroic narratives such as the *Ramayana* such as Bana’s seventh century *Kadambari*, and Bhavabhuti’s eighth century *Uttaramacarita*. Van Kooij argues these provide evidence of “the artistic expression of the religious outlook of the wealthy citizens, and of the court.”⁹⁸ This last point is extremely important for my analysis of narrative relief cycles on Hindu temples in chapter 3.

The final section of Van Kooij’s article considers archaeological evidence from two of the earliest Hindu temples for clues as to whether these parts of the temple and its iconographic program functioned in the same way as the picture galleries described in the epics – as expressions of the religious outlook, or enjoyment.⁹⁹ Examples considered include the lintels above the doorway to the central shrine the at Udayagiri and Haridwar, and fragments from Pawaya that depict scenes from the myth of Vishnu and the Churning of the Ocean (*amrtamanthana*), as well as portions of scenes from the *Ramayana* found at Nachna and Deogarh from the same period. Not only are these images located on the outer wall of the temple, but the figures are depicted in fighting postures according to the rules of the *Natyasastra*, leading Van Kooij to suggest a connection to the depictions of gods in the picture galleries of classical Sanskrit literature and were therefore part of a larger visual program representing the celestial abode of the deity on the outer walls of the temple. This is borne out of the decorative motifs carved around the doorways of flowering trees, door guardians, *apsaras*, and *mithuna*. This is carried over into the decoration of the superstructure with its pyramidal structure

⁹⁷ Ibid., 235.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 236-238.

mimicking the halls of the *Lokapalas* from Book II of the *Mahabharata*.

Granoff and Van Kooij's essays underline two points that are significant for my study of visual art and courtly culture. First, both are suggesting a relationship between literary evidence such as the *Puranas* and *kavya* and the development of Hindu temple architecture – thus the process of evolution is not only rooted in artisan traditions and *Silpa Sastras*, but in the social imagination of the patrons who commissioned temples to honor their patron deities. Thus a relationship exists between the symbolism of the Hindu temple as a representation of celestial heaven and the design of the plan and superstructure as well as the placement of imagery within the walls. Along the same lines, Van Kooij suggests artists chose particular literary themes with the *nagaraka* in mind as the quintessential practitioner of popular Hinduism. Second, both (but especially Van Kooij) suggest in their analysis that the temple was built with an elite viewer in mind who would have noted the symbolic imagery of the temple as heaven. These viewers would have been well versed in these heroic narratives, and most importantly they were trained in how to properly appreciate these aesthetic features in a religious monument, in the same way they would listen to the recitation of an inscription or a poem, or observe a dramatic performance.

Exploring the Hidden Meaning of Hindu Temple Sculpture

The second group of scholars (Huntington, Asher, and Kaimal) open up the meaning of the Hindu temple in another way, by suggesting that the iconographic program of the temple may have several levels of meaning, an obvious one and a hidden meaning. These scholars are building off of scholarship on ancient Indian kingship, where the ruler is identified with a deity (i.e. Shiva or Vishnu), and thus Hindu temples commissioned by royal patrons signify divine

kingship and political authority.¹⁰⁰ These scholars want to explain how this plays out in the iconographic program of the Hindu temple – for example, in the choice of deities depicted in subsidiary shrines and niches and the choice of scenes from epic poetry depicted in narrative relief sequences on the outer walls of the temple. These scholars argue the representation or symbolism of divine kingship expressed in visual allegories is operating in a similar mode to the eulogistic inscriptions (*prashasti*) that praised the valorous qualities of rulers through comparing them to the heroic exploits of the deities.

In an important article by Rick Asher on the monumental relief carving of Varaha, the boar avatar of Vishnu, rescuing the earth goddess from the bottom of the cosmic ocean from Udayagiri Cave 6, Asher argues for an allegorical reading of this scene as a metaphorical allusion to Chandra Gupta II's unification of his northern territories thereby establishing peace within this realm:

...it seems likely that, on a secondary level, these figures are intended to recall royalty. Could they then represent the local kings like the patron of the relief who paid homage to the paramount Gupta sovereign, much as the sages acknowledged Varaha's supremacy?¹⁰¹

Thus in addition to being a religious icon of veneration, as an incarnation of Vishnu, this massive carving can also be read as an allegorical portrait honoring the king, which also reinforces the notion of divine kingship through identifying Chandra Gupta with Varaha. Asher's analysis is borne out by inscriptional evidence that a local feudatory in honor of the Gupta king's victory dedicated the shrine. It is further supported by the practice of adopting deities, in this case the boar avatar of Vishnu, as royal emblems that would also have been reinforced by inscriptions.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See especially J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: the Rajasuya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated* and J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*.

¹⁰¹ Frederick M. Asher, "Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art," in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1983), 56.

¹⁰² Asher, "Historical and Political Allegory," 57.

Asher goes on to analyze allegorical references in monumental sculptures of the boar avatar at Eran, where an inscription notes that a local feudatory has adopted the same royal emblem to assert his sovereignty from the Guptas.¹⁰³ This is further applied to the other incarnations of Vishnu alluding to political authority such as Trivikrama, and others such as the personification of Vishnu's wheel to symbolize the king as the ideal ruler or *chakravartin*. Then Asher turns to South India and considers the use of allegory in Pallava Hindu monuments at Kanchipuram and Mamallapuram. At Kanchipuram, allegory is used more explicitly to narrate the story of the Pallava kings on the inside walls of the Vaikunta Perumal temple while the Kailasanatha temple can be viewed in and of itself as a monument to a particular king Rajasimha (ruled circa 700-728 CE), which is reinforced by the inscribed royal epithets written along the inside wall of the temple compound.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Asher addresses the monumental narrative reliefs at Mamallapuram depicting the descent of the Ganges River and Krishna upholding Mount Govardhana respectively. The former is carved on a prominently placed wall with what appears to have been a reservoir that collected water during the rainy season; the latter is located on the wall of the veranda of the Durga cave temple, directly facing another large-scale depiction of Mahisasuramardini (Durga slaying the Buffalo Demon). Asher argues that taken together the two monuments symbolize the reigning Pallava monarch's success in ending either a drought or a flood, depending on which relief one is viewing:

One can easily imagine an inscription to have existed which extolled the glory of the reigning monarch under whom the system was constructed (probably Narasimhavarman Mamalla) who, like the virtuous penitent Bhagiratha, brought water to his people and who, like Krishna, controlled its excesses.¹⁰⁵

The Mamallapuram relief continues to be the subject of inquiry in Padma Kaimal's essay,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 62-63.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 64-66.

“Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Mamallapuram,” which pushes Asher’s allegorical model further suggesting that perhaps the reliefs were intended to have more than one reading for its viewers.¹⁰⁶ Kaimal is drawing upon the scholarly debate as to the identification which narrative is represented on the monolithic stone mural – scholars are still divided over whether the relief represents the Descent of the Ganges or Arjuna’s Penance. Kaimal argues that if the relief can be read as a political allegory to Pallava kingship, then the double-entendre of the relief was intentional to reinforce the king’s political authority where “each narrative can be read as the description of yet another aspect of the king’s protective qualities.”¹⁰⁷ The specific qualities are teased out and enumerated by Kaimal’s close reading of the relief in terms of the two narratives.¹⁰⁸ Kaimal’s claim is supported by archaeological evidence – the Descent motif appears in narrative relief at several other Pallava monuments as well as in inscriptions.¹⁰⁹

In an article entitled, “Kings as Gods, Gods as Kings: Temporality and Eternity in the Art of India,” published in response to Kaimal and others writing about the political meaning of Hindu narrative reliefs, Susan Huntington roots her analysis of the Shiva Gangadhara at Trichy in Tamil Nadu in terms of indigenous, emic practice, historical context.¹¹⁰ Huntington wants to fine-tune this scholarly debate by grounding it in an “overarching Hindu worldview, specifically relating to the concepts of *moksha* and *dharma*, provided the general context for their creation.” Huntington looks to previous studies of Hinduism that emphasize this inherent duality in Hinduism – that life is dominated by two poles of existence – the path of spiritual liberation

¹⁰⁶ Padma Kaimal, “Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Mamaallapuram,” *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994): 1-27.

¹⁰⁷ Kaimal, “Playful Ambiguity,” 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Susan Huntington, “Kings as Gods, Gods as Kings: Temporality and Eternity in the Art of India,” *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994): 30-39.

(*moksha*) that everyone including the king ultimately seeks, and the need to carry out duties commensurate with one's position in the world order (*artha* or caste). She supports her arguments by looking to the *Dharma Sastras*, a body of literature that spells out the duties and obligations of the king to his people, also known as the *rajadharma*.

Huntington argues the duality of images is not the representation of a king being compared to a god, but is instead a reflection of how Hindus view the world in terms of *moksha* and *dharma*. The god represents *moksha* and the king represents *dharma*, on his own terms and specifically commands the temporal world of *maya* or illusion, which is presumed to be secular. The reference to the king is explicit – people automatically associate particular kings with particular deities. In this sense, images do not serve as political propaganda but rather they reinforce the notion that “the king is the upholder and pinnacle of *dharma*.”¹¹¹ Finally, these images are not representations of so called *devaraja* or “god-kings,” but a royal iteration of the universal concept of *atman*, or the merging of the king with the universal being (non-duality).

Huntington's argument is focused on religious concepts, and boils everything down to an essential duality in the nature of Hindu kingship of the sacred and profane that has since been rejected by scholars in favor of a model that is grounded in human agency. Current scholarship is decidedly anti-essentialist, even though it acknowledges that we are dealing with a historical moment in which things were often couched in terms of essences. Huntington's approach ignores the relationships between different levels of society that informed royal identity.

These articles by Asher, Kaimal, and Huntington actually corroborate what the previous group of articles have suggested – that the iconographic program of the Hindu temple, like the building itself, was created for a courtly audience, one that would have had a trained eye and would have been able to identify the subtle allegories to historical or political events. Huntington

¹¹¹ Huntington, “Kings as Gods,” 35.

specifically suggests – perhaps too insistently – that the icon itself is inherently dualistic, comprised solely of a binary relationship that underlines the king’s struggle between doing what is his dharma and attaining liberation through asceticism. Such symbolism would not be lost on the same group of elite viewers schooled in the *Dharma Sastra*.

Conclusion

Although there have been attempts in recent years to revise it or upend it, Kramrisch’s model of the temple as an exclusively sacred space remains dominant. The move by recent scholars towards a more nuanced interpretation of the Hindu temple in terms of its social meaning provides fertile ground for a deeper inquiry that encompasses a diverse range of religious perspectives from the Brahmin priest to the courtly *nagaraka*. One can also extrapolate from these findings that the Hindu temple and its iconographic program have multiple meanings – a representation of the cosmos and its heavenly bodies, the celestial abode of a god and the divine servants who wait on him, the social hierarchy of Hindu kingship, and perhaps other meanings that remain undiscovered. The aesthetic treatises delineate how members of the court learned to appreciate art in a way that mirrored the way in which they organized the world according to their ideology, and the depiction of characters in Sanskrit plays who would have frequented the temples. It is to these that I will now turn my attention in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding Indian Courtly Culture Through the Dramatic Tradition: Dramatic treatises and *Ramayana* Plays of the Sixth to Eighth Centuries

Introduction

In this chapter and the next, the relationship between courtly culture and visual art of the sixth to eighth century is exemplified through an analysis of literary and art historical sources. The evidence presented in these two chapters considers the parallel practice of depicting the life story of Rama in Sanskrit plays and in narrative relief sequences on Hindu temples from the sixth to eighth centuries. I begin with the literary evidence in this chapter as it provides historical interpretative material for understanding the visual evidence that I will address in the next chapter. I have focused my analysis on representations of Rama's life story as an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu who comes to earth in human form. The earliest known account of Rama's life is the *Ramayana*, written by Valmiki around the fourth century BCE and considered the first Sanskrit *mahakavya*, or epic poem. Evidence from plays and Hindu temples will be considered here in relation to the *Ramayana* to understand the relationship between courtly culture and the reception of visual art. Findings from this chapter will be used to compare with visual depictions of the *Ramayana* on Hindu temples discussed in the next chapter.

For my analysis, I will look at two types of literary sources. I begin by looking at the instructional treatises that guided playwrights and actors in how to produce a play, and in turn informed audiences in how to respond to a performance, drawing upon sections from the fifth century *Natya Sastra* written by Bharata, as well as the second century *Abhinaya Darpana* written by Nandikesvara.¹¹² I then analyze scenes from eighth century plays based on the *Ramayana* by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti.

¹¹² Bharata-Muni, *Natya Sastra: Ascribed to Bharata-Muni*, trans. Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1956). Hereafter referred to as NS. Nandikesvara, *The Mirror of Gesture, Being the Abhinaya*

Audience, Aesthetics, and Characterization in Dramatic Treatises

The dramatic conventions of the *NS* and the *AD* are extensive, and thus I have restricted my analysis to sections in these treatises that pertain to audience, aesthetic theory, character roles, and plot development for different types of plays.¹¹³ I have chosen to focus on these aspects of the text for what they reveal about viewer reception. Of the various types of plays described in the treatises it is the *nataka*, or the heroic drama, that I am most interested in for the purposes of my dissertation project to understand how this may have impacted courtly reception of *Ramayana* reliefs on Hindu temples.

It is important to note that Sanskrit drama represents a world inhabited by both men and gods similar to that which is described in the epics and the *Puranas*, a world where deities regularly intervene in the daily lives of human beings, often appearing before them in anthropomorphic form.¹¹⁴ Specifically, the *NS* describes drama as “a representation of the

Darparna of Nandikesvara, trans. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya (New York: E. Weyhe, 1936). Hereafter referred to as *AD*. In keeping within the historical milieu of the sixth to eighth century, I have confined myself of dramatic treatises to text that are dated before the eighth century. After this time, Indian aesthetics continue to evolve, especially in the work of the tenth century author Abhinavagupta.

¹¹³ The focus of the *AD* is the science of gestures or movements known as *abhinaya*, that is broken down into head movements, glances, movement of the eyebrows and neck muscles, and hand gestures (*mudras*), all of which are still studied by Indian dancers today. The science of *abhinaya* is summarized in chapter 18 of the *NS*. In addition to dramatic conventions, the *NS* describes the rituals and dances performed in conjunction with dramatic performance including the construction of the playhouse as well as the *purvaranga* ceremony performed prior to the opening benediction and opening act of the play. For more on the *purvaranga*, see F.B. J. Kuiper, “Worship of the *Jarjara* on Stage.”

¹¹⁴ Both treatises have mythological origins and are written as an exchange between the author and the gods. *NS* 1:19-25 states the *NS* was written by Brahma and given to Bharata, who was appointed to use it produce plays based on the epics, to be performed by Bharata’s one hundred sons. Initially Brahma asked that Bharata teach to *NS* to the gods so they could perform the plays, but Indra intervened and said the gods were not fit for this purpose, and were only schooled in the Vedas (i.e. Brahman sages). The sons were suited for learning and maintaining a treatise that was considered a “fifth Veda.” *AD*, 31 records the transmission of the laws of dancing, but in this case the author Nandikesvara, is instructing the god, Indra, who has come to visit the sage-author at Mount Kailasa, the celestial abode of Shiva, lord of dance.

feeling-state of the three worlds” of earth, heaven, and hell, as well as the “mimicry of the exploits of gods, Asuras, kings as well as house-holders in this world.”¹¹⁵

The origin and function of *natya* (drama) is described in chapter 1 of the *NS*.¹¹⁶ Indra, the king of the gods, asked Brahma to create drama as a form of entertainment that was accessible to people of all classes, and to impart the rules of the *NS* to the same Brahmin sages who were entrusted with the knowledge of the Vedas.¹¹⁷ Drama was also created to “conduce to duty, wealth, as well as fame,” inspiring kings to act righteously, and relieving those afflicted with grief or bad luck.¹¹⁸

Attending a dramatic performance was considered beneficial for those in attendance. For example, in *NS* chapter 36 there is the following remark:

the man who properly attends the performance of music and dramas will [after his death] attain the happy and meritorious path in the company of Brahminic sages.¹¹⁹

It is also apparent from the treatises that both dance and drama had a ceremonial function for the king and court. Dance and drama were to be performed for royal audiences at the king’s court on special occasions and ceremonies, especially those celebrating the coronation of kings and the procession of divine images, marriage, and birth rites, or to obtain wealth. There is literary evidence from within extant plays that drama was performed on the occasion of a king’s coronation.¹²⁰ It also was considered a king’s duty to provide for the performance of dramatic

¹¹⁵ *NS* 1:106, and 120.

¹¹⁶ *Natya* is a flexible term that means both drama and dance. The *AD*, 32, specifically defines *natya* as “dancing used in a drama (*nataka*) combined with original plot.”

¹¹⁷ *NS* 1:7-23. Indra specifically states in verses 21-22 that deities were “unfit to do anything with the drama.”

¹¹⁸ *NS* 1:14-15 and 108-115.

¹¹⁹ *NS* 36:80-82.

¹²⁰ For example, in the beginning of Act I of Bhasa’s *Pratimanatika*, to be discussed below, reference is made to preparations for the performance of a play on the occasion of Rama’s own coronation ceremony. See Woolner and Sarup, *Thirteen Plays of Bhasa*, 159.

productions for the community to enjoy at no cost, and it received the most praise out all the king's required charities.¹²¹

The audience described in the *NS* and the *AD* was comprised of men and women of all ages from three main classes – inferior, middling, and superior – and that all three classes were present within the same audience as the king and his royal entourage:

Because objects of knowledge are so numerous, and the span of all life is so brief, the inferior common persons in an assembly which consists of the superior, middling, and the inferior members, cannot be expected to appreciate the performance of the superior ones. And hence an individual to whom a particular dress, profession, speech and an act belong as his own, should be considered fit for appreciating the same.”¹²²

The above quote also indicates that the drama was designed to appeal to the various attitudes of the audience members in attendance.

Treatises also include references to specific members of the audience who were employed as experts to judge specific aspects of an actor's performance. Among these were the priests who performed ritual sacrifices, courtesans, painters, musicians, court officials, poets, and grammarians along with other actors. These assessors included specialists in various aspects of dramaturgy who were called upon to judge the success of a play in the event of a controversy in contests between dramatic masters who competed for a prize awarded by the king.¹²³ Evidence of this practice is borne out in the plays themselves where performances are staged for the protagonist, usually a king, who is asked to judge the quality of the performance.¹²⁴

¹²¹ *NS* 36:80-82.

¹²² *NS* 27:56-58.

¹²³ *NS* 27:63-68.

¹²⁴ A notable example of this is found in Act I-II of Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*, where the king and queen are asked to judge a contest between the disciples of rivaling dance masters. See Stoler-Miller, *Theater of Memory*, 255-273.

The *AD* is more elaborate than the *NS* in its description of the royal audience, stipulating that the audience is presided over by a chief and his ministers.¹²⁵ Presumably these were synonymous with the king and his royal ministers of the actual court where the play was to be performed. Described as wealthy, learned, cultivated, and righteous men, clearly these were members of the upper echelon of court society. More difficult to determine from treatises are the members of the middling class audience, but presumably they were still members of an elite background, perhaps including merchants and other agents within the court who were specifically members of the royal family or court officials. Easier to identify are the inferior members of the audience because they encompassed all who were *murkha* (uncultured).

Within these three classes of spectators, the *NS* also discusses the disposition of various audience members, with specific distinctions between young and old, “heroic persons,” and the “common” or “uncultured” men, women, and children.¹²⁶ For example, while the youth (understood here as the younger kings, their wives, sons and daughters) were disposed to love stories, the Brahmin priests were disposed to subjects of liberation, and merchants were interested in stories about wealth. Heroic persons (presumably kings, princes, and successful warriors) enjoyed watching battle scenes, while the community elders were more pleased by dramatization of the epics or tales of virtue. Women, children, and uncultured men enjoyed comedy, and were fond of costumes and make-up.¹²⁷ Hence different aspects of the drama were designed to appeal to the differing dispositions of superior, middling, and inferior audience members.

¹²⁵ *AD* 32-33. The Chief of the Audience, is described as *dhirodotta nayaka*, a heroic character type outlined in chapter 34 of the *NS* as “self-controlled and vehement,” a category generally reserved for the gods (kings fall within the *dhiralalita* or “self-controlled and lighthearted” category).

¹²⁶ *NS* 27:59-62.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

A successful dramatic production was heavily dependent on the ability of the audience to discern aspects of the performance that appealed to their appropriate class and disposition. The success of a play was visibly manifested in the facial expressions, emotional reactions, and gestures of the audience members. There were two types of success – divine and human. Human success was expressed through vocal and physical responses. Vocal responses included smiling, laughter, resounding applause, and exclamations such as “excellent,” “how wonderful!” or “how pathetic.”¹²⁸ Physical responses included horripilation, jumping up from one’s seat and giving away of clothes and throwing of rings at the actors on stage. These were among the human expressions of success conveyed by the average spectator (i.e. a commoner), who was moved by external aspects of the performance such as verbal and physical gestures.

Divine success was not dependent on divine intervention. Rather, it was determined by both the quality of the performance and the disposition of the viewer. Divine success was only possible through “an excessive display of *sattva*” on the part of the actors, and was only recognized by certain members of the audience, presumably those that are of a higher class, who would have been expected to have extensive knowledge of the *NS*.¹²⁹ *Sattva*, loosely translated here as spirit or feeling, is closely related to the theory of aesthetic experience to be outlined momentarily, and is something intangible that only certain audience members could discern.¹³⁰ Divine success was also indicated by the inaudible response of the audience – the pin-drop silence of a full court assembly that has no interruptions or audible disruptions from off stage.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *NS* 27:9-15.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 27: 6-17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 27:15-16.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 27:7.

The *prekshaka* (ideal spectator), one capable of judging the quality of a performance, was distinguished from those members of the audience who only enjoyed certain aspects of the performance that appealed to their class and disposition:

Those who are possessed of [good] character, high birth, quiet behavior and learning, are desirous of fame, virtue, are impartial, advanced in age, proficient in drama...alert, honest, unaffected by passion...He who attains gladness on seeing a person glad, and sorrow on seeing him sorry, and feels miserable on seeing him miserable, is considered fit to be a spectator in a drama.¹³²

The description of the ideal spectator in the *NS* suggests the ideal spectator was not only an expert in dramatic treatises, but was also from the extremely cultivated background of the superior ranking class. The list of qualities enumerated could perhaps only have been found in a figure such as the king or a member of his inner circle of court poets and playwrights who were well versed in aesthetic treatises on poetics and dramaturgy.

These definitions of superior, middling, and inferior audience members given in both the *NS* and the *AD* suggest that although the drama was created for people from all walks of life, the performances catered to a highly sophisticated audience that was familiar with the dramatic treatises and educated in how to judge the quality of the actors' performance on stage. Several passages of the *N.S.* suggest that drama was also performed in the presence of a divine assembly.¹³³ The origins of drama are tied to a mythological first performance for the gods ordered on the occasion of Indra's Banner Festival.¹³⁴ Specifications were given for playhouses of the gods in the different types of playhouses defined in chapter 3 of the *NS* – the largest size playhouse reserved expressly for the gods. There is a consecration ceremony for the building of the stage, and the superstructure of the playhouse is likened to a cave mountain, similar to the way in which residential and temple architecture is addressed by the *Vastu Sastras*. Rituals

¹³² *NS* 27:49-55.

¹³³ Specifications for the construction of playhouses for gods, kings and ordinary men are outlined in *NS* 3.

¹³⁴ *NS* 1:53-58.

honoring the deities of the playhouse performed before each performance, (also known as the preliminaries of the play), underscore the importance of honoring the protector deities of the playhouse. A divine presence is also implied by the format of the opening benediction that requires salutations to deities.¹³⁵ Finally, at the close of the *NS*, Bharata states that the gods were more pleased by a dramatic performance created in their honor than any other ritual offering:

Gods are never so pleased on being worshipped with scents and garlands as they are delighted with the performance of dramas.¹³⁶

That deities were present for dramatic performances is also evident from the extant plays themselves. Opening benedictions of extant dramas frequently mention that plays were commissioned and performed to honor certain deities on the occasion of religious festivals. References are also made in dramas to the presence of a divine assembly when performances are staged before the king and his court. For example, in Act VII of Bhavabhuti's *Uttaramacarita*, to be discussed below, when a performance is staged for Rama at his palace in Ayodhya, reference is made to preparations of the theater to seat the court and a divine assembly.¹³⁷

Thus in reading the *NS* one gets a sense of the community that made up the audience for dramatic performance. While the *NS* clearly states that drama was created for people of all walks of life, it appears that the genre was primarily intended to serve two purposes. On one level, the performances catered to the elite taste of members of the king's royal household. These same performances were also intended to honor and entertain celestial deities whose presence, though unseen, was assumed.

Central to the successful production was the ability of certain audience members to discern the main sentiment of the plot through observing the emotional responses of the

¹³⁵ *NS* 5:108-112.

¹³⁶ *NS* 36:80-82.

¹³⁷ *Uttaramacarita*, 7.1-10.

characters. This is what is known as *rasa* theory, and the *NS* provides a detailed description in chapters 6-7. *Rasa* is achieved when all the constituent parts of the drama are unified – representation through *abhinaya* (gestures), words and speech, costume and make-up, and *sattvika* (involuntary emotional responses) of the viewer.¹³⁸ *Rasa* literally means sap or juice, and is derived from a term used to describe the essential fluid of the body or a plant. The goal of a successful drama then was to bring about the spectator’s experience of “tasting” *rasa* through identifying with the emotional responses of the play’s hero/protagonist like a diner who is discerning ingredients of a recipe in haute cuisine.

Specific sentiments and feelings are clearly delineated in the *NS* through a typology of emotions. There are eight major *rasas*: *sringara* (erotic), *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vira* (heroic), *bhayanaka* (terrible), *bibhatsa* (odious or repulsive), and *adbhuta* (marvelous). Corresponding feelings, known as *bhavas*, bring out each of the *rasas*. These are also known as *sthayibhava* (the durable psychological states), such as love (with the erotic), mirth (with the comic), sorrow (with the pathetic), or anger (with the furious). Additionally, there are *vyabhicaribhava* (complimentary psychological states) that are represented by various *vibhava* (determinants), that help bring *anubhava* (the desired results). Finally, there is (involuntary states or physical reactions) caused by a combination of durable and complimentary psychological states.¹³⁹ Hence *rasa* was produced in a drama through the co-mingling of various emotions and reactions – it was created by the playwright who acts like an alchemist creating a

¹³⁸ With regard to the use of the term *abhinaya*, it should be noted that the *AD* as a treatise is primarily a typology of hand gestures, and head and arm movements used in ancient Indian dance. A similar digest of bodily gestures is given in chapters 8-10 of the *NS*, as well as a separate chapter 13 on bearing, that describes how actor’s should carry themselves on stage in a manner that is appropriate to their character type.

¹³⁹ There are eight *bhavas* and thirty-three *vyabhicaribhavas*, which when combined with the eight *sattvikas* comprise the “Forty-Nine Psychological States.”

formula for specific emotional responses or like a chef creating a recipe for a specific flavor of cuisine.¹⁴⁰

The storyline of all Sanskrit plays is built around the protagonist's desire to attain a specific goal (i.e. love, victory over an enemy, etc.). The plot is divided into principal and incidental actions that propel the characters towards their desired goal. The *NS* uses the metaphor of a seed germinating to describe the process of the plot unfolding from beginning to end. The plot follows the hero moving towards his goal through five distinct stages – beginning, effort, possibility, certainty, and attainment of goal. The denouement is the point in the play when the protagonist reaches his goal, known as the attainment of the object, and is likened to a plant that bears fruit (*phalaprapatti*). This is outlined at length in chapter 21 of the *NS*, which gives specific terminology for various elements of plot development.

According to the *NS*, although the plays are to be imbued with multiple sentiments and emotions, there should always be one dominant *rasa* that serves as the organizing principal underlying plot and character development in a Sanskrit play. The plot or subject matter (known as the body of the play) is organized accordingly to lead the audience to discover this sentiment through the events that unfold and through the emotional responses of the characters. The audience members responded emotionally in kind to the character's plight – in sorrow, anger, joy, love, etc. Because all plays were written to evoke a particular *rasa*, the ideal spectator for a Sanskrit drama was the *rasika*, the Sanskrit term for a connoisseur of sentiments capable of discerning *rasa* within a play. The *prekshaka* was thus an expert in *rasa* theory who could identify sentiments through the actors' gestures, movements, expressions, and emotional responses while in character.

¹⁴⁰ *NS* 6:31-33.

One may think of the eight *rasas* as the major themes around which the dramatic narratives were created. Unlike plays in the Western traditions where surprise is expected in the resolution of the narrative, the Indian plays were known from the beginning what was to happen. There were ten different types of plays according to the *NS*, each with its own set of mandates on proper use of sentiments, character types, and subject matter suited to each genre. The two most popular forms and those we have the most evidence for are the *nataka* and the *prakarana*.¹⁴¹ The *prakarana* was reserved for dramas based on historical events, in particular the romantic escapades of kings and other elite male members of the court, emphasizing the erotic and comical sentiments. The *nataka* was considered the heroic drama par excellence – its subject matter was explicitly drawn from mythological sources such as the *Puranas* or legends (*itihasa*) such as *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The hero of the *nataka* was “a celebrated person of exalted nature,” and the drama was to highlight his character traits, especially his birthright to the divine protection of royal seers and his superhuman strength (e.g. Rama). *Natakas* were also used to depict the “behaviors of kings due to their joys and sorrows,” through the system of *rasa* and *bhavas* outlined above.¹⁴²

The characters in a Sanskrit drama represented archetypes that appear to have been modeled after members of the audience described above that were also classified in the *NS* as superior, middling, or inferior. While the description of the audience members is more general, the chapters in the *NS* that describe these character types provide a detailed distribution of roles in a Sanskrit drama organized by gender and by social ranking.¹⁴³ A superior male character was self-possessed or dispassionate, virtuous, generous, skilled in *silpa* (the arts), and well versed in

¹⁴¹ The other eight types of plays outlined in chapter 20 are the *anka*, *vyayoga*, *bhana*, *samavhakara*, *vithi*, *prahasana*, *dima*, and *imhmarga*.

¹⁴² *NS* 20:10-11.

¹⁴³ *NS* 24:99-143 (female types), 210-226 (types of heroines including female members of high family, courtesans and hand maidens); 34: 3-9 (male characters), 10-14 (female characters), 14-16 (character of mixed nature).

the *sastras*. A middling male character was kind and gentle, “an expert in the manners of people,” and was also knowledgeable of the arts and treatises but not to the level of the superior character.¹⁴⁴ The superior female character was beautiful, deferential, kind-hearted, and faultless, in contrast to the middling female character that was partially flawed. An inferior character, male or female, was “ill-mannered, low-spirited, criminally disposed, irascible and violent.”¹⁴⁵ This was also a term used to refer to the morally or ethically deficient. A fourth category of “characters of mixed nature” was reserved for maidservants and hermaphrodites.¹⁴⁶

The hero or lead protagonist of a play occupies a special category within the description of superior and middling character types provided in the *NS*. This is what is referred to as the *nayaka* (*nayika* for female heroine), and the *NS* identifies four classes.¹⁴⁷ The *dhiroddhata* (haughty or arrogant hero) is usually represented by a god. The *dhiralalita* (playful or sportive hero) is usually represented by a king. The *dhirodatta* (exalted hero) is usually represented by a minister. The *dhiraprasanta* (calm or peaceful hero) is usually represented by a Brahmin priest or a merchant. These four male heroes have their female counterparts, who are also of four classes: goddesses, queens, aristocratic women, and courtesans. These four heroines share corresponding character traits of *dhira* (peaceful), *lalita* (playful), *udatta* (arrogance), and *nibhrta* (modesty).¹⁴⁸

Although a play could include more than one heroic character, the *NS* clearly stipulates the protagonist must always be a superior male character. The treatise also explains that the corresponding heroic sentiment known as *vira rasa* “relates to the superior type of persons and

¹⁴⁴ *NS* 34:4-5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 34:6-9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 34:14-16.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 34:18-21.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 34:25-37. Later these four main classes of heroes/heroines are further broken down into the system of *ashta-nayika* (eight pairs of male and female lovers) commonly depicted in *ragamala* paintings beginning around the sixteenth century and later known through the popular Indian dance drama *bharatanatyam*.

has energy as its basis.”¹⁴⁹ Character traits associated with the heroic sentiment include equanimity, determination, and discipline, as well as physical strength and martial acumen. Actors were to exude these traits on stage through “firmness, patience, heroism, pride, energy, aggressiveness, influence and censuring words.”¹⁵⁰

Other characters found in a Sanskrit play included four classes of *vidushika* (jesters) who customarily function as the confidant of the hero/protagonist of the play, such as the king’s royal priest or advisor.¹⁵¹ There are also detailed descriptions of various members of the royal retinue divided between those of the private and the public sector of internal or external employees. The private sector was considered the intimate, interior space of the women of the court, including the chief and secondary queens, lower ranking wives, concubines, handmaidens, female guards, and dancers.¹⁵² The public sector was the male-dominated world of the king, his inner circle of generals, priests, ministers, and advisors who served the king and supervised the education of young princes.¹⁵³ Such detailed descriptions of character types given in the *NS* suggest that *dramatis personae* were modeled closely on members from all walks of life in ancient Indian society.¹⁵⁴

From the above discussion of the *NS*, it can be concluded that drama was not simply a form of entertainment for the court, but that it was intended to mirror the social reality of the ancient Indian court. As will be shown below, in actuality the plays present an idealized view of the world as it is depicted in the epics. The *mis-en-scene* for Sanskrit drama represented the court

¹⁴⁹ *NS* 6:67-69. There were also three types of *vira rasa*: one that arises from making gifts, another from fulfilling one’s *dharma*, and another from fighting one’s enemy.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 6:66.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 34:21-22.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 34:31-81.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 34: 82-98.

¹⁵⁴ Corresponding to this is the detailed description in chapter 35 of the *NS* on the distribution of roles given to actors based on their physical attributions to match those of the characters they were to represent in the drama.

through idealized, archetypal, heroic characters, primarily those depicted in the well-known courtly literature of epic poetry.

Ramayana dramas in the sixth to eighth century

Now that I have provided an overview of the dramatic conventions from the *NS* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*, and in particular the rules pertaining to characters and plot structure of the *nataka*, I will turn specifically to four plays by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti are based on the *Ramayana*. My purpose is to outline the heroic themes from the *Ramayana* that are stressed in the plays, and will use this to compare how the *Ramayana* is depicted in relief sculptures on Hindu temples. I have selected the plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti because they date to approximately the same time period as the temples with which I am dealing. My assumption is that both the plays and the temples are products of royal courts, and may provide an interesting cross-reference for identifying how the Rama story was interpreted and specifically how these interpretations were presented to elite audiences of the time. I believe the playwrights carefully selected certain episodes from the epic that would underline Rama's role as a cultural hero. This act of selecting out certain episodes and stringing them together in a dramatic narrative is useful as well for understanding the organization of narrative reliefs on Hindu temples that I examine in the next chapter.

The *Ramayana*, rich with pathos, is perfectly suited for the examination of emotions and sentiments of characters that is central to *rasa* theory and dramaturgy.¹⁵⁵ The seventh avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, the preserver of the cosmos, Rama was brought to earth in human form to destroy the demon Ravana who was invincible to the gods. Rama is also a figure rooted in mythohistorical tradition, a legendary king who lived during the Treta Yuga and ruled the

¹⁵⁵ Scholars such as Sylvain Levi and V. Raghavan have analyzed the attributes of the *Ramayana* that make it ideally suited for adaptation to the *nataka* form. See Levi, *Theater of India*, vol 1, 248 as well as Raghavan, *Some Old Lost Ramayana Plays*, viii-ix.

ancient Ikshvaku kingdom of Koshala in north India. Rama has all the desired qualities of a heroic character in a *nataka* play; his exploits are exemplary. In what follows, I will consider three *Ramayana* plays by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti that were all written in the eighth century. I begin by summarizing the epic itself, and then discuss its cultural significance in the sixth to eighth century. As background, I begin here with a brief summary of the major actions recalled in the epic.

A total of 24,000 verses, the *Ramayana* is organized into seven books (*kandas*), beginning with Rama's life as a prince under the tutelage of the royal sage Vishvamitra, through his exile from the kingdom of Ayodhya, followed by his quest to save his wife Sita from the hands of the evil demon king Ravana of Lanka.¹⁵⁶ The first book, the *Balakanda*, covers Rama's life as a young prince in Ayodhya who is taken under the tutelage of the sage Vishvamitra, along with his younger brother Lakshmana, through his marriage to Sita, daughter of Janaka, the king of Mithila. As the oldest of four brothers, Rama is the rightful heir to the throne of Ayodhya. However, in the second book, the *Ayodhyakanda*, when Rama's father the king Dasharatha decides to step down, his step-mother Kaikeyi cashes in on a boon that forces Rama into exile so that her son, Bharata, can become king instead of Rama.¹⁵⁷ The third book, the *Aranyakanda*, covers Rama's period in exile through Ravana's abduction of Sita. During this time, Rama takes up residence in a penance grove in the Panchavati Forest, accompanied by his dutiful wife, Sita, and his brother, Lakshmana. While Rama and Lakshmana are hunting in the forest, Sita is abducted by the evil demon Ravana and taken to Lanka where she is imprisoned. In the fourth book, the *Kishkindakanda*, Rama and Lakshmana form an alliance with Sugriva, the exiled monkey king and his general, Hanuman, who flies across the Indian Ocean to search for Sita in

¹⁵⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I rely on the translation of the first six *kandas of the Ramayana* by Robert P. Goldman, et al. (Princeton University, 1984) and Hari Prasad Shastri's translation of the *Uttarakanda* (Shanti Sadan, 1959). References to specific *kandas* with *sarga* (chapter) and verse numbers are cited below.

¹⁵⁷ Dasharatha has four sons: Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughana

Lanka. In the fifth book, the *Sundarakanda*, Rama, joined by Sugriva's forces, builds a bridge to the island of Lanka. In the sixth book, the *Yuddhakanda*, Rama conquers the demon Ravana, and rescues Sita. Sita must undergo a trial by fire to prove she has remained chaste and devoted to Rama during her captivity under Ravana. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana return to Ayodhya, where Rama is crowned as the rightful king. In the seventh and final book, the *Uttarakanda*, Sita is banished from the kingdom by Rama amid rumors of infidelity, and is taken in by the sage/author Valmiki. Sita gives birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusha who are raised in Valmiki's hermitage under his tutelage unbeknownst to Rama. Rama comes to learn of their existence in the process of performing rites associated with the horse sacrifice. They are welcomed into the Ayodhya court as Rama's sons and successors, but Sita calls on her mother the Earth to take her back and is swallowed by the ground never to be seen again. Rama then ruled a utopian kingdom for ten thousand years where all lived in peace in happiness before he ascended to heaven.

The *Ramayana* is a character study of exemplary behavior that explores heroic themes of bravery, loyalty, and righteousness through recounting Rama's heroic actions.¹⁵⁸ First are Rama's innate qualities: a human avatar of Vishnu born into the lineage of Ikshvaku dynasty. This was significant for in ancient India, the kings traced their genealogies back either to the solar line of King Ikshvaku, or the lunar line of his daughter Ila.¹⁵⁹ Second, his cultivation in ways of the court and sacred laws of the *dharma* through his tutelage as a young prince under Vishvamitra enables him to channel his extraordinary physical power against evil forces that interfered with the forest priests' ability to perform the daily sacrifices. Through this training, Rama gains knowledge of the powerful Jimbhaka weapons from Vishvamitra. Finally, Rama's behavior is exemplary because he follows the ethical code of *dharma* and as such represents "the

¹⁵⁸ For more on characterization in the *Ramayana*, see Wurm, *Character-Portrayals in the Ramayana of Valmiki*, Brockington, *Righteous Rama*, and Sheldon Pollock's introduction to the *Ayodhyakanda*, vol. 2 of the Princeton University *Ramayana*.

¹⁵⁹ A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1968), 86.

very model of virtuous conduct.”¹⁶⁰ Rama’s bravery and superhuman strength are demonstrated over and over again in his battles against various demons. His loyalty to his wife, family, and political allies is attested in his relationships with Dasharatha, Bharata, Lakshmana, Sugriva, and Sita. Rama’s righteousness is demonstrated through his resignation to follow the sacred laws of *dharma*, accepting his fourteen-year exile without protest.

The *Ramayana* plays under discussion here underline Rama’s role as a cultural hero who later becomes associated with the deities of the Hindu pantheon. Inscriptional evidence from the first millennium suggests that Rama was not worshipped as a cult deity, but rather as a cultural hero.¹⁶¹ Verses from the *Ramayana* are quoted in dedicatory inscriptions (*prashasti*) comparing the deeds of historical kings to the heroic actions of Rama, underlining his political symbolism.¹⁶² Sheldon Pollock argues that the *Ramayana* provided “an epithetical paradigm of, or argument for royal sovereignty and indeed royal divinity” that later becomes the basis for state sponsorship of the worship of Rama as a deity.¹⁶³ The *Ramayana* as part of *itihasa* was required knowledge as part of the training of kings and young princes aspiring to be kings. The *Artha Sastra* states that *itihasa* was among the four “knowledge systems” that were required reading for kings.¹⁶⁴

The widespread popularity of the *Ramayana* is also attributed to the belief that hearing the heroic exploits of Rama was considered beneficial for the community. Verses in the

¹⁶⁰ Rosalind Lefebvre, Introduction to *Kishkindakanda*, vol. 4 of the Princeton University *Ramayana*, 45.

¹⁶¹ A notable exception is the fifth century site of Ramtek in Maharashtra. See Hans Bakker, “Reflections on the Evolution of Rama Devotion in the Light of Textual and Archaeological Evidence.” This may be an example of a localized practice of Rama being worshipped as an avatar of Vishnu but not as an individual deity. For further discussion on worship of Rama by the king Skandagupta (ruled circa 456-67 CE), see Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 241-242.

¹⁶² C. Sivaramamurti, “*Ramayana* in Inscriptions,” in *Asian Variations in Ramayana*, ed. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1983), 183-191.

¹⁶³ Sheldon Pollock, “*Ramayana* and the Political Imagination,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (1993): 263. See also Raghavan, *The Greater Ramayana*.

¹⁶⁴ Kautilya, *Selections from the classic Indian work on statecraft*, trans. and ed. Mark McClish and Patrick Olivelle (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2012), 4.

Ramayana itself extol the benefits for both hearing and reciting the heroic exploits of Rama recounted. At the end of the *Yuddhakanda* and repeated again at the end of the *Uttarakanda* it is written:

This epic [the *Ramayana*], which promotes long life, grants good fortune and destroys sin, is equal to the Veda and should be recited by the wise to men of faith. On hearing it, he who has no son will obtain a son, he who has no fortune will become wealthy; to read but a foot of this poem will absolve him from all sin...He who recites this epic 'Ramayana'...will be blessed with his sons and grandsons in this world and after his death, in the other world.¹⁶⁵

Thus there was a special incentive for rulers as stewards of the people to insure the *Ramayana* was publically recited on a regular basis. The proliferation of poetry and plays inspired by the *Ramayana* in the first millennium written in Sanskrit as well as vernacular languages supports this claim.¹⁶⁶

The corpus of earliest extant poems and plays based on Rama's story coincides with the blossoming of the *mahakavya* and *nataka* traditions in fifth century. Ancient poets heralded by the *Ramayana* as the first *mahakavya* ever written, and its author Valmiki was credited with having invented the literary genre.¹⁶⁷ Ancient Indian poets and playwrights therefore drew upon the *Ramayana* for inspiration, as with Kalidasa's fifth-century *Raghuvamsa*, a poem celebrating Rama's ancestral lineage of the Raghu dynasty, and Bhatti's seventh-century *Ravanavadha* (The Death of Ravana), an instructional poem (*sastra-kavya*) that tells the story of Rama through rules of Sanskrit grammar. A chronicle of Rama's exploits is also provided in the *Ramopakhyana*, a

¹⁶⁵ *Uttarakanda*, sarga 111. See also *Yuddhakanda*, sarga 130.

¹⁶⁶ For a detailed study of various literary modes of representing the *Ramayana* from classical to the modern era see Paula Richman, *Many Ramayanas: the Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*.

¹⁶⁷ V. Raghavan argues that it provided the standard model for all *mahakavya*, not simply those that were based on the story of Rama. See Raghavan, "The Ramayana in Sanskrit Literature," in *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, 6-7.

section of the *Aranya Parvan* in the *Mahabharata*, and various excerpts from the *Ramayana* are found in *puranas* that postdate the Valmiki original.¹⁶⁸

The earliest extant Sanskrit plays based on the *Ramayana* are by four plays by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti, both poets of south Indian origin active in the eighth century.¹⁶⁹ In what follows, I will discuss *Pratimanatika* (The Statue Play) and the *Abishekanatika* (The Consecration), written by Bhasa, and the *Mahaviracarita* (The Life of the Great Hero) and the *Uttaramacarita* (Rama's Last Act), written by Bhavabhuti. While events from the broader narrative are referred to in all of the plays, each one emphasizes certain episodes over others. The *Pratimanatika* is a seven-act play that focuses on episodes leading up to and immediately following Rama's exile in the *Ayodhyakanda*. The *Abishekanatika* is a six-act play derived from episodes in the *Kishkinda*, *Sundara*, and *Yuddha kandas*, and focuses on the alliance forged between Sugriva and Rama that aids Rama's victory over Ravana at Lanka. The *Mahaviracarita* is a seven-act play that recounts several episodes from the first six *kandas* of the epic, while the *Uttaramacarita* is a seven-act play derived solely from events taking place in the seventh and final *Uttarakanda*, after Rama is restored to the throne of Ayodhya.

As a genre, *Ramayana* plays pick up on cultural themes that are dominant in the epic. These dramas were not merely a simple recitation of the Valmiki original. I believe they were written to highlight Rama's heroic qualities of bravery, loyalty, and righteousness – qualities that were upheld as courtly ideals during sixth to eighth century India. The basic premise of all the

¹⁶⁸ For detailed discussion, see Raghavan, *Greater Ramayana*, and A.N. Jani, "Different Versions of Valmiki's *Ramayana* in Sanskrit," in *Asian Variations in Ramayana*.

¹⁶⁹ Although previous thought to date to the second or third century CE, Bhasa's plays have recently been re-attributed to the eighth century. See Tieken, "The So-Called Trivandrum Plays Attributed to Bhasa." A full study comparing the similarities and differences between Bhasa and Bhavabhuti may shed further light on the literary culture of eighth century. Both playwrights were originally from south India, and each was affiliated with a powerful regional dynasty. Born in southern Maharashtra, Bhavabhuti was affiliated with the court of Yasovarman of Kanauj in present day Uttar Pradesh. It has been speculated that Bhasa was affiliated with the Pallava court of Tamil Nadu.

plays is Rama's heroic quest to follow the righteous path of *dharma*, and the challenges he successfully meets along this path.

In Bhasa's and Bhavabhuti's plays, episodes from the *Ramayana* are presented sequentially as scenes within each act of the play, as a dialogue between no more than two or three characters, following the dramatic conventions of the *NS*. The intense dialogue between characters replaces the brutality of the physical struggle between characters that is emphasized in the poem. The treatises speak of prohibiting actors from performing violence on the stage. The audience was expected to be familiar with the outcome of the plot so the playwrights could focus on a particular episode or set of episodes in each act, using dialogue between secondary characters in the prelude of each act to remind the audience of those events or actions that are not depicted in the play itself.

Playwrights freely adapted from Valmiki's text, to emphasize aspects of the epic that most appealed to the sensibilities of the court audience, a society heavily informed by rules of the *dharma* spelled out in texts such as the *Artha Sastra*. As I will discuss below, in presenting key episodes, such as Rama's exile from Ayodhya and the battles against his main adversaries, the playwrights chose to emphasize courtly etiquette and diplomacy in the dialogue between characters. The violent aspects of these physical conflicts recounted in the *Ramayana* epic were simply referred to by characters in the play as events that took place off stage.

In staging the *Ramayana* as a *nataka*, the playwrights also presented the story of the great hero Rama in the preferred genre and style of kings and gods. The *NS* delineates that the *nataka* was to be performed in the "delicate" style because it was most pleasing for kings and gods.¹⁷⁰ Following the required conventions of the *nataka* genre, physical battles, death, murder, or any kind of violence, was not acted out on stage but rather described through dialogue in the

¹⁷⁰ *NS* 35:49.

intervening scenes between acts. Thus Rama's heroism was depicted more through characterization than physical actions.

Although the major plot lines of the Valmiki *Ramayana* were upheld, the playwrights interpreted some of the scenes more freely, adding scenes and dialogue between characters, and changing the circumstances under which Rama comes into conflict with them. For example, in Bhavabhuti's *Mahaviracarita*, to be discussed momentarily, Malyavan, Ravana's grandfather and chief advisor, instigates the battle between Rama and Ravana. The overall outcome of events – Rama's victory over Ravana, rescue of Sita, and coronation as king of Ayodhya – was left unchanged, but the characters' actions would take on a different meaning because the intention behind them was different. I believe the playwrights made such alterations to the epic in order to emphasize certain themes that would resonate with the superior members of the court audience.

I now turn to an analysis of specific episodes from the *Ramayana* depicted in the plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti. Here I argue the playwrights' selection and framing of particular episodes or series of episodes from the *Ramayana* as a series of dramatic vignettes was deliberately intended to underline Rama's heroic qualities as superior to all others. That is, how the court envisioned heroic qualities of Rama as a symbol of superior character. First I will analyze the representation of Rama's heroic qualities in the *Mahaviracarita*. Then I will consider the role of visual art in Act III of the *Pratimanatika* and Act I of the *Uttaramacarita*. Conclusions drawn from studying these dramatic narratives will be compared to the way in which the *Ramayana* is represented in visual narratives on Hindu temples in the following chapter.

Depictions of Rama's Heroic Qualities in Bhavabhuti's Mahaviracarita

Rama's heroic qualities are most clearly portrayed in Bhavabhuti's *Mahaviracarita*

through character oppositions – through Rama’s interactions with his adversaries, Parasurama, Valin, and Ravana, who are worthy opponents but not as morally fit as Rama, Bhavabhuti underlines Rama’s superior heroic character.¹⁷¹ It has been suggested previously that Bhavabhuti’s underlying goal in writing the *Mahaviracarita* was to “show different nuances of heroism in Rama, Rama of the Axe, Valin and other characters,” in a manner consistent with the description of the various qualities of heroic characters defined in the *NS*.¹⁷² I would add that in illustrating such nuances Bhavabhuti was underlining Rama’s status as an exemplary cultural hero whose character was superior to all others in the *Ramayana*. As one of the character remarks on Rama’s actions in the beginning of Act IV:

The astonishing acts of that great hero, which are uncommon and abound with good qualities and surpass the world, and are attended with great success in their results, confer happiness not only upon us but upon the three worlds.¹⁷³

I begin with a plot summary of the *Mahaviracarita* as a background for my analysis of characterization. The *Mahaviracarita* recounts several episodes from the *Aranyakanda* through the *Yuddhakanda*, beginning with the marriage of Rama and Sita and concluding with the coronation of Rama.¹⁷⁴ Act I opens in Vishvamitra’s hermitage, where preparations are being made for the performance of a special sacrifice designed to bring together Sita and Rama. Vishvamitra invites Sita’s father Janaka to attend a sacrifice at his hermitage. Being himself already engaged in a sacrifice, Janaka sends his brother Kucadhvaja in his place, attended by Sita

¹⁷¹ For a useful discussion of the *Mahaviracarita*, see A.K. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature* vol. 4, *The Ways of Originality (Bana to Damodaragupta)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972), 308-336.

¹⁷² Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, 4:313, argues this is inferred by the lines from the prologue that the play should include “peerless characters of which the heroic spirit is assigned to each by fine but clear divisions.”

¹⁷³ Bhavabhuti, *Mahaviracarita: the Adventures of the Great Hero Rama. An Indian Drama in Seven Acts*, trans. John Pickford (London: Trubner, 1871), 72.

¹⁷⁴ Govind Keshav Bhat, *Bhavabhuti* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1979), 16, states that most scholars believe Bhavabhuti only completed the *Mahaviracarita* through Act V, and that the remaining Acts VI and VII were written by a different author. Warder (see above n167) disputes this, arguing that Bhavabhuti wrote the play in its entirety, and that discrepancies between Acts I-V and V-VII are explained by later recensions of the texts being passed down over time.

and her sister Urmila. The episode of Rama breaking Shiva's bow to prove his worthiness as a suitor for Sita, which occurred in the *Aranyakanda* at the court of Janaka, takes place instead at Vishvamitra's hermitage. In a slight alteration from the Valmiki original, Bhavabhuti inserts in this first act of the play an exchange with one of Ravana's *rakshasa* ministers, Sarvamaya, who has come to Valmiki's hermitage to make a claim for Sita's hand on behalf of Ravana.¹⁷⁵

Sarvamaya was sent by Ravana's grandfather and chief advisor, Malyavan, who sought by following rules of diplomacy to prevent Ravana from taking Sita by force.¹⁷⁶ Rama and Lakshmana reflect on Ravana's worthiness as a rivaling suitor for Sita as a king who obtained his superhuman power through performing penance to Brahma. The exchange with Sarvamaya is interrupted by reports that Janaka's sacrifice has been disrupted by the female *rakshasa* Tataka. Rama conquers Tataka offstage. Seeing that Rama has proved himself worthy, Vishvamitra then summons the divine Jrimbhaka weapons, and instructs Rama to perform obeisance to them. It is through this action Rama gains the power of the weapons that makes him invincible to his adversaries.¹⁷⁷ In the *Mahaviracarita*, this episode also serves to demonstrate for Kucadhvaja that the Raghus are favored, and therefore Rama is the appropriate suitor for the hand of princess Sita of Mithila who should be allowed to test his strength on Shiva's bow. Rama effortlessly breaks Shiva's bow and is joined in marriage to Sita.

This series of events in Act I sets in motion Ravana's revenge plot that will continue throughout the play. Throughout the *Mahaviracarita*, Bhavabhuti made slight alterations to the Valmiki *Ramayana* that resulted in a storyline focused on Rama's three major opponents Parasurama, Valin, and Ravana. In each of these situations, the playwright highlights how

¹⁷⁵ Note that in the original epic, Rama was invited to Mithila by King Janaka to examine Shiva's divine bow, and it is only after Rama demonstrates his superhuman strength in breaking the bow that Janaka pledges his daughter to Sita in marriage.

¹⁷⁶ Bhavabhuti, *Mahaviracarita*, 14. For more on Malyavan see *Yuddhakanda*, *sargas* 35-36.

¹⁷⁷ *Balakanda*, *sarga* 27-28.

Rama's superior character allows him to conquer his enemies who are not his equal. Each act is a vignette that highlights the dialogue between Rama and one of his three adversaries.

Rama encounters his first adversary, Parasurama, in Act II of the *Mahaviracarita*. In Hindu mythology, Parasurama, a.k.a. "Rama of the Axe," named for the axe he wielded in his right hand, was the sixth avatar of Vishnu who appeared before Rama himself (Rama was the seventh avatar of Vishnu). Parasurama was born as a *brahmana* to the sage Jamadagni and his wife Renuka. In the *Mahabharata*, Parasurama fought against the repressive rule of the *kshatriyas*, while in the *Ramayana* he figures in the *Balakanda* as a sage and follower of Shiva who had given up his martial ways to live as an ascetic on Mount Mahendra.¹⁷⁸ The battle between Rama and Parasurama takes place following the wedding of Rama and his brothers to Sita and her sisters at Mithila, as the newlyweds make their way through the forest to Ayodhya. Offended by Rama's breaking of Shiva's bow, Parasurama wishes to avenge his teacher. Parasurama challenges Rama to a duel with his own bow that he inherited from his father the sage Jamadagni. Before releasing the arrow from the bow, Rama asks Parasurama where he should aim the bow. Out of respect for his teacher Vishvamitra, Rama does not wish to kill Parasurama because he is a Brahmin. Rama asks instead to aim the weapon at Parasurama's "ascetic merit," and upon releasing his arrow Parasurama is stripped of his powers.¹⁷⁹ Defeated, Parasurama retreats to Mount Mahendra and disappears into oblivion. In the poem, the gods observe the duel as Rama releases the arrow and Parasurama nobly accepts his fate.

In the *Mahaviracarita*, the duel between Parasurama and Rama takes place at the court of Janaka in Mithila, and Parasurama is recast as an adversary sent by Malyavan. In the beginning of Act II, Malyavan receives a letter from Parasurama, politely requesting him to reign in the

¹⁷⁸ *Balakanda, sarga 73-75.*

¹⁷⁹ Parasurama gained his ascetic powers through penance and was awarded lands in the heavens by the sage Kasyapa for fighting against the *kshatriyas*. In challenging Rama to a duel, he forfeited his ascetic power and was barred from heaven.

rakshasas Viraha and Danu who are trespassing in the Dandaka Forrest, an area under his protection.¹⁸⁰ Malyavan takes advantage of the diplomatic entreaty to incite a feud between Parasurama and Rama. Malyavan and Surpanakha travel to Mahendra to inform Parasurama that Rama has broken the bow of Shiva. Malyavan wagers that, in his rage, Parasurama will kill Rama, eliminating him as a threat to Ravana. The play then cuts in the next scene to an enraged Parasurama, who inappropriately bursts through the gates of the royal palace kingdom, and enters the women's chambers in search of Rama. Sita cowers in fear of the former slayer of *kshatriyas*, but Rama vows that he and his betrothed pay their respects and receive Parasurama.

The confrontation between Rama and Parasurama depicted in Acts II and III of the *Mahaviracarita* is a war of words, where each character debates the merits and powers of the other, reciting them before Sita and the women. Rama's response to Parasurama's threatening dialogue is even-tempered; the women remark on his confidence, fearlessness, and courageous resolve. The discourse resumes in Act III, as Parasurama continues his provocations and overbearing display of arrogance in remarks to Janaka, Dasharatha, and the assembly of royal sages (Vishvamitra, Vashishta, Catananda). Act IV begins with an intervening scene between Malyavan and Surpanakha that reveals Parasurama has been purified of his sinful pride by Rama, but not killed.¹⁸¹ Parasurama, having been purified of his sinful pride by the gracious Rama, accepts his fate and asks to be released to live in obscurity in the forest.

Rama's superior heroic qualities are next depicted in Act V of the *Mahaviracarita* through his confrontation with Sugriva's older brother Valin. In the *Kishkindakanda* of the *Ramayana*, Valin banishes his younger brother from the kingdom based on false accusations that

¹⁸⁰ *Mahaviracarita*, 33.

¹⁸¹ Following rules of court etiquette, the escalating exchange between Rama and Parasurama is deferred so that Rama's marriage ceremony can proceed. The enmity between the *kshatriyas* and Parasurama, the former destroyer of their race, is still apparent as tensions between the two kings and the Brahmin rise. At the close of Act III, Rama returns from the wedding ceremony and two adversaries are about to begin combat.

Sugriva had attempted to take his elder brother's life and left him for dead.¹⁸² At the beginning of their search for Sita, Rama and Lakshmana encounter Sugriva, who is like them living in exile, on Mount Rishyamukha, along with the monkey general Hanuman.¹⁸³ Rama vows to help Sugriva regain his wife and the kingdom of Kishkinda back from Valin, and in exchange Sugriva vows he will help Rama rescue Sita from Ravana. During a struggle between Sugriva and Valin, Rama shoots an arrow from a concealed position behind a tree and fatally wounds the elder brother. The dying Valin accuses Rama of dishonoring the *kshatriya* warrior code because he shot at him from behind a tree, and attacked while he was already engaged in combat with Sugriva.¹⁸⁴ Rama justifies his actions on three counts: first, because Valin unlawfully took Sugriva's wife, which according to the *ksatriya* code is punishable by death. Second, because Rama took an oath of allegiance to Sugriva. Finally, because Valin is of the *vanara* monkey species, Rama is justified in killing him in his role as a hunter of animals. Hearing his justification, Valin relents and asks for Rama's forgiveness. Having received appropriate form of punishment, Rama declares Valin free from his previous sins.¹⁸⁵

In Act V of the *Mahaviracarita*, Valin is recast as an ally of the *rakshasas* asked by Malyavan to challenge Rama to a duel. As with the duel of Rama and Parasurama in Acts II through IV, the dispute between Rama and Valin is presented as a lengthy dialogue between two powerful heroic figures. Sugriva is only featured as a background figure who shares outcast status with Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother.

¹⁸² *Kishkindakanda*, sarga 2-23.

¹⁸³ In *Kishkindakanda*, sarga 9-10, Sugriva recounts the story of how he was banished. As the elder brother, Valin had initially been crowned king as the rightful heir to the throne. Valin was accidentally sealed inside a cave by Sugriva while fighting the demon Mayavi. Sugriva mistook his brother for dead and sealed the cave to fend off the demon. Sugriva was subsequently crowned king. Valin escaped from the cave and falsely accused Sugriva of betrayal, reclaimed his throne, banished his younger brother and took Sugriva's wife Tara for himself.

¹⁸⁴ *Kishkindakanda*, sarga 17.13-23.

¹⁸⁵ *Kishkindakanda*, sarga 18.

Following Rama's victory over Parasurama in Act IV, Surpanakha arrives at the Ayodhya court in the guise of Mantara, Kaikeyi's handmaiden, to deliver a message from the queen that she has claimed her two boons from Dasharatha. Rama accepts his exile without protest, desiring to focus his attention on protecting the sages in the Dandaka forest to preserve the ritual sacrifices they perform. The episodes that take place in the epic between Rama's exile and the battle of Valin – Surpanakha's disfigurement, the battle against the demons Khara and Dhusana, Sita's abduction, and the death of Jatayus, king of the vultures, who attempted to rescue Sita from Ravana – are briefly recounted in the interlude between Acts IV and V. Act V opens with Lakshmana and Rama reflecting with sadness on the recent course of events. Upon receiving news that Sita's garment was found on Rishyamukha by Sugriva, the princes resume their rescue mission. On their way to Rishyamukha, the spirit of Danu appears before them, and reveals Malyavan's plot to send Valin after Rama. In the subsequent scene, Valin approaches Rama prepared to fulfill his obligation to Malyavan, but struggles with his choice when he witnesses the noble features of Rama. As Valin is bound through his loyalty to Ravana to kill Rama, the two proceed to combat.¹⁸⁶

The battle between Rama and Valin is reconceived in the *Mahaviracarita* as a fair fight in accordance with the *ksatriya* warrior code, and Sugriva is only a bystander. Rama releases an arrow with Shiva's bow that fatally wounds Valin. The dying Valin places the lotus garland on Sugriva to signify his relinquishment of the throne to his younger brother through right of succession. Sugriva regards Valin respectfully as his "teacher and lord," and honors Valin's last request that he form an alliance with Rama.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ The formation of Valin's alliance with Ravana is alluded to in *Uttarakanda*, *sarga* 34.38-41. Thus Bhavabhuti used creative license by making this piece of information on their alliance more salient in the *Mahaviracarita*.

¹⁸⁷ *Mahaviracarita*, 116.

Having eliminated all the opponents placed before him by Malyavan, Rama finally confronts Ravana in Act VI. The battle takes place offstage, and is narrated by Indra, king of the gods, and Chitraratha, king of the Gandharvas (celestial deities), who observe the fighting armies of *rakshasas* and monkeys from the heavens. Ravana is depicted as arrogant, shortsighted, and overcome by his lust for Sita, scoffing at warnings from Queen Mandara and General Prahasta of the impending arrival of Rama's army, and flouting Rama's demand that he return Sita. The battle between Rama and Ravana is described in detail by Indra and Chitraratha as if they are commentators at the ringside of a sporting event, weighing both the physical and moral fitness of each opponent boxing match, and calling out losses and gains on both sides. Finally, a group of divine sages intervenes to persuade Rama and Lakshmana to cut off the heads of Ravana and his son with their arrows. A shower of garlands falls from the heavens in celebration of their victory. The play ends in Act VII with the coronation of Vibhishana as the new king of Lanka, followed by Rama's coronation at Ayodhya.

What is gained from analyzing the *Mahaviracarita* is an understanding of how playwrights visualized the epics for a courtly audience. In celebrating the life of Rama as a mythological hero from *itihasa*, the *Mahaviracarita* achieves its goal as a *nataka*. In this dramatic interpretation of the *Ramayana*, the epic is distilled to the major events of the epic, underlining Rama's worthiness as a heroic character through character oppositions. Furthermore, Rama's victories over Parasurama, Valin, and Ravana are depicted in a series of visual tableau, highlighting the major conflicts in the *Ramayana* that the audience members would have been familiar with from hearing the epic recited regularly at court. Thus the play helps us understand how narrative reliefs on Hindu temples depicting Rama's heroic deeds were produced with the same audience in mind.

The Alliance of Rama and Sugriva in Bhasa's Abhishekanatika

Although the *Abhishekanatika* draws on different chapters in the Rama story than the other three plays, it is not discussed here in depth as it has many similarities to the other plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti in terms of its organization and themes. Of significance is the play's emphasis on the alliance formed between Rama and Sugriva against Valin, which results in their joining of forces in a rescue mission to save Sita and battle against Ravana. The play opens in Act I with Rama's intervention in the battle of Sugriva and Valin, and Valin's subsequent death. Act II presents Hanuman's meeting with Sita in captivity, underlining his own importance as a secondary heroic character in the epic. In Act III, Hanuman is captured by the *rakshasa* army, and Ravana's brother and counselor, Vibhishana, is banished. In Act IV, the building of the bridge and crossing the ocean to Lanka is presented as a dialogue between Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, and Vibhishana, who has now joined forces with them against his brother. In Act V, the confrontation between Ravana and Sita in the Asoka is intense as the demon king tries in vain to persuade her to marry him by presenting her with two severed heads that purportedly belong to Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana's ruse is quickly exposed, and his defeat at the hands of his rival comes swiftly in the opening of Act VI. Act VI closes with Rama's consecration ceremony at Ayodhya. In this way, the play is bookended by the consecration ceremony of the two main characters and allies – Sugriva in Act I and Rama in Act VI. While the *Abhishekanatika* does not have the gravitas of the other three plays discussed here – it does not have the detailed character portrayals as in the *Mahaviracarita*, and it does not present major additions to the story as in the *Pratimanatika* or the *Uttaramacarita*. Nevertheless, this second play by Bhasa still provides valuable evidence for how the *Ramayana* was presented on stage for an elite audience that can be compared to the narrative reliefs on Hindu temples addressed in chapter 3.

Painting and Portraiture in Ramayana Plays

In the *Pratimanatika* and the *Uttaramacarita*, portrait sculpture and paintings are used in the storyline of the play to represent characters and scenes from the *Ramayana*. Visual art was traditionally used in Sanskrit drama as a narrative device to evoke emotional response in characters through triggering lost memories such as love, sorrow, and veneration. Portraiture is the most frequently featured visual media that appears in dramatic literature, but there are also instances of mural painting. In surveying the dramatic corpus, most of the instances where portraiture is used are in the romance dramas.¹⁸⁸ However, in two of the *Ramayana* plays by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti, sculptural portraits and picture galleries are used within the storyline to evoke the heroic and pathetic sentiments that are required of the *nataka* genre. The descriptions of visual art in the plays provides clues for understanding how the heroic deeds of *Rama* as a cultural hero and as an avatar of Vishnu were commemorated in narrative sequences on the walls of Hindu temples.

This technique of using visual art as a narrative device is noted in the earlier plays of Kalidasa to conjure lost or distant memories. In her study of Kalidasa, Barbara Staler Miller describes his “aesthetic of memory” as a technique used by the playwright to evoke sentiments of love and longing through the “act of remembering.”¹⁸⁹ In the *Ramayana* plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti, sculptural portraits and mural paintings also serve a commemorative function, to celebrate the heroic exploits of Rama. In Bhasa’s *Pratimanatika*, sculptural portraits are used in to evoke admiration for Rama’s ancestors. In Bhavabhuti’s *Uttaramacarita*, mural paintings are

¹⁸⁸ Limited scholarship has been done on this subject. See for example Virginia Saunders, “Portrait Painting as a Dramatic Device in Sanskrit Plays,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 39 (1919): 299-302, which tracks references to portraiture in plays by Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Harsha, and Rajasekhara.

¹⁸⁹ Barbara Stoler-Miller, *Theater of Memory: the Plays of Kalidasa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 38. For example, in Act VI of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*, the king reflects on a painted portrait he made of his lost lover with intense passion and emotion.

used invoke emotional responses in Sita and Rama as they relive their own harrowing experiences.

Representing the Raghu Lineage in Bhasa's Pratimanatika

In Bhasa's *Pratimanatika* (The Statue Play), descriptions of visual art facilitate recollection and reverence for the previous kings in the Ikshvaku lineage to which Rama belonged. The Ikshvakus were a mythical dynasty associated with the solar race of kings.¹⁹⁰ Rama is often referred to as Raghava or a descendent of Raghu, who was Rama's great-grandfather and an ancestral king of the Ikshvaku dynasty. The *Pratimanatika* focuses on Rama's resignation to follow his *dharma* and go into exile as well as his brother Bharata's deep sense of loyalty, as a secondary heroic character dutifully following Rama's request to serve as regent for the duration of Rama's exile. The play is named for the portrait gallery in Act III where Bharata's learns of his father's demise and his brother's exile.

The play opens in Act I as plans are underway for the consecration of Prince Rama to overtake the throne of Ayodhya from his father Dasharatha. Dasharatha's second wife, Kaikeyi, encouraged by her nefarious handmaiden Manthara, reminds him of a boon owed to her for tending to his wounds in battle. Kaikeyi demands that her son and Rama's younger brother, Bharata, be made king instead of Rama. The play follows the consequences of her actions – her desire to be queen results in the exile of Rama and the death of Dasharatha in Act II. Following these events, Bharata entreats Rama to return to Ayodhya to no avail in Act IV, and takes Rama's sandals to place on the throne. Ravana's abduction of Sita is depicted in Act V. In act VI, Kaikeyi repents for her actions and is forgiven by Bharata. In Act VII, Rama returns

¹⁹⁰ The dating of the Ikshvakus in epic literature is generally attributed to the Vedic period, while the historical Ikshvaku dynasty of modern Andhra Pradesh who came to power at the end of the second century CE.

triumphantly to Ayodhya having conquered Ravana and rescued Sita. The play ends with Rama's coronation celebration.

Act III of the *Pratimanatika* represents a pivotal moment in the *Mahaviracarita* when the events of Act I and II transpired are revealed to Bharata upon returning from a sojourn at his uncle's palace. The description of the portrait gallery is entirely Bhasa's innovation, and brings to mind the manner in which Kalidasa recounted the heroic exploits of the Ikshvakus in the *Raghuvamsa*.¹⁹¹ Bharata is advised to wait for the proper asterism to re-enter Ayodhya. Bharata and his charioteer decide to pass the time by visiting a roadside shrine just outside the kingdom:

That will serve the double purpose, worship and repose. And it is the proper custom to sit a moment before entering a town, so stop the chariot.¹⁹²

Initially, Bharata thinks he has entered a newly prepared shrine for a deity, as indicated by the offerings of garlands, fried grains, and sandalwood markings on the walls.¹⁹³ His aesthetic response to the sculpture is expressed in detail:

[Entering and looking round.] What exquisite carving in these sculptures! How lifelike they are. Though these statues represent deities they look just like men. Is this a glorification of the four deities? Nay, be they what they may, they delight my heart.¹⁹⁴

As Bharata proceeds to worship the sculptures as gods, the temple priest intervenes and explains to Bharata that these are portrait statues of the Ikshvakus, the great warrior clan (*kshatriya*) and creators of the solar race to which Bharata and his forefathers belonged.¹⁹⁵ Overjoyed, Bharata expresses his admiration for his ancestors in diction that is reminiscent of eulogistic inscriptions:

¹⁹¹ Kalidasa and Mallinatha, *The Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa, with the commentary of Mallinatha*, trans. Gopal Raghunath Nandargikar (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), chapter 14.

¹⁹² Bhasa, *Pratimanatika*, 3.5.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ A distinction is noted in the dialogue between Bharata and the priest between the *brahman* worship performed for gods and the salutations that are given to *kshatriya* ancestors. The priest hurries to prevent Bharata from performing the wrong kind of ritual for the statues lest there be consequences.

Sons of Ikshvaku! So these are the rulers of Ayodhya. These are they that rallied with the Gods at the destruction of the Demon city. These are they that by their good deeds pass to Indra's realm with the subjects of the country and the town. These are they that hold the whole world won by the might of their arms. These are they that Death so long sought an excuse for not removing.¹⁹⁶

The priest then identifies each of the portraits for Bharata by their accomplishments – Dilipa for his command of the *dharma*, Raghu for his charity, and Aja for his devotion.¹⁹⁷ Bharata declares the proper salutations to each of the sculptures, illustrating how portrait statues were honored as though they were manifestations of the actual ancestor.

Turning to the fourth portrait statue of Dasharatha, Bharata becomes perplexed, as it was not customary to “put up statues of living kings.”¹⁹⁸ Realizing that his father has died, Bharata's reaction is palpable (he swoons and regains consciousness multiple times). It is then revealed how his mother Kaikeyi prevented the consecration of Rama by invoking the “bridal fee” (i.e. her boon) from Dasharatha, forcing him to make Bharata the king. The psychological intensity of this moment continues with the arrival of the queens to the temple with the king's minister, Sumantra, who have come to pay homage to the newly installed ancestral portrait of Dasharatha. Bharata salutes Rama's mother Kausalya and Lakshmana's mother Sumitra, who both respond with blessings. Bharata then rebukes his own mother, Kaikeyi:

Oh, wicked woman! Betwixt this my mother and that one thou lookest not well, like a foul stream slipping between the Ganges and the Yamuna.¹⁹⁹

Defying his mother's order to perform the royal consecration, Bharata promptly departs in search of Rama and Lakshmana.

¹⁹⁶ *Pratimanatika*, 3.7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 3.8. Dilipa is the father of Raghu, who is in turn the father of Aja, who is the father of Dasharatha. A.D. Pusalker *Bhasa: A Study* (1940; reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968), 422, describes these portrait statues as the “embodiment” of the king's character.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 3.8

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.16.

The depiction of Bharata's engagement with and reaction to the portrait statues of his ancestors is unique in the literary corpus of Sanskrit plays of the eighth century, and provides compelling evidence that royal portraiture was a known practice in India at this time.²⁰⁰ More importantly, this scene provides clues as to how temple statues functioned in the secular context of courtly culture, distinct from sectarian rituals performed for Hindu deities. In this instance, we see royal patrons visiting a temple to pay respects to ancestral kings as exemplary heroes. The placement of royal portrait statues inside the temple and the oblations performed on the occasion of the installation of Dasharatha's memorial portrait within the family suggests that kings were worshipped in a manner similar to that of Hindu deities, but the priests were careful to draw distinction between the rites performed for ancestral kings and actual deities in worship. This roadside temple was expressly made to commemorate the ancestral line of the Ikshvaku kings to whom Bharata and Rama belonged. The dialogue between Bharata, the temple priest and the queen's entourage suggests women and men of royal family equally paid their respects to the previous kings.

Picturing Narrative in Act I of the Uttaramacarita: the Painted Murals of Rama's Life Story.

Like the *Pratimanatika*, visual art is used in the *Uttaramacarita* as a narrative to facilitate recollection of Rama's heroic exploits. However, while Act III of the *Pratimanatika* is set in a

²⁰⁰ This is part of a larger debate on whether a royal portraiture tradition existed in ancient India. If one accepts the current dating of Bhasa's work to the eighth century and the patronage of the Pallava king Rajasimha, then it may be possible to establish linkages back to Rajasimha's major architectural commission, the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. Although this is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting the visual program of the temple reflects the patron's predilection for the literary arts. Additionally, in *Pratimanatika* 3.8, Bharata's question to the priest, "Do they put up statues of living kings" and the latter's response, "oh no, only of the dead," suggests certain interdictions were in place. This may explain why portrait statues were more rare in ancient India because they could only be created posthumously, and thus it would fall to the next ruler or a family member to commission a portrait honoring their deceased loved one. One wonders if this is the case with a portrait statue of Narasimhavarman (Mamalla I) on the south face of the late seventh-century Dharmaraja shrine at the Pallava site of Mamallapuram, illustrated in Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 310, fig. 14.26. For further discussion on Pallava Rajasimha's patronage, see R. Nagaswamy, "Innovative Emperor and his Personal Chapel: Eighth Century Kanchipuram," in *Royal Patrons and Great Temple Art*, ed. Vidya Dehejia (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988), 37-60.

portrait gallery at a roadside shrine located on the periphery of the Ayodhya palace, Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* is set in a picture gallery located inside the palace compound, where earlier episodes from the *Ramayana* are depicted in mural paintings. The royal picture gallery is an atypical setting for action in a play. When actions are set at the king's court, they are usually staged in public spaces such as the entrance gates to the palace gardens and royal audience halls, or in the more intimate spaces of pleasure gardens and private residential quarters. I know of only one other instance where a scene is staged in a picture gallery, but this is in the context of a romantic *prakarana* play, and the mural decorations of the space do not figure in the dialogue between characters.²⁰¹ In the *Uttaramacarita*, both the setting of the picture gallery and what is being depicted within that space serve an integral role in the development of the plot.

The *Uttaramacarita* is a seven-act play derived exclusively from the episodes recounted in the *Uttarakanda*. In essence, the play picks up where the *Mahaviracarita* leaves off at the end of the *Yuddhakanda*, focusing on the events that took place following Rama's coronation as king of Ayodhya. As in the *Mahaviracarita*, Bhavabhuti made changes to the original plotline of the *Ramayana*, and these have a significant impact on the conclusion of the story in the *Uttaramacarita*. In the original storyline from the *Uttarakanda*, Valmiki orders his young disciple Kusha and Lava to sing the *Ramayana* on the occasion of the sacrifice, and sends them to Rama's palace to follow out his orders. Rama then discovers that he has two sons, and that Sita is still alive. He summons her to court to undergo a new trial by oath. After avowing her fidelity to Rama, Sita asks to be returned to Mother Earth. The ground opens beneath her, and she descends into the earth, never to be seen again. Rama, though perpetually bereft by the loss of Sita, rules a prosperous kingdom for 10,000 years.

²⁰¹ In Act III of the *Priyadarshika* – a seventh century drama by Harsha of Kanauj (ruled circa 590-647) – the king's jester and the queen's attendant meet in a picture gallery of the palace during the performance of a play in order to plan a romantic tryst between the king and his lover.

The conclusion of the *Uttaramacarita* is significantly different from that of the *Uttarakanda*. The play opens in Act I with the hero enjoying his newfound prosperity with Sita, who is now with child. Rumors have spread amongst the people causing them to question Sita's fidelity to Rama, forcing him ultimately to banish her from the kingdom even after she has passed the trial by fire. After being banished, Sita gives birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusha, and entrusts them to the poet sage Valmiki who raised them in his hermitage at Chitrakuta and leaving the twins without knowledge of their birthright. Acts II-VII take place twelve years after Sita has given birth to the twins. Action resumes as Sita attempts to take her life by drowning in the Ganges River. The goddesses of the earth and Ganges River (Bhagirathi) rescue Sita and command her to care for the boys until they are twelve years old. Meanwhile, Rama wonders for twelve years re-visiting all the locales he shared with Sita and Lakshmana from the *Ramayana*. Upon returning to Ayodhya, Rama resumes his duties as king and orders *asvamedha*, and assigns Lakshmana's son Chandraketu with the responsibility of the protecting the horse on its journey. Arriving at Chitrakuta, Chandraketu is challenged by Rama's son Lava to a duel, during which Lava invokes the magical Jrimbhaka weapons known only to Rama. Impressed by the young boy's valor, Chandraketu invites the two boys to Ayodhya to view a performance of a scene from Valmiki's newly composed *Ramayana* to be staged by a troupe of *apsaras* (divine courtesans) on the banks of the Ganges River, before the kingdom of Ayodhya and an assembly of gods. This performance takes place in the final act VII of the *Uttaramacarita*, and serves as the denouement that reunites Rama with Sita and the twins. This *garbanka* (play within a play) is another narrative device that depicts the birth of Kusha and Lava and Sita's subsequent descent into the earth, thus informing Rama of the events that transpired after his repudiation of Sita. Taking Sita for dead, Rama falls grief-stricken until the actual Sita appears on stage and is reunited with her family.

The change of the ending from the original *Uttarakanda* in Bhavabhuti's *Uttaramacarita* is significant in that it resolves another problematic aspect of the *Ramayana*, and that is Rama's abandonment of Sita and her subsequent suicide. This is remedied in the *Uttaramacarita* as Sita is reconciled with Rama and they return to Ayodhya with their two sons to happily rule over the kingdom.²⁰²

Another innovation in the *Uttaramacarita* is the detailed description of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana viewing of paintings in a picture gallery of the Ayodhya palace in Act I, which foreshadows the sequence of events that follow in Acts II-VII.²⁰³ For it is in the viewing of the paintings, that Sita and Rama pay homage to images of the Jrimbhaka weapons for the protection of their unborn children, and to the Ganges River goddess, Bhagirathi, as the "deity of the Raghu clan," establishing a binding agreement between the gods and the king.²⁰⁴ Thus the gods intervene when Sita's attempted suicide threatens the future of the royal line, and again at the end of the play to insure the reunion of Sita and her family.

Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* opens at the court of Ayodhya following Janaka's departure for Mithila after Rama's coronation ceremony has been completed. Seeking a diversion for the couple that is saddened by the departure of the in-laws after the festivities, Lakshmana invites Rama and Sita to view a freshly painted picture gallery illustrated with scenes from their life in exile. Lakshmana explains that the paintings depict all the events up until Sita's purification by fire, corresponding to the first six *kandas* of the *Ramayana*. As they move through the picture gallery, the three characters describe what is depicted in fourteen of the episodes, skipping over

²⁰² Pollock speculates that later poets viewed the original ending from the Valmiki *Ramayana* was an "ethical dilemma" and therefore altered the ending with the couple returning to Ayodhya. See introduction to his translation of *Uttaramacarita*, 47.

²⁰³ Pollock, notes for *Uttaramamacarita*, 410, notes the allusions to painting exhibitions in *sarga* 14 of Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*, which would have been known to Bhavabhuti, may have served as inspiration for the use of a *citrasala* as a narrative device in Act I. This reiterates the shared knowledge of canonical Sanskrit *kavya* in regional courts across the subcontinent.

²⁰⁴ *Uttaramacarita*, 1.100.

key passages that would be too troubling for Sita in her vulnerable state. The first episode they describe is Rama's acquisition of the Jrimbhaka weapons from the *Balakanda*.²⁰⁵ Sita describes the scene with gods "crowding together overhead...appearing to sing my husband's praises."²⁰⁶ Rama instructs Sita to bow and pay homage to these deities in order that they will serve their children as they served Rama.

Next in the painted sequence is the "Mithila episode," that depicts the breaking of Shiva's bow, and the marriage ceremony of Rama and Sita. Sita again describes the scene, which shows Rama breaking of Shiva's bow "with utter nonchalance" as Janaka observes "almost speechless with astonishment at his physical beauty."²⁰⁷ Following this is an image of the wedding ceremony – four brothers present a cow for the wedding followed by a ritual consecration. Sita remarks, "Why, I almost feel as if I were now there and this was then."²⁰⁸

Following the Mithila episode is the battle of Rama and Parasurama. Sensing her uneasiness, Rama briefly pays homage to his former adversary, and quickly steers them to the next painting of the newlyweds' reception upon their arrival at Ayodhya. From here the sequence continues with four episodes from the *Ayodhyakanda*. Skipping over an image of Manthara, the evil handmaiden who incited Kaikeyi to betray her husband and Rama, the group moves to a later episode that takes place after they have departed Ayodhya for their forest exile. Rama describes the painting of the *ingudi* tree at Shringavera, under which they received counsel from Guha, king of the Nishadas on the banks of the Ganges River. This is followed by the episode of Rama tying his hair to take on his new role as an ascetic.

²⁰⁵ *Balakanda*, sarga 26..

²⁰⁶ *Uttaramacarita*, 1.60.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.70.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.75.

In the next scene, Rama pays homage to the Goddess Bhagirathi, i.e. the Ganges River, the “deity of the Raghu clan,” and asks for protection of Sita: “Mother, I beg you to be as kindly disposed to your daughter-in-law Sita as Arundhati is.”²⁰⁹ Lakshmana then describes the next painting, another depiction of a tree on the banks of a river – this time the black banyan tree on the banks of the Kalindi River, where they receive directions from the sage Bharadvaja to Valmiki’s hermitage at Citrakuta. Sita and Rama nostalgically reflect on their brief respite in this safe haven until Lakshmana redirects them to the next episode in the sequence depicting an episode from the *Aranyakanda*, when the *rakshasa* Viradha blocked their entrance to the Vindhya Forest, and attempted to abduct Sita. Finding this scene objectionable, Sita turns to another painting which shows the loving couple enjoying themselves on Mount Prasravana in Janasthana. Rama and Sita linger happily on this memory until Lakshmana directs them to the episode of Surpanakha in the Panchavati forest. Sita cries, “Oh my husband, this is the last sight I’ll have of you!” to which Rama replies, “Now, now, so afraid of separation. It’s only a painting.”²¹⁰

Continuing with the sequence, Lakshmana then describes the episode of the golden deer leading to Sita’s abduction and recalls Rama’s “half-mad acts when Janasthana” was left deserted.²¹¹ The memory proves too much for Rama to bear, who breaks down in tears. Seeing Rama’s distress, Lakshmana re-directs them to an image of Jatayus, the son of Vishnu’s avatar Garuda, presumably a reference to his noble attempt to save Sita from Ravana.

Following the image of Jatayus, Lakshmana directs Sita and Rama to an image of the Chitrakuta wilderness, recalling scenes from the *Kishkindakanda* including the brothers’ battle with the demon Kabandha, an image of Matanga’s ashram at Mount Rishyamukha where they

²⁰⁹ *Uttaramacarita*, 1.100.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.110-115.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

encounter the female ascetic Shabari, and the lotus pond on Lake Pampa where Rama succumbed to his grief at the loss of Sita. Lakshmana then notes an image of Hanuman, who is praised for his valorous attempt to save Sita from captivity. Sita notes another image of Rama nearby, slumped against a tree, “his natural glow dulled, a mere vestige of his once-captivating majesty.”²¹²

The viewing of the picture gallery ends abruptly here as Lakshmana, sensing Rama’s anguish and Sita’s fatigue, directs them away from the paintings:

From here on there are countless miraculous feats for viewing, each one greater than the next of brother [Rama] and the monkeys and *rakshasas*. But sister-in-law must be tired; I would ask her to rest now.²¹³

Presumably these “miraculous feats” would have included numerous battle scenes from the *Yuddhakanda*, including Rama’s victory over Ravana.

The audience is not privy to the final episode depicting Sita’s purification by fire because it is too upsetting for the hero and heroine to recall. Sita expresses her desire to bathe in the calming waters of the Ganges, thus setting the stage for her departure from Ayodhya in Act II. Rama is summoned by his doorkeeper, and is presented the ill-fated report of the townspeople spreading rumors of Sita’s impurity. Tortured by what he knows he must do to retain his honor and the prosperity of his kingdom, Rama orders Lakshmana to take Sita to the forest and abandon her there, thus setting of the sequence of events for the rest of the play. What the characters describe as they view the picture gallery in Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* is, in effect, a narrative sequence of selected episodes from the *Ramayana*. Bhavabhuti chose to focus on episodes that were most evocative for Rama and Sita. This act provides the seeds for plot

²¹² *Uttaramacarita*, 1.135-140.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

development - prayers to the family gods for protection prevent Sita's demise and reunite her with Rama.

What is conveyed by the highly descriptive passages on narrative paintings in Act I of the *Uttaramacarita*? First, our understanding of what is being depicted in Bhavabhuti's picture gallery is inferred by the highly visual description given by the characters. What is depicted on the walls of Rama's picture gallery is conveyed to the audience through dialogue. In other words, there is no indication that there is a set decorated with painted murals and this was not customary in Indian theater tradition at this time. The *NS* gives minimal instructions for set decorations known as "model works."²¹⁴ Costuming and props were used as accessories, but the stage was primarily a ritually consecrated platform upon which actors performed. Thus characterization was more important than accessories and the lengthy descriptions in both plays attest to the ability of the actor to convey an imaginary mural or statue that the audience can envision in their mind. Even if there was a mural decoration on stage, it is was not the painting so much as the description of the events occurring in it that were discussed in the dialogue. Our perception of the picture gallery is given from the dialogue and perspective of the hero and heroine Rama and Sita.

Second, and this could be said of *Ramayana* plays on the whole, there appears to have been a commemorative function in the visual representation of heroic figures that was intended to remind viewers of the king's heroic actions. Rama is positioned here as the exemplary ruler because of his heroic exploits and adherence to the *dharma* of the *ksatriya* warrior code. One will recall Lakshmana's line from the beginning of Act I that "the painter has completed his depiction of your life story in the picture gallery, just as we recounted it to him."²¹⁵ The

²¹⁴ See *NS* 20:41 for statement regarding restrictions of using chariots, elephants and horses on stage, and 23:6-9 regarding elements of stage props and design or "model works" such as fake animals, palaces, hills, and weapons.

²¹⁵ *Uttaramacarita*, 1.50.

completion of the paintings coincides with the end of Rama's coronation festivities, thus one wonders if Bhavabhuti's implication is that these were commissioned specifically to celebrate the "miraculous feats" of the new king of the Raghu dynasty.

Turning to the actual paintings, some observations can be made about their composition and subject matter. First, landscape plays a prominent role – the painted murals are set within the mythological landscape of the epic itself – depicting the hero's journey through the same geographic locations – rivers, mountains, forests, ascetic hermitages. Second, many of the episodes focus on the heritages visited by Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita in their period of exile. Third, secondary heroic figures in the narrative such as Jatayus and Hanuman are depicted and given recognition for their contributions, as are Rama's previous adversaries who later become his allies (i.e. Parasurama). Battle scenes, though not described in the act itself, were included to highlight Rama's martial bravery. Such battle scenes as well as Sita's abduction and her trial by fire, while considered inappropriate to represent in the *nataka* format on stage, were acceptable subjects for narrative paintings.

Finally, what is most significant about Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* is that it provides literary evidence for a parallel practice of depicting scenes from the *Ramayana* in a visual narrative format, and that these were organized with a courtly viewer in mind. That is, the paintings are intended to produce an emotional response in the viewer as they recall the past events of the *Ramayana*. Rama and Sita are portrayed as courtly characters with whom such an audience could easily identify by their mannerisms as archetypal heroic characters defined in dramatic treatises.

In the previous chapter, I reviewed Van Kooij's discussion of the dearth of evidence for actual picture galleries outside of disparate literary references from *itihasa*. It is noteworthy that the term used in the *Uttaramacarita* for the picture gallery, *vithika*, is the same as that used to

describe picture galleries in inscriptional evidence.²¹⁶ Interestingly, the term is used similarly in a fifth century inscription from cave 16 at the Buddhist site of Ajanta in modern Maharashtra.²¹⁷ Epigraphers have noted the use of the term *vithi* for picture gallery by both the author of the fifth-century Ajanta inscription and in the eighth-century play *Uttaramacarita* previously.²¹⁸ However, art historians have not considered the significance of this connection between the inscriptional, archaeological, and literary evidence at length.

Cave 16 is a *vihara* (Buddhist monastery) that was built and decorated between 462-479, and commissioned by Varahadeva, a minister to the Vakataka court of King Harisena (ruled circa 475-500 C.E.).²¹⁹ Though most of the paintings in cave 16 have deteriorated, extant paintings on the veranda and ambulatory pathway surrounding the audience hall suggest it originally had an elaborate decorative program of narrative paintings depicting the Buddha's life stories with intricate ceiling carvings.²²⁰

The dedicatory inscription in cave 16 is on the left-end wall of the veranda, and has been dated by epigraphers to the reign of the Vakataka king Harisena (ruled 475-500 C.E.).²²¹ The inscription records the dedication of the cave by Harisena's minister, Varahadeva, who commissioned and donated the monument for the merit of his parents.²²² A description of the cave is given in verse 24:

²¹⁶ *Uttaramacarita*, 1.50.

²¹⁷ I thank Robert Brown for bringing the Ajanta inscription to my attention.

²¹⁸ Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi, "Ajanta Cave Inscription of Varahadeva." *Inscriptions of the Vakatakas*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 5 (1963): 111n3.

²¹⁹ Walter Spink, *Ajanta: History and Development*, vol. 4 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 140-46.

²²⁰ Dieter Schingloff, Monika Zin, and Matthias Helmdach, *Guide to the Ajanta Paintings* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999), 1:9-30 and 2:25.

²²¹ Mirashi, "Ajanta Cave Inscription of Varahadeva," 111.

²²² Note here tradition of donating religious shrines, icons for parents. In case of Buddhism accruing merit on behalf of others important. In case of Hinduism, icons dedicated in honor of parents.

[The cave] which is adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture galleries [*su-vithi*], ledges, statues of nymphs of Indra and the like, which is ornamented with beautiful pillars and stairs, and has a temple of the Buddha image.²²³

Further down in verse 27, the *vihara* is also compared to Vishnu's celestial palace on Mount Mandara:

[The cave which resembles] the palaces of the lords of gods and is similar to a cave in the lovely Mandara mountain.²²⁴

What is significant for my project is that the inscription provides further evidence that picture galleries were used in both religious and secular architecture, and were placed strategically in dedicated spaces for viewers to engage in a contemplative experience of recalling the heroic exploits (in the case of Rama), or the miraculous events (in the case of the Buddha). Furthermore, the description of the Buddhist *vihara* as resembling a celestial palace is reminiscent of descriptions of temples and palace structures found in architectural treatises. This underlines Granoff's argument that the temples were lavishly decorated to emulate the celestial palaces described in the *Puranas* and other literary sources. Thus the picture gallery was a technique that could be employed by poets and playwrights for commemorating the life of any heroic figure whether in a religious or secular context, and it seems that Bhavabhuti employed this visual medium as a narrative device for setting up the plot in the first act of his *Uttaramacarita*.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, I conclude that the *Ramayana* plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti provide evidence for the courtly experience of visual art that further supports inscriptional

²²³ Mirashi, "Ajanta Cave Inscription of Varahadeva," 111.

²²⁴ Ibid.

evidence from actual sites. The audiences may have contemplated narrative reliefs as a kind of re-enactment of the epic where the reliefs (like the dramatic counterpart) provide visual stimuli for the viewer who is already familiar with the story. In using visual art as a device for recollection of the heroic exploits, Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* presents perhaps the closest parallel to looking at narrative reliefs on Hindu temples that I address in the following chapter.

Having examined the dramatic tradition of the *NS* and *Ramayana* plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti, what can be established about the courtly subjectivity vis a vis visual art? My goal in examining the dramatic tradition in courtly literature was to recapture something of the cultural milieu in which elite temple patrons circulated. In order to have a better understanding of the courtly perspective these individuals brought to their experience of visual art. The literary evidence helps us understand more about the audience for the reliefs that was the same courtly audience that enjoyed dramatic performances in the royal palace. From the dramatic treatises such as the *NS* one can conclude that notions of heroic characters were carefully defined to mimic those of the social organization of the court. The plays reflect the popular reception of the *Ramayana* and Rama's status as an archetypal hero – the model of bravery, loyalty, and righteousness that embodied the just ruler. It is also possible to gain insight into what expectations courtly patrons brought to their experience of narrative reliefs on temples – that they were heavily informed by watching scenes from epics interpreted on stage in dramatic performances. The *Ramayana* dramas were a natural extension of tradition of reciting the epics for festivals honoring deities and royal figures such as the king. Finally, that this was a secular kind of activity – that of enjoying a dramatic presentation – embedded within a religious ceremony honoring a deity.

CHAPTER 3

Ramayana Reliefs on Hindu Temples in the Sixth to Eighth Centuries

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I investigated texts related to Indian dramaturgy, outlining the types of plays, characterization of actors, and audience appreciation. I then considered several plays from the sixth to eighth centuries that center on the heroic life of Rama. While the plays vary in their story lines, they all ultimately refer to the *Ramayana*. Rama is depicted in the plays in a manner that is consistent with honoring him as a loyal, brave, and righteous hero, as someone to be admired by people from all levels of society. Still, these plays were clearly written for the court, and ultimately for the king. Looking at the use of sculpture and painting in the storyline of the *Pratimanatika* and the *Uttaramacarita* provided valuable insight into the use and meaning of visual art in the culture at that time.

In this chapter, I turn to the earliest extant depictions of the *Ramayana* in relief sculptures on Hindu temples built between the sixth and eighth centuries. I will track the development of *Ramayana* relief sequences at Hindu temples through extant evidence from the Vishnu temple at Deogarh in north India, the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami, the Papanatha and the Virupaksha temples at Pattadakal, and the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora. The majority of these sites are clustered in the Deccan in areas that were initially controlled by the Chalukyas of Badami, who dominated the region between circa 550-750 CE until they were eclipsed by their feudatories, the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed, who maintained control until circa 950 CE. I use the evidence from the previous chapter to guide my interpretation of temple sculpture, drawing comparisons between the literary and visual evidence.

In chapter 1, I observed how previous readings of temple sculpture have consistently been in terms of esoteric and complex religious interpretations. Obviously sculptures

representing Hindu deities on a Hindu temple are by definition religious; however, the organization of the sculptures, their actual identification, and what they signify to the temple audience are often difficult to determine. Furthermore, there is limited information on these sculptures in terms of inscriptions. One approach to interpreting the placement and identification of sculptures has been to treat the iconographic program of a Hindu temple as a kind of puzzle that is pieced together and decoded to reveal its secret meaning.²²⁵ I am not denying the validity of this approach. Instead, I argue that temple sculpture can also be interpreted as an object of aesthetic enjoyment, strategically designed to appeal to knowledgeable viewers as an expression of the highly refined court cultures of the period. Through a comparison of literary and visual evidence, my goal in this chapter is to consider how temple audiences responded in a similar fashion to sculptural representations of Rama as theatergoers responded to the representation of Rama on stage. That is, to see visual art on Hindu temples in terms of entertainment, wonder, and aesthetic achievement.

Before beginning my analysis of the *Ramayana* reliefs, I want to make two points regarding the approach I have adopted for this material. First, as with my analysis of Sanskrit dramas in the previous chapter, I use the Valmiki *Ramayana* as the primary textual source for identifying the sequence of extant reliefs because it is the oldest known account of Rama's life, and because it was the most widely circulated version of the epic in the sixth to eighth century. Second, I believe that artists strategically used framing, a sequential mode of narration wherein individual scenes are delineated by borders between the relief carvings, as a narrative device within an architectural context, selecting out specific episodes and placing them in a recognizable order.²²⁶ That being said, I do not believe the function of the reliefs was didactic

²²⁵ See for example Cathleen Cummings, "A Study of the Iconographic Program of the Lokesvara (Virupaksa) Temple, Pattadakal" (PhD diss., OSU, 2006).

²²⁶ Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), 20.

nor were they part of a ritual practice such as circumambulation. Rather they function symbolically to evoke heroic ideals that were universally recognized in the figure of Rama. In this sense, the narratives function more iconographically to evoke Rama's presence in a manner that is similar to the depiction of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni's life story in Buddhist architecture.²²⁷ Finally, the intention or signification of these narrative reliefs was in part secular – they were designed to appeal to a courtly sensibility and do not serve a liturgical purpose. The narrative function of the reliefs are as signifiers of courtly ideals that members of the elite class, especially the king and his royal household, would immediately identify with through the well-known story of Rama's journey through exile, and the battle to save his beloved wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. Therefore, the courtly viewer's reception of narrative reliefs was informed by their knowledge of the *Ramayana*, through hearing the epic recited, or by viewing it performed on stage.

Vishnu Temple at Deogarh, circa mid-sixth century

The *Ramayana* relief cycle from the Vishnu temple at Deogarh is among the earliest known examples of a sequential narrative arrangement in stone.²²⁸ The Deogarh reliefs originally decorated the plinth of the Vishnu temple. Unfortunately, the Deogarh reliefs were removed from their original location, and are now housed in the National Museum in Delhi. However, the *shikhara* and the plinth of the temple have been reconstructed, and with the help of archaeological reports it is possible to discuss the arrangement of *Ramayana* reliefs to a degree.

²²⁷ Robert L. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: the Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 64-109.

²²⁸ Scattered relief fragments were found elsewhere in northern India at Nachna and in eastern India at Apsadh (on stucco panels) and Bhubaneswar. I will address Nachna below. On Apsadh, see Jayantika Kala, *Epic Scenes in Indian Plastic Art*, 20-22. On Bhubaneswar, see Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Ramayana in Orissa*, 70-71.

For the purposes of my dissertation, Deogarh represents the beginning point of the *Ramayana* tradition in temple architecture of the sixth to eighth century. Although located several hundred miles north of the Deccan in Madhya Pradesh, Deogarh is important here to emphasize that visual motifs travelled across a large swath of geography in a short period time.²²⁹

The Vishnu temple at Deogarh is one of the earliest extant remains of freestanding Hindu temple architecture in stone in India. **(Figure 1)** It also has some of the earliest examples of narrative relief sculpture, both on the outside walls of the temple proper and the plinth upon which the temple is built. Originally a five-shrined (*pancayatna*) temple built on a raised plinth, the temple is undated; however, recent scholarship has shown that it was probably built in stages during the sixth century.²³⁰

Although the Deogarh temple is a simple, four-sided structure, it is rich with relief sculpture around the doorway and in the niches of the outer walls of the temple. The stories represented here are Vishnu Anantasayana (Vishnu Lying on the Cosmic Snake) on the south wall, the sages Nara/Narayana on the east wall, and the story of Gajendramoksha on the north side. These are all stories related to Vishnu and his avatars. The temple stands upon a ten-foot high plinth that was originally decorated with a continuous band of narrative reliefs that included scenes from the *Mahabharata*, the *Krishnacarita* (Life of Krishna), and the *Ramayana* around the perimeter of the plinth, placed approximately four feet from ground level. **(Figure 2)** Staircases punctuate the center of the plinth on each of its four sides allowing access to the terrace around the temple. There is an additional image of Vishnu Anantasayana carved in the *lalatabimba* (tutelary image) in the lintel above the doorway to the cella. Three sculptural

²²⁹ For thorough analysis of this circulation of motifs and the political motivations behind it see Cummings, “A Study of the Iconographic Program of the Lokesvara (Virupaksa) Temple, Pattadakal,” 188-466.

²³⁰ Joanna Gottfried Williams argues that construction of the Vishnu temple was done in two phases. First in circa 500 the superstructure was built including the doorway jamb and side shrines, while the plinth (including the relief sculptures), walls and pillars were completed in a second phase from 520-550. See Joanna Gottfried Williams, *Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 132.

fragments that have been labeled as bust figures of Vishnu, one in his incarnation as Antasayi Vishnu, were also documented at the site; however, these are too damaged to attribute any credible identification.²³¹ In addition, there are remains of approximately thirty relief panels that include scenes from the *Ramayana*, the *Krishnacarita* as well as *mithuna* couples, dwarves, and female bust portraits framed in *chaitya* windows. Thus the overall theme of the temple's iconographic program is the story of Vishnu and his avatars. This emphasis on Vishnu makes a compelling case for the temple's Vaishnava affiliation, and it is indeed a rare instance in which the iconographic program of the temple is closely related to its divine affiliation.

The Vishnu temple was first published by Alexander Cunningham in his *Archaeological Report on Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa* between 1874-77. Cunningham found the temple before the *shikhara* was reconstructed, with approximately five feet of the plinth visible. Photos from Cunningham's reports show that the majority of the plinth and miniature shrines on the four corners of the platform were still covered with debris at the time.²³² However, enough of the plinth was visible for Cunningham to produce a schematic rendering of the terrace plinth (without the miniature shrines because they had not yet been discovered) that measured 55'6" square, and an elevation of the walls of the terraced plinth. **(Figure 3)** Cunningham noted finding two "end stones" with *mithuna* and four narrative reliefs still in situ, and speculated there were originally twenty reliefs on each side of the platform with a total of eighty slabs.²³³ Two of the reliefs described as still in situ by Cunningham correspond to depictions of the Surpanakha and Khara-Dhusana episodes from the *Ramayana* that are no longer in situ. **(Figure 9)** Unfortunately Cunningham neglected to note on which side of the plinth these two reliefs were originally

²³¹ Madho Sarup Vats, *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India 70 (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1952), plate XII.

²³² Alexander Cunningham, *Report of Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa in 1874 and 1876-77*, Archaeological Survey of India 10 (Calcutta, 1880), plate XXXV.

²³³ Ibid., 108-109.

located. Another relief described in Cunningham corresponds to an image later identified by Vats as a scene of Nanda and Yasoda with Baladeva and Krishna from the *Krishnacarita* that is still in situ. **(Figure 4)**

Remains of the *shikhara* and the plinth of the Deogarh temple were excavated in 1917-1918, along with remains of four miniature shrines that originally stood at each of the corners of the platform as well as moonstones at the bottom of each staircase.²³⁴ Between 1927-1928, M.S. Vats restored the plinth and the *shikhara*. During this time, Vats discovered additional scenes from the *Ramayana*, *Krishnacarita*, and the *Mahabharata* and placed them in a godown to the east of the temple. Vats' publication, *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh* (1951), remains the most extensive discussion of the relief sculptures on the plinth. In the process of restoring the plinth, Vats removed the two *Ramayana* panels previously identified by Cunningham, but left in situ the *Krishnacarita* panel and a badly damaged side panel of the staircase intact as well as two smaller *mithuna* reliefs. Vats identified a total of eighteen episodes from the *Ramayana* and eight from the *Krishnacarita*. Of these only five of the *Ramayana* series are discernable as panels, the remaining only fragments of faces, hands, figures, thus making it difficult to describe the actual tableau or verify these are actually panels from the same relief sequence²³⁵ **(Figures 5-9)**

Vats estimated that each complete relief panel would have measured approximately 2 ½' in height by approximately 1 ½' in width, with the total height of the plinth of approximately around 10'. Vats also measured the reliefs placed horizontally along the plinth approximately 3' 8" from ground level, the top height of the slabs at 6' 4". Each slab was individually framed by a

²³⁴ Vats, *Gupta Temple at Deogarh*, 5.

²³⁵ Ibid., plates XVIIb-e.

pilaster with a pot and foliage motif etc., as evidenced by an in situ relief from the

Krishnacarita.²³⁶ **(Figure 4)**

Vats arranged the slabs and fragments according to all of these in order of the original epic poem of Valmiki, using the 1870 translation by Griffiths' translation as his primary source.²³⁷ Vats' reconstructed sequence begins with the story of Rama's redemption of Ahalya from the *Balakanda*, and ends with the episode of Hanuman carrying the mountain peak of the Himalayas to bring the healing herbs to revive Lakshmana from the *Yuddhakanda*. **(Figure 10)** Each of the slabs can be read as an individually framed episode within a sequential narrative.

The first episode in the Deogarh *Ramayana* sequence is the story of Ahalya from the *Balakanda*, which takes place after Rama conquers the demoness Tataka, before his entering Mithila.²³⁸ Ahalya was the wife of the ascetic Gautama, who was struck by the curse of invisibility for sleeping with Indra while he was disguised as her husband. It had been prophesied that a member of the Ikshvaku clan (i.e. Rama) would lift Ahalya's curse. Rama removes Ahalya's curse by touching her head.

The depiction of the Ahalya episode in the Deogarh relief is set in Gautama's hermitage. **(Figure 5)** The composition includes four figures, and is framed by flowering trees. Seated on the right is Rama, who rests his hand on the head of Ahalya, who is shown kneeling at his feet offering a flower. The artist of this relief chose to depict the moment following Rama's removal of the curse when Ahalya performs the hospitality ritual for Rama, pouring water on his feet and offering flowers. Depicted in the background is Lakshmana standing, and the sage Gautama, is seated at left.²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid., 5.

²³⁷ R. T.H. Griffiths, *Selections from the Ramayana*, 1900.

²³⁸ *Balakanda*, *sarga* 47-48.

²³⁹ Given that the right-hand figure is portrayed in ascetic's garb, this could also be identified as Vishvamitra.

Following the Ahalyā panel, the next relief in the reconstructed sequence depicts Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana walking in the forest, and was previously interpreted by Vats as “Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana going into exile (a.k.a. *vana-gamana*).” **(Figure 6)** The relief composition from the viewer’s right to left shows two male figures followed by a female. The figures are depicted hieratically, the female figure being smaller than the two males. One can still make out the bows held by the two male figures – the central figure holds the bow over his proper left shoulder while the figure to the viewer’s right holds his weapon upright in his proper left hand. Unlike the previous relief the figures are not set in a landscape background – the focus is on the three walking figures in isolation.

On further examination, this scene probably depicts the three main characters after they have already departed from Ayodhya after crossing the Ganges. In the *Ayodhyakanda*, upon leaving Dasharatha’s palace, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana travel by chariot with the king’s chief minister Sumantra until they reach the banks of the Ganges.²⁴⁰ They spend the night at Nishada hosted by Rama’s friend Guha, and in the morning cross the Ganges by boat. Once they reach the other side of the Ganges and disembark, they proceed in their journey on foot to the hermitage of Bharadvaja:

With Sita following behind, the mighty brothers arrived at the ashram [of Bharadvaja] and stood some distance off, eagerly awaiting the appearance of the sage.²⁴¹

Here Bharadvaja instructs them to take up residence twenty miles from there on Mount Citrakuta.

The next relief in Vats’ reconstructed sequence is identified as the visit of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana to the hermitage of the sage Atri and his wife Anasuya, also from the

²⁴⁰ *Ayodhyakanda*, *sarga* 46.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *sarga* 48.10

Ayodhyakanda (**Figure 7**)²⁴² Fearing for their safety, the three are advised by the seers of Mount Citrakuta to depart for the nearby ashram of the sage Atri. During their sojourn here, Sita receives advice from Anasuya – who is a powerful ascetic in her own right, on how to be a good wife – and receives from her gifts of a garland, clothing, jewelry, and a special cream/salve.

The relief is damaged, but it is still possible to discern five figures – two smaller female figures in the foreground, and three larger male figures seated in the background. Trees in the upper portion of the relief and a pair of peacocks in the lower left corner suggest the setting is an ascetic grove. In the center a standing woman applies an unguent to another seated woman's hair as three men watch. Vats noted that the male figure on the left has matted hair, is holding a book in his proper right hand, while his left hand is raised in what may have been a teaching gesture (his hand now broken), and is dressed in the *valkala* (bark-cloth garment) of an ascetic.²⁴³ On this evidence, Vats identified the figure to as Atri. The three men observe as Anasuya instructs Sita in the ways of being a good wife, and prepares her with proper accouterments. The exchange mimics that of a mother advising her daughter, and perhaps is intended to signify courtly feminine ideals.

Vats identified the next relief in the Deogarh sequence as the mutilation of Surpanakha, an episode from the *Aranyakanda*.²⁴⁴ (**Figure 8**) Ten years have elapsed since Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita first went into exile, and lived peacefully in the glade of the Panchavati forest until they encounter Ravana's sister, the *rakshasa* Surpanakha. Surpanakha falls madly in love with Rama, but he rejects her. When she tries to attack Sita, Rama restrains her as Lakshmana cuts off her ears and nose.

²⁴² Ibid., *sarga* 117-118.

²⁴³ Vats, *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh*, 16.

²⁴⁴ Vats, 17, R.4. See also *Aranyakanda*, *sarga* 16-17.

The Deogarh relief shows the moment right before Lakshmana cuts off Surpanakha nose and ears.²⁴⁵ It contains four figures; the flowering trees carved in the upper background of the composition suggest a forest setting. A male figure is seated on the left, holding a bow in his proper left hand. To the right of him, a woman stands holding her proper left hand to her chest in a gesture of fear. To her right are two figures engaged in a struggle. A male figure holds the hair of a woman kneeling on the ground with his left arm, and raises a dagger in his right hand. Vats identifies this as Lakshmana holding Surpanakha her by the hair with his proper left hand, his right arm raising the sword about to strike, with Sita standing to his right, and Rama seated on a rock to her right. Rama holds up his proper left hand up, but it is not possible to determine the gesture as it has been destroyed.

Vats has identified the next relief in the sequence as the battle of Rama and Lakshmana against Khara's army from the *Aranyakanda*.²⁴⁶ **(Figure 9)** After Surpanakha's violent disfigurement by Lakshmana, she runs off into the forest, arms flailing and roaring incessantly, seeking her brother Khara who was stationed with his army nearby in Janasthana. Seeing his sister maimed and bleeding, Khara seethes with rage, and orders fourteen of his *rakshasa* soldiers to attack Rama, who easily eliminates them with his bow and arrow. Khara and his general Dhusana then mount a counter attack with an army of 14,000 *rakshasas*. Rama orders Lakshmana and Sita to take refuge in a cave while he does battle alone, fighting valiantly until all the *rakshasas*, Dhusana, and Khara have perished.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ *Aranyakanda*, sarga 17:20-24. The depiction of this scene in the Deogarh relief varies slightly from how it is described in the poem itself, where Rama restrains Surpanakha as Lakshmana pulls out his sword and then cuts off her ears and nose.

²⁴⁶ Vats, 17, R.5. See also *Aranyakanda*, sarga 18-29.

²⁴⁷ *Aranyakanda*, sarga 22. The battle is described here in great detail as a heroic spectacle beheld by an audience of "great seers, gods, *Gandharvas* (celestial musicians), perfect beings, and celestial bards," with emphasis on Rama's martial bravery – using his bow to shoot arrows by the thousands to knock down his opponents.

In the relief, a figure on the right stands in *alidhapada*, or archer's stance, accompanied by a smaller figure holding another bow to the left of the archer.²⁴⁸ The larger figure is taking aim from behind a tree. If Vats' identification of the relief is correct, one would expect to see Khara and Dhusana depicted with their army of *rakshasas* in the same relief, or perhaps in an additional slab, as in a later example of the same scene from the Papanatha temple at Pattadakal. **(Figure 41a-b)** Unfortunately there is no evidence remaining from Deogarh to support this. It is quite probable this relief depicts Rama in an archer's stance attended by Lakshmana, but without further visual details, this could be one of many battle scenes depicted in the *Ramayana*. Cunningham noted that this panel was originally found next to the previous one with Surpanakha on a corner of the south facing plinth of the Deogarh temple – the only two reliefs recorded in situ.²⁴⁹

Vats identified the remaining episodes in the Deogarh *Ramayana* sequence from relief fragments. These include: 1. the garlanding of Sugriva as the king following his victory over Valin, 2. a drunken Sugriva reclining as Rama and Lakshmana look on, 3. a very badly damaged image of Ravana threatening Sita in the Asoka forest at Lanka, and 4. the upper portion of a relief depicting Hanuman carrying the mountain with medicinal herbs. **(Figure 10)**

While the remaining panels of the Deogarh *Ramayana* sequence are missing, and the sequence is incomplete, it is possible to gain a sense of what may have been depicted there by looking at comparative evidence from another sixth-century set of six stone slab reliefs excavated at Nachna, approximately 200 miles east of Deogarh. **(Figure 10b)** These include the following scenes from the epic: 1. Surpanakha making overtures to Lakshmana after being rejected by Rama, 2. Ravana approaching Sita in the guise of an ascetic, 3. three scenes from the

²⁴⁸ For a full description of *alidhapada*, see Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 266.

²⁴⁹ Cunningham, *Report of Tours of Bundelkhand and Malwa*, 108-9.

Kishkinda showing the alliance formed between Rama and Sugriva and two battle scenes between Sugriva and Valin, and 4. Hanuman being captured at Lanka and taken to Ravana. Little else is known about these reliefs other than their place of origin.²⁵⁰

The material evidence from Nachna and Deogarh collectively demonstrates that a tradition of *Ramayana* reliefs was already quite sophisticated in the first half of the sixth century, indicating there may have been a preceding tradition in more ephemeral materials such as wood. More importantly, the reliefs indicate that the epic was a popular motif within a regional temple tradition that would have been recognizable to courtly patrons. There is at both sites an attempt to present the episodes in a sequential narrative format, where scenes are individually framed, and individual panels highlight three to four characters. Finally, the emphasis is on the heroic actions of Rama and his encounters with allies and opponents. Although there is a gap in the material record of approximately one hundred years, the next set of examples from the late seventh through the middle of the eighth illustrate a continuation and elaboration of this tradition several hundred miles south in the Deccan.

Upper Shivalaya Temple at Badami, circa mid-seventh century

The narrative relief carvings on the plinth of the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami are the earliest extant example of a stone-carved *Ramayana* narrative sequence still in situ. **(Figure 11)** The Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami is part of a larger site that was once the ancient capital and political center of the Chalukya court known as Vatapi; it is situated on an outlet of the Malaprabha River (a tributary of the Krishna River in Karnataka) that forms a small lake known as the Agastya tank and is surrounded by rocky outcroppings.²⁵¹ It is believed the temple

²⁵⁰ Williams, *Art of Gupta India*, 113-114.

²⁵¹ The significance of Badami as a royal political center is not insignificant here. The Chalukyas took over the site from their previous overlords, the Kadambas of Banavasi (ruled circa sixth century CE), from at least 543 CE, when

was initially a Vishnu temple that was later changed to a Shiva temple when the kings changed their affiliation.²⁵² In contrast to the Vishnu temple at Deogarh, Badami as a site is more intact - it includes sixth-century rock-cut Hindu and Jain caves carved into the escarpment on the south side of the tank, and structural temples scattered around the perimeter of the tank and on the northern bluff ranging in date from the middle of the seventh through the ninth century.²⁵³

(Figure 12) Below this temple is the better-preserved Malegitti Shivalaya temple, and a single-cell shrine known as the Lower Shivalaya.

The Upper Shivalaya temple is situated on the bluffs to the north of the Agastya tank, and is believed to be the earliest free-standing Hindu temple at Badami. Based on stylistic analysis, the temple is dated circa 620-630 CE, possibly built during the reign of Pulakeshin II (ruled circa 608-642 CE).²⁵⁴ **(Figure 13)** The temple is oriented toward the east, and is built on a plinth

Pulakeshin I (ruled 540-566) performed both Vedic kingship ceremonies of the *asvamedha* and the *hiranyagarbha*. See R. S. Panchamukhi, "Badami Inscription of Chalukya Vallabhesvara," *Epigraphia Indica* 27 (1947-48), 4-9. On the art historical evidence, see Tarr, "Chronology and Development of the Chalukya Cave Temples," *Ars Orientalis* 8 (1970): 155-84.

²⁵² The assumption that the Chalukyas initially worshipped Vishnu before converting to Saivism is largely based on inscriptional evidence. See Tarr, "The Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1969), 85n15.

²⁵³ Various scholars have speculated that there was a hiatus in temple activity at Badami between 630-699 after the Pallavas conquered the Chalukyas' and took over the city, forcing the Chalukya court to seek refuge in Alampur. Construction at Badami then resumed several years after Vikramaditya I's rise to power in 655, first with the Jambulinga (dated 699 CE), then the Lower Shivalaya (built circa 720-725) and Malegitti Shivalaya (built circa 730-745) temples on the hills to the west of the Upper Shivalaya, and finally the Bhutanatha temple (built circa 750-755) on the east bank of the tank. The site was taken over by the Rashtrakutas in circa 745 CE, after which temples were added on the northern banks of the tank across from the earlier Bhutanatha complex. The subject of continuous patronage at this site needs further analysis.

²⁵⁴ Previous studies of the Upper Shivalaya temple include: Tarr, "Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas," 83-86, figs. 41-45, and Appendix II (referred to as the Narasimha-Krishna temple); Carol Radcliffe Bolon, "Early Chalukya Sculpture," (PhD diss., NYU, 1981), 118-122 figs. 165-174 (referred to as the Badami Upper Vishnu temple), Susan Buchanan, "Chalukya Temples: History and Iconography," (PhD diss., OSU, 1985), 61-66 figs. 102-116, and George Michell, *Early Western Chalukyan Temples* (London: Aarp, 1975), 10-11, plates I and V, and dwg. 3. The temple is also briefly mentioned by Cousens in his *Chalukyan Architecture of the Kanarese Districts* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central publication branch, 1926), 55 and plate XXX. Unfortunately, there are no donative inscriptions associated with this monument. Based on my own site survey conducted in 2007 and 2012, I accept Tarr's chronology of Chalukya temples, and use this as my baseline for dating the reliefs at neighboring sites.

made partially from bedrock on the north side.²⁵⁵ Whereas the Deogarh temple is *pancayatna* type with a central shrine, the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami is a larger *sandhara* type temple that includes an outer vestibule and pillared hallway in front of the main sanctuary (now destroyed) with a covered circumambulatory path around the *garbagriha* and subsidiary shrines. Previous studies suggest the temple once had a covered *mandapa* and front porch in front of the main shrine, thus the overall measurements for the temple were approximately 60'1 x 33'w.²⁵⁶ **(Figure 14)** The temple has three sculptures in the *devakoshta* (niche) on the three outer walls of the temple– within the southern *devakoshta* is an image of Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana, in the western *devakoshta* is an image of Krishna subduing the serpent king Kaliya, and on the northern *devakoshta* is an image of Narasimha eviscerating the demon Hiranyakasipu.

The reliefs at the Upper Shivalaya temple are carved between the upper moldings of the *adisthana*, a.k.a. the base of the plinth, approximately three feet from ground level, on recessed panels referred to as *kandhara* or *upana* by architectural historians.²⁵⁷ **(Figure 15)** Reliefs are carved in a continuous band that wraps around the perimeter of the temple like a decorative frieze. The carvings include narrative scenes with alternating motifs of dancing *ganas* and flowering vines, and are capped on either side of the entrance staircase by seated lions and elephants. Scenes from the *Krishnacarita* are carved on the west side, while scenes from the *Ramayana* are carved on the south side. Many of the reliefs on the east and north sides of the plinth are badly damaged or have been removed. Previous scholars have noted similarities between the presentation of narrative reliefs on the plinth of the Upper Shivalaya and the dancing

²⁵⁵ The plinth of the Upper Shivalaya temple is unusual in that it is partially comprised of solid rock on the south and west facing sides of the temple. It was completed using stone blocks on the north and east facing sides of the temple. Similar building techniques have been found at Pallava monuments at Mamallapuram in Tamil Nadu dating from the seventh and eighth century.

²⁵⁶ The roof and pillars from the inner *mandapa* are now missing. Michell in *Early Western Chalukyan Temples* (10) has speculated this is because the temple was never completed.

²⁵⁷ Michell, *Early Western Chalukyan Temples*, 24.

gana motifs carved on the false plinth of sixth century cave temples located on the facing hill across the Agastya tank.²⁵⁸ In these earlier examples, scenes from epic narratives were carved on the upper lintels of the caves' inner veranda. Thus the artists who carved the plinth of the Upper Shivalaya adapted these motifs to the new tradition of freestanding stone architecture by placing the reliefs on a structural plinth.

There has been little in the way of analysis of the reliefs on the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami – they have not been properly documented nor have they been adequately identified frame by frame. Carol Radcliffe Bolon was the first to identify individual episodes from the *Ramayana* on the reliefs on the temple's southern plinth in her dissertation on Chalukya sculpture.²⁵⁹ Bolon's list, while accurate, is incomplete (some episodes are missing), and there are no accompanying illustrations nor is there any detailed analysis of each relief. In another dissertation, Susan Buchanan speculates that the inconsistent arrangement of the reliefs indicate "a full iconographic program for the Upper Shivalaya's basement was not worked out before it began."²⁶⁰

Using Bolon's original identifications as a guide, I now provide a detailed analysis of each relief adding new identifications of my own. There are a total of the thirty-one extant relief carvings decorating the frieze of the Upper Shivalaya temple indicated on the ground plan by Michell. **(Figure 16)** There are seven extant scenes from the *Ramayana*. Additionally there are six extant panels depicting the *Krishnacarita*, and sixteen extant panels depicting floral patterns

²⁵⁸ Tarr has suggested the plinth motif of the Upper Shivalaya temple is a continuation of a technique initially used on the faux-plinth frontispiece of the Badami Caves. Tarr, "Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas," 83-86.

²⁵⁹ Bolon, "Early Chalukya Sculpture," 122. The reliefs are not discussed in Cousens, perhaps because the site had not yet been excavated. Plate XXX from Cousens, *Chalukyan Architecture of the Kanarese Districts* illustrates the façade before the plinth and staircase leading up to the *mandapa* was not yet cleared of debris to reveal the *gana* motifs and elephants placed on either end of the plinth frieze.

²⁶⁰ Buchanan, "Chalukya Temples," 63-65. Others who discuss Badami only in passing include Cummings' "Study of the Iconographic Program of the Lokesvara (Virupaksa) Temple," Helen Wechsler's "Royal Legitimation: Ramayana Reliefs on the Papanatha Temple at Pattadakal," and Cecelia Levin's "Ramayana at Loro Jonggrang" (in relation to the ninth-century Central Javanese site at Prambanan).

and dancing *ganas*. I have annotated Michell's ground plan to show exact location of the reliefs. Several of the reliefs are missing from the north and east sides of the plinth; others are deteriorated beyond recognition, particularly those on the west wall and along the east side of the north wall.

The first significant aspect of the *Ramayana* sequence on the Upper Shivalaya temple sequence is that it follows the order of the Valmiki epic. Viewing the arrangement of the narrative reliefs from right to left or east to west, the sequence begins in the *Aranyakanda* with the departure of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita into exile, and ends in the *Yuddhakanda* with an image on the fourth projection from the east end that depicts Ravana's titan army attempting to rouse his brother Kumbhakarna from slumber. **(Figures 17 and 23)** Following the Kumbhakarna image, the frieze continues along the south side of the plinth with an alternating pattern of flowering vines and *ganas*. The narrative scenes resume on the southwest corner of the plinth, and continue along the length of the west wall with a series of reliefs from the *Krishnacarita*. Unfortunately, the northern side of the plinth is only partially extant – only the panels depicting *ganas* on the outer wall of the *garbagriha* remain.

Returning to the southern side of the plinth, the *Ramayana* relief sequence on the Upper Shivalaya temple is as follows. It begins with two framed panels carved on the corner projection. **(Figure 17)** The right hand panel appears to be a court scene with a king seated on his throne in *rajalila-asana* (position of royal ease), flanked by two standing female attendants and surrounded by four male guardians, two seated in front and two standing in the back, each of them holding a sword or a club. The left hand panel depicts three standing figures – two male archers holding their bows in their left hands, followed by a female personage who is carrying something with her right arm.

I believe this relief depicts Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita taking leave of Dasharatha at the court of Ayodhya. The departure of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita from Ayodhya is described at length in the *Ayodhyakanda*.²⁶¹ The pronouncement of Rama's exile happens in the midst of preparations for his consecration ceremony. Rama and Sita arrive at Dasharatha's palace in a chariot driven by Sumantra to find his father despondent, lying slumped on a couch attended by Kaikeyi.²⁶² Rama leaves the king "sorely troubled, heaving sighs like an elephant."²⁶³ The announcement of Rama's departure is met with rounds of protests, first from the royal family members, then by the community. Family grief turns to communal mourning for the loss of the royal scion. By comparison, the depiction of Rama's departure from the Upper Shivalaya is significantly more restrained. The panel on the right depicts Dasharatha flanked by female guards, his proper right hand raised in a gesture that is no longer discernable. The panel on the left depicts Rama and Lakshmana followed by Sita, who have come to pay their respects to Dasharatha upon leaving for exile.

Continuing west, the next relief in the sequence is carved on the plinth in between the projections. **(Figure 18)** Viewing from right to left, there is a couple seated on a pedestal facing a standing female figure, followed by another view of a male seated on a pedestal facing another female figure. Both groupings appear to record a conversation between the figures. Following these two groupings, are two vibrant action scenes. Although the figures in the first scene are defaced, it is possible to discern two men apprehending a demoness, and a duplicate image of the same demoness escaping to the left. In the final scene on the left, an archer releases an arrow at a group of soldiers armed with clubs. A carved frame separates the nine figures on the right or east side of the composition from the battle scene on the left or west side of the composition.

²⁶¹ *Ayodhyakanda*, *sarga* 16-36.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, *sarga* 16

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, *sarga* 17.1.

I believe the right side of this relief depicts the mutilation of Surpanakha from the *Aranyakanda*.²⁶⁴ In the *Ramayana*, a goading exchange between Surpanakha, Rama, and Lakshmana insights the demoness, who subsequently attacks Sita in a fit of jealousy.²⁶⁵ The noble princes spring into action, and as Rama holds down the writhing Surpanakha “Lakshmana, in full view of his brother, drew his sword and in a rage cut off the creature’s ears and nose.”²⁶⁶

Unlike the Surpanakha relief from Deogarh discussed above, which only shows the final moment of her disfigurement, the artist of the Badami relief employed the continuous mode of narration within the sequential format, to illustrate cause and effect. On the right, Surpanakha first appears as a beautiful woman standing before Rama and Sita, who are seated in their ashram. Immediately to the left of these figures is another standing female facing left toward another seated male figure. Presumably this is Surpanakha now facing Lakshmana. Continuing to the left, Surpanakha is then depicted in her true form as an ugly *rakshasa*. Rama is shown restraining her from behind as Lakshmana draws his dagger. Then Surpanakha is shown fleeing the scene. This is perhaps the earliest example of this depiction of the Surpanakha episode in the Deccan and south India, and as will be shown below it appears again in later examples at Pattadakal and Ellora.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Previously identified as “Surpanakha *mukhabhanga*” in Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture,” 122.

²⁶⁵ *Aranyakanda*, *sarga* 16.1-17.15.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, *sarga* 17.21.

²⁶⁷ Previous scholars have argued that the depiction of Surpanakha as a beautiful women in disguise is perhaps related to a southern version of the *Ramayana* – the twelfth century Kampan *Ramayana* written in Tamil – where Surpanakha disguises herself as a beautiful woman in order to win over Rama. There is no reference to this in the Valmiki *Ramayana*. Although the Kampan text is later, it is speculated that a southern version of the *Ramayana* with this description of Surpanakha that pre-dates the Kampan text. See Stephen Markel, “The *Ramayana* Cycle on the Kailsanatha Temple at Ellora,” *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 59-71. As demons, *rakshasas* were capable of taking on different forms as well as possession. That Surpanakha was a shape-shifter is also implied in Act IV of the *Mahaviracarita*, when Malyavan orders her to take over the body of Manthara, Kaikeyi’s maid, in order to poison the queen against Rama. *Mahaviracarita*, 67. Furthermore, in the earlier relief of the same subject at Deogarh, Surpanakha is depicted as a courtly female figure just like Sita in the same composition. (**Figure 8**) There is also a comparative image from Nachna where Surpanakha is depicted as a maiden speaking to Lakshmana, who covers his ears so as not to hear her. (**Figure 10b**) Thus, it is likely there was variation in the visual depiction of Surpanakha as

Moving to the battle scene on the left hand side of the relief, I believe this is the episode of Rama fighting Khara and Dhusana.²⁶⁸ Comparing this composition to the relief from Deogarh that is also attributed as the battle with Khara-Dhusana, this one shows Rama's in the throws of martial combat against Khara and his *rakshasa* army. In the relief, Rama is depicted hieratically in *pratyaldhapada* (archer's stance), shooting an arrow towards a group of soldiers to the left.²⁶⁹ The two soldiers holding clubs in the foreground are probably Khara and Dhusana, their *rakshasa* infantry pictured behind them.

The narrative sequence continues on the next projection to the west with a court scene. **(Figure 19)** In the middle of the composition is a multi-headed male figure seated on a pedestal, surrounded on either side by soldiers bearing arms. To the right a guard restrains a grotesque-looking woman. This relief depicts the events that occur immediately following the death of Khara and Dhusana in the *Aranyakanda*.²⁷⁰ Having lost her brother to Rama in a bloody battle, Surpanakha returns to Lanka to warn Ravana. She finds Ravana idly enjoying the splendors of his royal palace, and accuses him of negligence. Warning him that he must defend the *rakshasas* from Rama, she also entices him with the description of Sita as the most beautiful woman on earth, encouraging him to take her as his wife. Hence the figure seated on the throne in the relief is Ravana, and Surpanakha is shown at right, restrained by a palace guard.

The next set of reliefs is carved in between two projections of the plinth that is divided into two panels. **(Figure 20)** The right-hand panel shows a multi-armed figure facing a man holding a bundle of firewood. The left-hand panel shows two ashram scenes separated by a tree – the right side of the panel shows two men in conversation, the man on the left seated on a rock,

there was in the textual tradition. What is significant is that this particular depiction, compositionally, is specific to a regional court style that evolved during the seventh and eighth centuries.

²⁶⁸ Identified as "Destruction of Khara and Dhusana," in Bolon, "Early Chalukya Sculpture," 122.

²⁶⁹ See Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 266.

²⁷⁰ *Aranyakanda*, *sarga* 30-32.

then man on the right seated on the ground holding a weapon. Behind them a third figure, the gender of which is difficult to discern, stands with their arms raised in a manner that suggests an ascetic posture. On the other side of the tree to the left are three figures, one female and two male, seated in a relaxed fashion on a stone pedestal.

I believe this relief depicts several events leading up to Sita's abduction as they are described in the *Aranyakanda*.²⁷¹ Following his exchange with Surpanakha, Ravana mounts his chariot and travels to the ashram of Marica to demand that he help distract the two princes to clear the way for him to capture Sita. Ravana conceives a plan where Marica will disguise himself as a beautiful golden deer to lure Rama and Lakshmana away from Sita to pursue a hunting expedition. In the right-hand panel, the multi-armed Ravana is shown dismounting his chariot to speak to Marica, the standing figure to the left. The ashram scene on the far left is an elegant image of Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana in the ashram, seated in repose.²⁷²

Continuing eastward on the plinth, the next relief shows two figures observing a hunt scene. **(Figure 21)** I believe it is a depiction of Rama shooting Marica in his disguise as the golden deer on the left, with Sita and Lakshmana in conversation on the right.²⁷³ In this episode of the *Ramayana*, Sita, hearing the false cries of the dying Marica who disguised his voice to sound like Rama, orders Lakshmana to find Rama. Ravana then approaches Sita, now alone and unguarded in the ashram, disguised as an old ascetic so as not to frighten her. When Sita rebuffs his marriage offer, Ravana takes his true form, violently seizes her by the hair, and absconds with her to Lanka in his flying chariot. As they fly through the sky, Jatayus, son of Garuda and

²⁷¹ Ibid., *sarga* 33-39.

²⁷² I am unable to identify the scene in between Ravana and Marica's conversation and Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. It is possible this is a sage in conversation with a warrior, and perhaps it shows the continuation of Ravana's conversation with Marica.

²⁷³ Presumably, this what Bolon identified previously as "Marica's death" in "Early by Chalukya Sculpture," 122.

king of the vultures, makes a noble attempt to rescue Sita, but is defeated by Ravana, who rips him apart limb by limb.

Continuing east along the plinth the next relief in the sequence, though badly damaged, is still legible. **(Figure 22)** At right, the multi-armed Ravana stamps out a figure, probably Jatayus, in the lower right corner of the composition. To the left, a male figure leans against a pavilion occupied by a seated female figure. Above the male figure is another seated female figure. At far left an archer stands in *pratyaldhapada* pose, and takes aim at another warrior at the far left.

I believe this relief depicts three episodes within the same composition. From right to left, the first two figures are Ravana and Jatayus. The palace scene following them is an image of Ravana making overtures to the imprisoned Sita as a female *rakshasa* looks on. In the *Aranyakanda*, following the death of Jatayus, Ravana arrives at Lanka, and immediately deposits Sita to the inner chambers of his palace, where she is guarded by low-level female demons who are instructed by Ravana not to allow anyone access to Sita without his approval.²⁷⁴ After Ravana replenishes his troops at Janasthana, he was so consumed by his lust for Sita that he “hurriedly reentered his lovely dwelling to see her.”²⁷⁵ Growing enraged as Sita rebuffed his repeated advances, Ravana sentences her to live in the *ashoka* grove under the supervision of his most ferocious female attendants.²⁷⁶

Turning to the third and final scene on the left end of the panel, I believe this is the part of the *Ramayana* sequence previously identified by Bolon as “Hanuman destroying the *rakshasas* in Asokavana.” from the *Sundarakanda*.²⁷⁷ Unfortunately the archers are too badly

²⁷⁴ *Aranyakanda*, sarga 52.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, sarga 53.2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, sarga 54. There is another struggle between Ravana and Sita in the *ashoka* grove later in the *Sundarakanda*, sarga 16.1-20.5.

²⁷⁷ Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sulpture,” 122. *Sundarakanda*, sarga 39-45.

damaged to determine exactly which battle scene, but in following the order of the epic, it should be an episode in the *Sundarakanda* or the *Yuddhakanda*.

The remaining panel in the Badami sequence may provide clues as to the identification of this battle scene. **(Figure 23)** In this relief, a recumbent figure lays sleeping on a bed while a pair of elephants tramples him from above. Dancers holding pitchers followed by a warrior holding a spear approach the reclining figure from the right. I agree with Bolon's previous identification of this relief as the "Waking of Kumbhakarna" from the *Yuddhakanda*.²⁷⁸ Kumbhakarna was one of Ravana's two brothers, the other being Vibhishana, who ended up forming an alliance with Rama. According to the legend, because of a curse Kumbhakarna could only awaken for one day every six months. Ravana finally enters the battlefield at Lanka after Hanuman and the monkey army slay two more of his generals. After realizing he is no match for Rama and his army, Ravana awakens Kumbhakarna prematurely from his slumber. Ravana sends his titan army to rouse Kumbhakarna from his mountain abode at Charyapura. After the army fails to wake Kumbhakarna with the smell of food, fragrant offerings, and music, Ravana orders a herd of horses, camels, and elephants to trample his body to wake him up. When the demon finally awakens, they ply him with food and pitchers of fat and wine to keep him awake, and then send him into battle against Rama.

The waking of Kumbhakarna is faithfully rendered in the relief at Badami. Kumbhakarna is the sleeping figure in the lower left. The herd of elephants sent by Ravana is pictured above him, and the entourage of dancers and warriors are pictured on the right side of the composition. Returning to the battle scene in the previous relief, Bolon's identification of "Hanuman destroying the *rakshasas* in Asokavana" falls within the correct order of events that precede the

²⁷⁸ *Yuddhakanda*, *sargas* 60-67.

Kumbhakarna episode in the text. However, its severely damaged condition renders an inconclusive identification.

The Badami *Ramayana* sequence abruptly ends here, followed by a series of scrolling vine motifs that continue to the southwest corner. The narrative reliefs resume with aforementioned scenes from the life of Krishna on the west wall. Although incomplete, it is possible to discern a nascent pattern in the depiction of *Ramayana* episodes beginning at Badami that becomes more elaborate over time. There is at Badami an effort to compress the entire *Ramayana* epic into the central events of the story, and in so doing provide an overarching message of heroism through bravery, loyalty, and righteousness. The Badami sequence begins with Rama's departure, showing his willingness to follow his father's orders to go into exile without protest. Rama is followed by his loyal brother, Lakshmana, and his dutiful wife Sita, and the three take up a life of asceticism in the Panchavati Forest. They live out their sentence in peace until demon forces intervene in the form of Surpanakha. The Surpanakha episode is pivotal as it re-ignites the conflict between the *rakshasas* and the ascetics. Rama, as the protector of the ascetics, must protect the sacrifice. The mutilation of Surpanakha is taken as a direct affront to the *rakshasas* who seek retaliation. The *rakshasa* military proves no match for our hero Rama, thus putting him in direct contest with the king of the *rakshasas*, Ravana. Ravana escalates matters considerably by unlawfully and violently taking Rama's wife. As Rama and Lakshmana set out to rescue Sita they come to form their alliance with Sugriva.

Between the late seventh and the second quarter of the eighth century, individual episodes from the *Ramayana* appear infrequently at various sites across the Chalukya territory.²⁷⁹ Noteworthy among these are reliefs found on the *vedipatta* at the Mahakuteshavara temple at

²⁷⁹ This may have been a period of experimentation as reliefs are found in various parts of the temple such as the inner ambulatory path of the Durga temple. Other examples are found on the *adisthana* of the Svarga Brahma temple at Alampur.

Mahakuta. **(Figure 24a-b)** The *vedipatta* is a molding between the *devakoshta* and the *adisthana*, approximately five feet from the ground level of the plinth. Although the sequence is incomplete, the placement of the reliefs at a more prominent vantage point indicates the artist wanted the narrative sequence to be more legible to temple patrons. Artists continued to place the narrative reliefs at various levels in the temples built only decades after at Pattadakal, to which I now turn. The freedom with which artists were allowed to choose the position of the reliefs, and the different episodes presented indicates a shared lexicon to draw upon that was not rigid or conservative.

Pattadakal

The first complete sequence of the *Ramayana* from the *Balakanda* through the *Yuddhakanda* in situ is found on the eighth century Papanatha temple at Pattadakal. Pattadakal is located about twenty-nine kilometers northeast of Badami on the left bank of the Malaprabha River. **(Figure 25)** Although Pattadakal is mentioned in inscriptional records from the time of Mangalesha, it did not become an important temple site until around the early eighth century.²⁸⁰ There are currently eight extant temples at the site as well as remains of several smaller shrines. **(Figure 26)** All are Hindu except for one Jain temple about one kilometer away that was built later in the ninth or tenth century. Three of the temples at Pattadakal were decorated with scenes from the *Ramayana* – the Papanatha (built in three phases between circa 720-750 CE), the Virupaksha, also known as the Lokeshvara temple (built circa 745 CE), and the Mallikarjuna, also known as the Trailokeshvara temple (also built circa 745 CE). My analysis focuses on the Papanatha and the Virupaksha temples. **(Figures 27 and 57)**

²⁸⁰ The Mangalesha inscription at Mahakuta dated 602 CE mentions Pattadakal as one of the towns that provided revenues for the Mahakuteshvara temple. See J.F. Fleet, “Sanskrit and Old-Kanarese Inscriptions, no. 185 – Mahakuta Pillar Inscription of Mangalesha,” *Indian Antiquary* XIX (1890): 20.

Papanatha Temple, Pattadakal, circa 730-750

Dating the Papanatha temple is difficult because it appears to have been built in stages between 700-757, over the reign of three different Chalukya kings (Vijayaditya, Vikramaditya II, and Kirttivarman II).²⁸¹ **(Figure 27)** The structure of the Papanatha temple was originally a single-cell *garbagriha* with a small, four-pillared *mandapa* like that of the Jambulinga temple on the northern extremity of the same site. It was then enlarged with a larger outer *mandapa* and front porch and enclosing ambulatory wall.²⁸² **(Figure 28b)** Inscriptional evidence at the Papanatha temple is limited to a few signed sculptures (a rarity for this time period), label inscriptions on the *Ramayana* reliefs, and an ambiguous commentary that may be attributed to a patron or simply a visitor to the temple.²⁸³

The sculptural program on the outer wall of the temple represents a more elaborate style than the previous era in which the Upper Shivalaya was built. The structure itself includes three outer projections on the west end of the temple walls surrounding the ambulatory path of the *garbagriha*, each containing a shrine to subsidiary deities of the temple (Gajasuranataka on the north, Andhakasura on the west, and Nataraja on the south).²⁸⁴ Pillars of the porticos also carry images of deities such as Vishnu on Garuda, and Trivikrama. There are a total of thirty-four exterior niches or *devakoshtas* on the outer walls of the temple – four on the east face, two on the west face, seven on the north and south faces. **(Figure 28a)**

²⁸¹ See Tarr, “Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas,” 293-301 figs. 235-46, and 271, and Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture,” 410-425 figs. 802-819.

²⁸² Bolon, 413, identifies of the seam on the north side of the temple marking where the temple was extended.

²⁸³ There are no inscriptions with royal eulogies or land grants attributing specific Chalukya kings to this temple; however, previous scholars have assumed royal patronage. See J. F. Fleet, “Sanskrit and Old-Canarese Inscriptions (nos. CV and CXIV) *Indian Antiquary* 10 (1880).

²⁸⁴ Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture,” 415.

Narrative reliefs are found inside and in between the *devakoshtas* on the north and south exterior walls of the temple. Like the earlier examples from the Upper Shivalaya temple, the Papanatha *Ramayana* reliefs are situated on the southern wall of the temple. Reliefs on the north wall are less intact, but selected scenes from the *Kiratarjuniyam* (Battle of Arjuna and Shiva as Hunter) are discernable. Interspersed between these are iconographic depictions of Ravana Shaking Mount Kailasa, Shiva and Nandi, Durga, and Agni. Additional reliefs on the west-facing wall behind the *garbagriha* contain iconographic images of Narasimha (the lion-headed avatar of Vishnu), and Mahisasuramardini.

There are a total of thirty-two carvings in the Papanatha *Ramayana* cycle with thirty-eight scenes (four of which are severely damaged and indecipherable). The sequence begins on the west end of the temple and runs along the wall from the back of the inner *mandapa* to the east face of the entrance porch (the temple faces east towards the Malaprabha river). **(Figure 28a)** These architectural niches on the outer wall of the temple serve as frames for each episode of the *Ramayana* cycle. **(Figure 41a)** However, there are instances in which scenes were carved across two panels so that the parts of the scene take place outside the frame of the niche. **(Figure 41a-b)** Another important development at Papanatha is the introduction of label inscriptions. Many of the relief panels are labeled in Old Kannada with names of the characters from the *Ramayana*.²⁸⁵

Individual episodes in the Pattadakal *Ramayana* sequence were initially identified in a temple guidebook without illustrations.²⁸⁶ In an essay on the use of *Ramayana* reliefs for royal legitimization, Helen Wechsler provides a detailed identification key for the sculptures on the Papanatha temple, with selected reliefs illustrated; however, there are some discrepancies, to be

²⁸⁵ Fleet, "Sanskrit and Old-Canarese Inscriptions, no. CXIV," *Indian Antiquary* X (1881): 170. See also Annigeri, *A Guide to Pattadakal Temples*, 45-46

²⁸⁶ Annigeri, A.M. *A Guide to the Pattadakal Temples*. Dharwar, 1961. Bolton only briefly refers to these in her dissertation on page 122.

addressed below, making it difficult to identify accurately each of the episodes being depicted.²⁸⁷

(Figure 28a) Here I want to review previous identifications of the sequence, and posit an expanded interpretation of the reliefs to clarify the attribution of each carving and the correct order of the sequence.

Similar to the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami, the Papanatha reliefs are sequenced in an order that chronologically follows the original Valmiki epic from the *Balakanda* through the *Yuddhakanda*. While the Badami reliefs are placed in an order that allows the viewer to follow the clockwise direction of circumambulation, the *Ramayana* reliefs on the Papanatha temple are meant to be viewed from left to right, moving eastward along the temple's southern exterior wall.

Beginning from the outer walls of the inner *mandapa* and continuing east towards the walls of the outer *mandapa*, the first three carvings of the sequence include 1. an image of two sages in conversation, followed by 2. two figures in the process of a gift exchange – the one on the left appears to be a sage receiving gifts from a king on the right, 3. followed by three more seated figures in conversation – though the faces are damaged, this appears to be a sage holding a garland (*mala*) in his proper left hand facing two figures, one male, the other indiscernible.

(Figures 29-31) The next three carvings show 1. a party of three men standing and facing east (inside the niche), 2. followed by a carving of a battle scene with a female demon in and in between the niches, 3. followed by a niche carving with men performing a sacrifice. **(Figures 32-34)** The next carving between the niches shows a woman holding a pot, surrounded by three male figures. **(Figure 35)** These three carvings are followed on the right by four smaller carvings both inside and in between the niches. **(Figure 36a-b and Figure 37a-b)** The four scenes depicted from top to bottom are: 1. a court scene (upper left), 2. an archery scene (lower left), 3.

²⁸⁷ Helen J. Wechsler, "Royal Legitimation: *Ramayana* Reliefs on the Papanatha Temple at Pattadakal," in *The Legend of Rama: Artistic Visions*, ed. Vidya Dehejia (Mumbai: Marg), 27-42

four walking figures (upper right), and 4. another archery scene (lower right). None of these have label inscriptions.

Previous scholars have associated these first ten reliefs in the *Ramayana* sequence with various chapters in the *Balakanda*. Below is a list comparing identifications by Annigeri and Wechsler for figures 26-33. Again, because neither scholar provided a fully illustrated list of the reliefs, this is my understanding of their identifications based on textual descriptions from the Valmiki *Ramayana* itself.

1 (Figure 30)

- Annigeri #26: Dasharatha giving gifts to Vashishta
- Wechsler #29: Ravana in conversation with Brahma

2 (Figure 31)

- Wechsler #28: Dasharatha and Priest

3 (Figure 32)

- Annigeri #32: Vishvamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana with him to be educated
- Wechsler #27: Dasharatha, wife and priest

4 (Figure 33)

- Annigeri #28: Rama kills Tataka
- Wechsler #26: Demoness disturbs sacrifice

5 (Figure 34)

- Annigeri #29: Dasharatha offers oblation to Agni (a.k.a. performing the “son-giving ritual” (*putrakamesti*))
- Wechsler #25: Dasharatha’s sacrifice

6 (Figure 35)

- Annigeri #30: Dasharatha handing of the *payasa* (sweet liquid) he received from Agni during the sacrifice to his wife Kausalya
- Wechsler #24: One of Dasharatha's wives receives *prasada* (a food offering)

The next part of the sequence is presented in two panels that have been each divided into upper and lower registers, with a total of four scenes.

7 (Figures 36ab)

- Annigeri #32: Vishvamitra leading Rama and Lakshmana to the *svayamvara* (a woman's choosing of her own groom) ceremony
- Wechsler: Kausalya and Dasharatha with Rama, Lakshmana and Vishvamitra (upper left), and Rama breaks the bow of Shiva part 1 (lower left).

8 (Figures 37ab)

- Wechsler: Rama, Lakshmana, Vishvamitra, and Ahalya en route to Gautama's hut (upper right), and Rama breaks the bow of Shiva part 2 (lower right)

From the list above, the first niche in this set has been alternately identified as either “Dasharatha giving gifts to the royal sage Vashishta,” from the *Balakanda* or “Ravana in conversation with Brahma” (a.k.a. Ravana's boon), an event that precedes the birth of Rama in the *Balakanda* but is recounted in the *Uttarakanda* to Rama after he has become king of Ayodhya. **(Figure 30)** Ravana receives a boon from Brahma through practicing asceticism in the forest for ten thousand years, and becomes invincible to all gods and demons. The representation of Ravana's boon in relief could well have been an artistic intervention (as might have happened in a dramatic interpretation where the playwright would include a flashback sequence). However, there is nothing particular to the composition of the relief that would indicate the two figures are Ravana and Brahma – for example, traditionally Brahma and Ravana are both depicted with

multiple heads and arms. In actuality, the scene depicts an exchange of gifts between a royal figure on the right and an ascetic figure on the left. The cow pictured in the lower left corner behind the left leg of the ascetic would also have been part of the donation. The faces in the background are witnesses to what would have been a communal ritual performed in public. Therefore, Annigeri's initial identification of this carving as Dasharatha with one of his two officiating priests is more plausible.

Dasharatha's offering is described at length in the beginning of the *Balakanda*.

Dasharatha was childless, and wanted to perform the *asvamedha* in order to produce a son.²⁸⁸

After consulting his religious counselors, Dasharatha called on his charioteer, Sumantra, to fetch his *purohita* (family priest) and *guru* (preceptors) for the sacrifice. The great sage Rishyashringa and his wife were brought from their forest ashram to oversee the sacrifice. Dasharatha ordered his counselors to release the sacrificial horse through all his territories, and build the sacrificial ground. After a year had passed, he asked Vashishta to begin preparations for the horse sacrifice.²⁸⁹

The description of Dasharatha's sacrifice from the *Balakanda* highlights the public nature of this ritual – construction of dwellings for visiting kings “invite all the righteous kings of the earth, as well as thousands of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras*.”²⁹⁰ The kings arrive bearing gifts for Dasharatha, and the sacrifice was performed on the banks of the Sarayu River following the guidelines of Vedic scriptures. Dasharatha and Kausalya perform the horse sacrifice for ritual purification; it is also a fire sacrifice. Then Dasharatha compensates the

²⁸⁸ *Balakanda*, sarga 8-15.

²⁸⁹ In actuality, preparations for the horse sacrifice began two years in advance. Once the king determined that it was time to perform the sacrifice it was a year before the horse is released, and then it took another year for the horse to do its royal tour of all the territories. See J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: The Rajasuya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated* (Gravanhage: Mouton, 1957).

²⁹⁰ *Balakanda*, sarga 12.20.

officiating priests with lavish gifts such as one million cows and gold pieces.²⁹¹ As Rishyashringa performs the “son-producing sacrifice” on Dasharatha’s behalf, pouring oblations into the fire, the gods appear and speak to him of their troubles with the *rakshasas*. The assembly decides that Vishnu will take a human incarnation through birth as one of Dasharatha’s sons in order to conquer Ravana, who can only be killed by a human being. Vishnu gives Dasharatha the *payasa* to distribute between his three wives –Kausalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi – and the princes Rama, Lakshmana, and Bharata are subsequently born.²⁹²

Returning to the relief carvings at Papanatha, the episode of Dasharatha’s sacrifice actually begins with a carving to the left of this one depicting two seated men in conversation, perhaps Vashishta and Vishvamitra, or this could be Dasharatha seeking counsel from Vashishta. **(Figure 29)** Thus the subsequent events are shown in the niche to the right with Dasharatha’s distribution of gifts. **(Figure 30)**

Continuing east on the other side of the niche relief of Dasharatha presenting gifts to the sages, there is another carving between the niches with three seated figures, the one in the center is barely legible but remnants of the torso are still visible. **(Figure 31)** Perhaps not realizing there was originally a third figure in the center, Wechsler identified this carving as “Dasharatha and Priest.” I believe this relief may actually depict Vishvamitra coming to Kausalya and Dasharatha to ask for Lakshmana and Rama to help get rid of the *rakshasas* that are disrupting the sacrifice. The niche immediately to the right then shows Vishvamitra leaving with Rama and Lakshmana for his ashram, which concords with Annigeri’s original identification. **(Figure 32)**

The relief between niches to the east is a damaged carving of a battle between a male figure and a demoness. **(Figure 33)** This has been identified alternately as “Rama kills the lady

²⁹¹ Ibid., *sarga* 13.40.

²⁹² Ibid., *sarga* 14-15.

demon Tataka” by Annigeri, or “Demoness disturbs sacrifice” by Wechsler, in reference to a similar story of a female *rakshasa* disturbing Dasharatha’s sacrifice. The next niche relief to the east shows a fire sacrifice identified by Annigeri as “Dasharatha offers oblation to god Agni (i.e. fire)” and simply as “Dasharatha’s Sacrifice” by Wechsler. **(Figure 34)** The next carving to the right depicts a woman holding a water pot, flanked by two men on either side with an elder bearded male figure in the background. **(Figure 35)** Both Annigeri and Wechsler identified this scene as Dasharatha distributing *payasa* to Kausalya causing her to give birth to Rama.

The next four scenes are carved in upper and lower registers on two panels placed within and to the right of the *devakoshta*. **(Figures 36-37a-b)** The upper register of the niche panel illustrates three seated male figures on the right facing a male and female couple on the left. Beneath them in the lower register is an archer releasing an arrow at left as two male figures on the right look on. The upper register of the right-hand panel illustrates four walking figures – three male figures followed by a female holding what appears to be a water pot. Beneath them in the lower register the same archer from the lower left niche relief is shown releasing another arrow with three figures in the background observing.

Wechsler interprets the upper registers of the two panels as 1. Dasharatha and Kausalya with Rama, Lakshmana, and Vishvamitra (upper left), and 2. Ahalya following Rama, Lakshmana, and Vishvamitra to Gautama’s hut after being released from the curse (upper right).²⁹³ **(Figures 36-37a-b)** One will recall the Ahalya scene was also depicted on the *Ramayana* reliefs at Deogarh. **(Figure 5)** At Papanatha, Wechsler identifies the standing female figure in the upper right register as Ahalya based on the water pot she carries in her right hand. This presumably is a reference from the story told in the *Balakanda* when Ahalya offers water

²⁹³ There is a discrepancy between Wechsler’s identification key for the reliefs on page 29 of the article, and what she describes in her essay on page 39. In the key the four-part sequence is identified as Kaikeyi with Rama and Lakshmana (upper left), the education of Rama and Lakshmana (lower left), Rama and Lakshmana in the forest with Vishvamitra (upper right) and Rama breaks the bow of Shiva (lower right).

for Rama's feet as a gesture of hospitality for having been released from the curse of invisibility. She is then reunited with her husband Gautama before the princes depart for Mithila where the episode of Rama breaking the bow of Shiva takes place.²⁹⁴

Wechsler's interpretation of this set of four reliefs presumes they were meant to be read horizontally from left to right. Yet, when viewed vertically one notes that the female figure in the upper left register is also holding a similar looking round object in her proper right hand. I believe this is the same female character depicted in the upper right register of the second panel. Thus the four registers actually depict four different episodes, with two on each panel. The panel within the niche depicts the arrival of Vishvamitra with Rama and Lakshmana to the court of Janaka in the upper register and the breaking of Shiva's bow in the lower register. **(Figure 36a-b)** The second panel following the niches depicts Sita then leaving Mithila with Rama, Lakshmana, and Vishvamitra in the upper register and the episode of Rama releasing an arrow from Parasurama's bow in the lower register. **(Figure 37a-b)** Thus while the archer in both reliefs is Rama, the sequence actually represents two different episodes as they were told in the epic and not necessarily a repeating symbol of power as argued by Wechsler.²⁹⁵ One will recall the depiction of Rama's encounter with Parasurama in acts three and four of Bhavabhuti's *Mahaviracarita* discussed in chapter 3. Perhaps the artist who produced this relief is mirroring the playwright's desire to depict Rama as a superior heroic character?

Having reattributed these four scenes, there is still the question of what is represented in the preceding niche. **(Figure 35)** Previously this relief was identified as Dasharatha distributing *payasa* to Kausalya in order to produce a male heir. However, it is unclear from the image whether the woman is receiving or offering a liquid from the pot held in her proper right hand.

²⁹⁴ *Balakanda*, *sarga* 48.15-48.20.

²⁹⁵ Wechsler, "Royal Legitimation," 39.

One could alternately interpret this as an image of a woman performing the hospitality ritual of offering water to a guest such as that described in the aforementioned Ahalya episode. If this carving is re-identified as the Ahalya episode, an alternate reading of the sequence that accords with Annigeri's original identifications makes sense: Dasharatha performs a sacrifice to obtain a son, Rama and Lakshmana are taken by Vishvamitra to his ashram for their education, Rama kills Tataka and restores order in the ashram, Rama removes Ahalya's curse, Rama arrives at Mithila and meets Sita, Rama breaks the bow of Shiva and proves himself a worthy suitor for Sita's hand in marriage. The alliance of the Janaka and Ayodhya kingdoms is solidified. The wedding party returns to Ayodhya. En route they encounter Parasurama. Rama proves his superhuman strength and ethical values again, choosing not to kill Parasurama but to destroy his pride by shooting an arrow at his pride. This is the necessary course of prophesied events that lead ultimately to Rama's face off with Ravana. Again, one is reminded of how similar scenes are developed in the plot of Bhavabhuti's *Mahaviracarita*.

In light of the above analysis, I would like to propose the following revised interpretation of these first nine scenes in the *Ramayana* cycle at the Papanatha by starting with an additional carving to the left of the first niche:

1. Royal sages in conversation (**Figure 29**)
2. Dasharatha presents offering to officiating priests for performing the son-making sacrifice (the asvamedha) (**Figure 30**)
3. Vishvamitra in conversation with Kausalya and Dasharatha (**Figure 31**)
4. Vishvamitra leads Rama and Lakshmana to his ashram for tutelage (**Figure 32**)
5. Rama kills Tataka (**Figure 33**)
6. Sacrifices resume at Vishvamitra's ashram (**Figure 34**)
7. Ahalya offers water to Rama and Lakshmana after the removal of her curse

(Figure 35)

8. Janaka and Sita, with Vishvamisra, Rama, and Lakshmana **(Figure 36a)**
9. Rama breaks the bow of Shiva **(Figure 36b)**
10. Vishvamisra leads Lakshmana, Rama, and Sita to Ayodhya **(Figure 37a)**
11. Rama stretches Vishnu's bow for Parasurama as Lakshmana and Sita observe

(Figure 37b)

The next episode in the *Ramayana* sequence at Papanatha begins inside the niche on the west-facing wall of the outer *mandapa* with an image of six seated figures that are stacked vertically in two registers with three on top and three below; the figures on the bottom seem to be in conversation with the figures above. **(Figure 38)** Though badly weathered, the body posture and hand gestures of the figures suggest they are holding a conversation. The bearded figure in the center of the top register is in a meditation posture with his right hand raised, perhaps in a gesture. The figures on either side of him could be his attendants. In the bottom register are two seated male figures, and a diminutive female figure.

This scene has previously been identified by Wechsler as “Rama, Lakshmana and Sita bid farewell” to Ayodhya. Presumably then the three figures on the bottom are Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita taking leave of Dasharatha, who would be seated above flanked by his two queens. It seems more likely this is a scene of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita visiting a sage, perhaps taking leave of Vashishta's son Suyajna as told in the *Ayodhyakanda*.²⁹⁶ In this episode, the sage and his attendants are presented with offerings – a necklace for his wife, a jeweled belt for him, an elephant, etc. In exchange, Suyajna conferred blessings on them. Continuing along the south wall of the *mandapa* moving east, the next identifiable relief is a familiar one from

²⁹⁶ *Ayodhyakanda*, *sarga* 29.

Deogarh with the three main characters walking in the forest.²⁹⁷ **(Figures 6 and 39)** The placement of this episode here underlines the transition between the palace life they are leaving behind in Ayodhya and their new life in exile as they enter the hinterland.

The next four carvings in the Papanatha sequence are related to the episode of Surpanakha from the *Aranyakanda*.²⁹⁸ **(Figures 40-42)** The first relief appears between the *devakoshta*. It shows Surpanakha as a beautiful lady on the left facing west, and a badly damaged male figure in warrior pose to her right facing east. **(Figure 40)** The carving is inscribed “Surpanakha” on the rock to the left, and above it is signed by the artist Baladeva.²⁹⁹ This is followed by the battle of Rama and Lakshmana against Khara and Dhusana, which is depicted in two carvings – one in the niche and one to the right between the niches – that face each other. **(Figure 41a-b)** These are labeled on either side of the niche pillars and on the walls. The next episode carved in the niche to the right is Surpanakha in conversation with Ravana, the same subject that is depicted on the Upper Shivalaya temple at Badami. **(Figures 19 and 42)** This relief is also inscribed with a descriptive label on the pillar frames of the niche. The scene between the niches to the right is completely obliterated.³⁰⁰

Continuing east the next three reliefs depict the events leading up to and following Sita’s abduction. **(Figures 43-45)** The first is a niche carving that synoptically recounts the episode of the golden deer. **(Figure 43)** The relief shows three large figures in the background – on the left is Sita in conversation with Lakshmana and on the right Rama turns away observing a smaller figure of a leaping deer. In the foreground is a smaller figure, presumably Rama releasing an

²⁹⁷ There is a relief on the corner of the wall to the right of this niche that is badly damaged and therefore not possible to identify, but it appears to be some kind of battle scene with two horse riders facing each other and trampling a third figure underneath.

²⁹⁸ *Aranyakanda*, sarga 16-17.

²⁹⁹ Annigeri, 45 no.35.

³⁰⁰ Perhaps this was originally a scene with Ravana and Marica in conversation (cf. Virupaksha temple pillar discussed below, **Figures 59-60**).

arrow at the golden deer that is pictured again in the bottom right corner of the composition. The relief is labeled on the pillar frames and inside the niche above the figures. The relief to the right of the niche is damaged, but there is enough remaining to suggest this is the scene of Ravana coming to Sita disguised as a holy man, a tableau that has antecedents from the sixth-century site of Nachna in northern India. **(Figures 10b and 44)** Sita is pictured seated on the left with her right hand on her knee and leaning on her left. To her left is Ravana disguised as a hermit. The next scene inside the niche to the right shows the climax of the battle between Ravana and Jatayus. **(Figure 45)** Accompanying labels are on the pillar frames on either side of the niche. The sequence is familiar, a similar selection of episodes to the *Ramayana* reliefs on the plinth of the Upper Shivalaya temple. It seems the artists at Pattadakal were drawing on a shared visual vocabulary, one that draws upon earlier imagery at Deogarh, and continues at the later site of Ellora.

Continuing along the wall of the Papanatha temple, the next two reliefs illustrate episodes from the *Kishkindakanda* and the *Sundarakanda* focusing on the alliance formed between Rama and the monkey king Sugriva, a scene one will recall from Nachna. **(Figure 46 and 10b)** The first relief in this set is placed between the *devakoshtas* and is carved in two registers, similar to reliefs showing earlier events at Mithila. **(Figures 36-37a-b)** The meeting of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sugriva where they form an alliance against Valin is shown in the top register, with the first wrestling match between Valin and Sugriva in the lower register. Here Rama refrains from releasing an arrow because he cannot distinguish between them. Label inscriptions are placed on the top, right, and left sides side of the relief.

The episode continues synoptically in the niche carving to the right with three scenes encapsulated within a single frame. **(Figure 47)** Rama, Lakshmana, and Sugriva hold their second meeting to plan a new strategy against Valin in the upper left corner of the relief. These

figures are dwarfed by larger figures of Sugriva and Valin engaged in a second wrestling match on the right side of the composition, while on the left Rama releases towards Valin. The defeated Valin is shown lying on the ground in the lower right corner of the frame.

The epic resumes in the next relief with a scene previously identified by Wechsler as “Monkeys with demons.” **(Figure 48)** Based on comparison with a similar scene on the southern plinth of the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, I believe this relief specifically illustrates the episode of Angada, the son of Valin, killing an *asura*.³⁰¹ **(Figure 49)** In the *Ramayana*, Sugriva rallies the monkey troops to help Rama and Lakshmana rescue Sita from Ravana. Sugriva sends out search parties, placing Angada in charge of a mission to the southern regions of the forest and caves. In the course of his search for Sita, Angada strikes at an *asura*, mistaking it for Ravana. This struggle appears to be depicted in the relief at Pattadakal. Angada is on the left, backed by his army, his right arm raised to strike at the *asura*, who is seen charging at them from the left. The fallen demon is depicted in the bottom right of the frame.

The final section of the Papanatha *Ramayana* sequence begins in the last niche on the southern wall with two carvings, and wraps around the east side of the temple, and all the reliefs are all related to episodes from the *Yuddhakanda*. First comes the episode of the monkeys building of the bridge to Lanka depicted inside a niche. **(Figure 50)** At the apex of the arch above this central image are seated Rama and Lakshmana in conversation with Sugriva. To the right of the niche is a schematic rendering of the bridge extending across the ocean into Lanka. The next relief scene is carved on the southeast corner of the temple wall, and shows Rama and Lakshmana leading the march into Lanka. **(Figure 51a-b)** Continuing along the east wall, the battle at Lanka is depicted in three parts. In the niche directly to the right (north) of the corner panel, an army of *rakshasas* face off the approaching figures of Rama and Lakshmana. **(Figure**

³⁰¹ *Kishkindakanda*, *sarga* 47.15-20.

52) This relief has been identified alternately as the battle between the “Vanara (monkey) army and the *rakshasas* Indrajit and Kumbhakarna” or “Rama with his Animal Army.”³⁰² The relief to the right of this carving is destroyed, but one can still make out the outline of warrior figures facing left towards the niche carving with Ravana in his chariot shooting arrows towards them. **(Figures 53-54)** This climatic battle scene between Rama and Ravana is followed by a more peaceful scene placed within a smaller *devakoshta*, placed immediately to the left of the entrance porch. **(Figure 55)** It is difficult to discern because of weather damage; however, this appears to be another vertically oriented scene with figures seated in repose. Wechsler suggests this is Sita, still in captivity in the Ashoka Grove. Alternatively this may be a depiction of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana visiting Bharadvaja’s ashram on their journey home to Ayodhya.³⁰³

The *Ramayana* sequence at the Papanatha concludes on the southern column of the temple’s entryway with a two-part relief showing scenes of court festivities. **(Figure 56)** These are identified from label inscriptions as two separate coronation celebrations – one for Vibhishana, who replaced Ravana as the king of the *rakshasas*, in the top register, and one for Rama in the lower register.³⁰⁴ The newly crowned Vibhishana is depicted in the upper left corner seated on a dais, presiding over his court as dancers and musicians perform below. In the lower register Rama is shown happily united with Sita in the center of the composition, flanked on either side by Sugriva, Hanuman, and Lakshmana. Surrounding the central figures, seated in a row in the foreground, are celebrants from Sugriva’s monkey army.

With the Papanatha temple it is now possible to view a full presentation of the *Ramayana* from the *Balakanda* to the *Yuddhakanda*. Through careful analysis of the *Ramayana* sequence on

³⁰² See Annigeri, *Pattadakal*, 46 nos.45-46, and Wechsler, “Royal Legitimation,” nos.5-6.

³⁰³ *Yuddhakanda*, *sarga* 112-115. Further analysis is needed. Unfortunately this relief does not bear a label inscription.

³⁰⁴ Annigeri, *Pattadakal*, 47 no.48.

the Papanatha temple, it is now possible to discuss their meaning and significance for a courtly audience.³⁰⁵ Essentially the temple sculptors produced in the reliefs a synopsis of the *Ramayana* epic; highlighting the major episodes from the *Balakanda* to the *Yuddhakanda* much in the way Bhavabhuti describes the newly crowned Rama's life story through the picture gallery in Act I of the *Uttaramacarita*. For the Papanatha temple, visual artists depicted episodes underlining courtly themes of bravery, loyalty, and righteousness. They also featured episodes that symbolize the importance of performing and maintaining the rituals honoring the deities that protect the kingdom, and insure political stability. For example, the Papanatha sequence begins in the *Balakanda* with the sacrifice Dasharatha performed in order to receive a son in order continue the Raghu's heroic lineage at Ayodhya. Rama and Lakshmana are then sent with Vishvamitra for their education in his ashram, and here Rama meets his first challenge and show of physical strength and bravery against the demoness Tataka. Rama's ability to perform miracles is illustrated through releasing Ahalya's curse of invisibility. Through breaking Shiva's bow, Rama proves himself worthy of Sita's hand in marriage, and Rama is on the proper path to becoming the heir apparent. Rama, now a married prince, nobly accepts his exile as his princely duty and out of loyalty to his family. The remaining reliefs in the sequence focus on the events around Sita's abduction and Rama's battle to rescue her from Lanka. The focus on the mutilation of

³⁰⁵ In her interpretation, Wechsler argues that the reliefs were placed on the southern wall of the temple both to commemorate the coronation of the Chalukya king Kirtivarman II (ruled 747-757), and to legitimate his political power at a time when Chalukyas were losing control over the region to the Rashtrakutas. The *Ramayana* then serves as an allegory of Kirtivarman kingship. Cummings uses the same approach in her study of the iconographic program of the neighboring Virupaksha temple. See Cummings, "Virupaksha," chapter 3. A much more detailed analysis is needed to support Wechsler's claim; unfortunately current evidence is insufficient to verify that Pattadakal was the Chalukyas coronation site at this time. Nonetheless, Wechsler's observations underscore the significance of the *Ramayana* as an epithet of kingship often invoked in eulogistic *prashasti* of the time period – that kings emulated Rama as an ideal king is undisputed. More importantly, it supports the argument that the reliefs are related to courtly culture and that they have a secular rather than a ritual function. Finally, her argument that they were placed there not for people to perform ritual circumambulation but instead as emblems of the king's authority also suggests a secular function. Given the dearth of inscriptional evidence at the Papanatha, it may be more productive to analyze the *Ramayana* reliefs on this temple in terms of what they signified for the broader community of the king's court.

Surpanakha and the abduction of Sita speaks to the importance of defending the honor of high-ranking women of the court. Finally, the victory over Ravana and coronation of Rama and Vibhisana signifies the restoration of order and peace on earth that is the ultimately kingly duty. This practice of highlighting heroic themes from the *Ramayana* continues in the remaining examples of this survey.

Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal, circa 745 CE

Adjacent to the Papanatha at Pattadakal are the Virupaksha and Mallikarjuna temples, both dedicated to Shiva (Lokeshvara). Commissioned by the two queens of Vikramaditya II, these temples are both the largest and most elaborately decorated temples at Pattadakal.³⁰⁶ The two temples exemplify the fully developed south Indian *dravida* style of the eighth century – each includes an entry porch, outer *mandapa*, and *garbagriha*, with an enclosed ambulatory path, hence they are also *sandhara* type temples. The Virupaksha complex has a separate shrine for Nandi facing west towards the *garbagriha*, and is circumscribed by a wall that has a large entry gate on the east (the temple faces east towards the Malaprabha river). **(Figures 57-58)** Both temples are elaborately carved with sculpture inside and out. In both temples, the inside pillars of the *mandapa* are carved on several sides with scenes from various epics including the *Krishnacarita*, and the *Ramayana*, similar to the reliefs at Deogarh and Badami, with additional episodes from the *Kiratarjuniyam*.³⁰⁷ This is a significant departure from preceding examples in that *Ramayana* episodes are now presented within the inner walls of the Hindu temple, yet still outside the inner sanctuary of the *garbagriha*. I will focus on an example on a north-facing pillar from inside the Virupaksha temple for my analysis. **(Figures 59-60)**

³⁰⁶ Fleet, “Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions,” *Indian Antiquary* 10 (1880): 162-170. For a detailed study of the Virupaksha temple, see Cummings, “Virupaksha.”

³⁰⁷ See Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture,” 448-452 and fig. 12. The practice of showing all three epics on the same monument continues at Ellora.

The Virupaksha pillar is carved in four horizontal registers that are viewed from right to left; as with previous examples, scenes from the *Ramayana* are depicted in order according to the epic, beginning from upper right corner of the first row and ending in the lower left corner of the fourth row. **(Figure 59)** Like the Papanatha reliefs, the *Ramayana* scenes on the Virupaksha pillar are labeled with inscriptions in the margins above the carvings. However, the scale of the reliefs is notably smaller than the previous examples, and they are presented as if in a scrolling format.³⁰⁸

Beginning from the top and moving from right to left, the top register of the Virupaksha pillar depicts the Surpanakha episode in three parts: 1. Surpanakha (in benevolent form) with Lakshmana, Rama, and Sita in their hermitage, 2. Lakshmana cuts off Surpanakha nose, and 3. Surpanakha returns to Ravana's court and demands that revenge is sought against Lakshmana. The second register depicts the continuation of this episode with two more scenes: 1. Ravana's younger brother Khara and Surpanakha are defeated by with Rama and Lakshmana (as Sita looks on at far right), and 2. the enraged Surpanakha at the court of Ravana (at left). The third register depicts three scenes from the episode of the golden deer: 1. Ravana seated in a pavilion facing Marica, shown standing in an ascetic pose, 2. Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana seated in their hermitage, and 3. Rama chasing and killing the golden deer.³⁰⁹ The bottom register depicts the events surrounding the abduction of Sita, beginning on the right with Ravana (in the guise of a beggar) with Sita, followed by Sita being taken away in Ravana's chariot, and ending with the battle of Ravana and Jatayus.

Turning to the outside walls of the Virupaksha temple, there is another series of *Ramayana* episodes carved in three of the *devakoshta* on the southern wall preceding the outer

³⁰⁸ Compositionally the relief resembles later examples of narrative scroll paintings such as those found in Andhra or Bengal. See Barbara Rossi, ed. *From the Ocean of Painting: India's Popular Paintings 1589 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91-146.

³⁰⁹ In the epic, Ravana visits Marica at a hermitage to enlist his services.

porch. **(Figures 61-63)** Moving east along the southern wall, the sequence begins with an image of Rama holding his bow, flanked by Sita and Lakshmana in the *devakoshta*. **(Figure 61)** A smaller image of Marica disguised as a deer is carved in the upper right corner. In the panel above the niche is a smaller relief showing Surpanakha confronting either Lakshmana or Rama. Next in the sequence is a niche image with Ravana battling Jatayus, with a smaller image of Sita being pulled by a chariot above them. **(Figure 62)** A miniature shrine with a figure peering out of the doorway is carved in the panel above the niche, while a fallen figure is depicted in a panel beneath Ravana and Jatayus.³¹⁰ The third niche sculpture is badly damaged, but appears to be Valin and Sugriva wrestling in the center as Rama, one of the smaller figures shown above them shoots an arrow from the trees as Lakshmana looks on from the left. **(Figure 63)** The niche is framed by a *makara torana* design, in the center of which is a seated figure on a cornice. The panel beneath the battle scene contains a low relief with five figures – a reclining figure in the center flanked by two females, with two smaller figures (a monkey and a kneeling figure) facing them on the right. It is difficult to identify this scene with certainty since the faces are damaged, but it appears to be a royal male figure lounging with two female companions at court. I believe this may depict an episode following Sugriva's his reinstatement as king of Kishkinda when he became "addicted to sensual behaviors," temporarily abandoning his duties.³¹¹ He is shown in the relief in a position of royal ease, attended by women.

In contrast to the complete sequence of episodes presented at the Papanatha temple, only a selection of key moments from the *Ramayana* are presented at the Virupaksha temple as part of an interwoven narrative that is only comprehended after viewing all the *devakoshta* reliefs

³¹⁰ Cummings suggests this image is to be read vertically in three parts. She identifies the miniature shrine above this niche sculpture as Sita alone in the hermitage prior to the abduction and the falling figure as the demon Kabandha, whom Rama and Sugriva encounter following the abduction of Sita. This would be a unique representation of Kabandha episode in the material record. Cummings, "Virupaksha," 351.

³¹¹ *Kishkindakanda*, *sarga* 28. Cummings' identification of this as Ravana being visited by Hanuman in Lanka seems unlikely. See Cummings, "Virupaksha," 347.

around the perimeter of the temple, and again through viewing all the pillars of the inner *mandapa*.³¹² As with the Papanatha temple, the Virupaksha reliefs are placed on the exterior wall in a counterclockwise order along the south side of the temple. Wechsler and others argue based on inscriptional evidence that the same artists worked on the southern exterior walls of both temples, first experimenting with *Ramayana* reliefs in the *devakoshta* at the Virupaksha and then a fully realized sequence at the Papanatha.³¹³ If the same artists indeed worked on both temples, it seems more likely they completed the Papanatha reliefs first and then began experimenting with various ways of framing scenes within and around the *devakoshta*. Furthermore, the style of the Virupaksha *devakoshtas*, derived from the southern *dravida* temple tradition, seems an evolution from earlier types at Mahakuta and Badami while the *devakoshtas* on the Papanatha temple more closely resemble northern *nagara* prototypes.³¹⁴

Kailasanatha Temple, Ellora, late eighth century

The final example in my survey of sixth to eighth century *Ramayana* reliefs is from the Kailasanatha temple in Cave 16 at Ellora in Maharashtra. **(Figure 64)** Evidence suggests the reliefs may have been carved soon after the completion of Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, during the reign of Rashtrakuta King Krishna I (ruled 757-773).³¹⁵ The temple is geographically situated on the periphery of the Chalukya territory, which suggests the *Ramayana* tradition had

³¹² This is dealt with at length in Cummings, “Virupaksha,” chapter 3.

³¹³ Wechsler, “Royal Legitimation,” 30 and 33. See also Bolon, “Early Chalukya Sculpture,” 432, and Buchanan, “Chalukya Temples,” 410-411.

³¹⁴ See Tarr, “Architecture of the Early Western Chalukyas,” 149-166 and 339-342.

³¹⁵ An exact dating of the temple is impossible as there are no dedicatory inscriptions to attribute a specific patron. There is only related inscriptional evidence from the Baroda Grant of Krishna I of 811-812 from IA vol. XII and the inscription of Dantidurga in the adjacent cave 15, both mentioned Krishna I’s patronage of great temple at Ellora. See Chattam, “Stylistic Sources,” chapter 3 and Stanislaw J. Czuma, “Brahmanical Rashtrakuta Monuments at Ellora,” (PhD diss., UMICH, 1972), 199n8. It is therefore generally accepted that excavation of the Kailasanatha temple was initiated by Krishna I (ruled circa 756-73), and continued by successive Rashtrakuta rulers through the ninth century.

become widespread in this region, and that it continued to be of importance to the Rashtrakutas, who were initially feudatories of the Chalukyas before taking over control of the region in the middle of the eighth century.³¹⁶

The Kailasanatha temple complex is unique in the archaeological record of ancient Indian monuments. It represents the most sophisticated example of rock-cut sculpture in that it combines elements of monolithic and freestanding architecture within the same complex. The largest and most elaborate of the caves at Ellora, the Kailasanatha is one of twenty-six rock-cut caves that were excavated over the course of two hundred years from the seventh to the ninth century.³¹⁷ It has an impressive entrance gate that leads to a massive monolithic sculpture that has been carved out of the rock into a two-story south-Indian *panchayatna* type temple connected by a causeway to a separate Nandi *mandapa* by a bridge. A separate, elevated processional path decorated with Shiva deities has been carved into either side of the remaining hill surrounding the temple. **(Figure 65a-c)** On the ground level of the inner courtyard just beyond the entrance gate are found two symmetrical pillar columns and elephants carved in stone on either side of the Nandi *mandapa*. The Kailasanatha temple proper is built on solid rock plinth that is twenty-seven feet high. This plinth is carved as though it were the wall of a *sandhara* temple – like the temples at Pattadakal, the base is carved with a frieze of elephants and lions such as those found beneath the porches of the Papanatha and the Virupaksha temples.³¹⁸ The

³¹⁶ For a discussion of influence of Chalukya architecture on Ellora see Doris Clark Chattam, “Pratihara from Pattadakal to Ellora: The Early Western Chalukya Basis for the Sculpture style of the Kailasa Temple,” in *Chhavi-2: Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume*, ed. Rai Krishnadasa (Banaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981), 71-79.

³¹⁷ See Geri H. Malandra, *Unfolding a Mandala: the Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

³¹⁸ Previous scholars such as Chattam (1977) and Parlier-Renault (2001) have argued the artists who built the Kailasanatha temple used the Virupaksha temple as their model. With further research, it may be possible to show that some of the same artists worked on both temples. What is significant for the purposes of this dissertation is that the similar use of *Ramayana* imagery at both temples reiterates a shared visual vocabulary of secular themes drawn from *itihasa* and placed on temples to appeal to elite court patrons.

first story of the temple is a solid rock plinth; staircases on either side of the west west-facing alcove provide access to the Shiva temple and Nandi *mandapa* above.

As with the Virupaksha temple, episodes from the *Ramayana* reliefs are depicted in two distinct formats at the Kailasanatha temple – as images in the *devakoshtas* on the outer wall of the temple and as a scrolling narrative on the temple plinth.³¹⁹ I begin with the *devakoshta* images. **(Figure 66-67)** These are situated on either side of the southern porch of the temple, and feature nearly identical versions of the Virupaksha reliefs showing Sita's Abduction, and Sugriva and Valin in Combat, also within close proximity to an impressive three-dimensional sculpture of Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa carved into the plinth below. While the Virupaksha reliefs are carved within the actual *devakoshta*, the Kailasanatha reliefs are carved directly into the rock within a simple box-like frame. The Ravana/Jatayus image at Ellora is almost a mirror image of the Virupaksha relief – the figures are oriented in the opposite direction with Jatayus entering the composition from outside the frame, and the space above and below is undecorated. **(Figures 62 and 66)** The Valin/Sugriva image at Ellora is similar to that of the Virupaksha in terms of the posture of the two monkey warriors, but without the figure of Rama shooting from the trees above. **(Figures 63 and 67)** Carved beneath and slightly off center from the main image is a smaller relief that at first appears to be the same court scene of the intoxicated Sugriva. However, on closer examination I believe this is an early depiction of the death of Valin, an episode that does not appear in the visual record with frequency until the ninth century at temples such as the Nageshvara temple at Kumbakonam.³²⁰ In the Ellora relief, Valin lies wounded in the arms of

³¹⁹ For a comparative analysis of the *devakoshta* images of the two temples, see Parlier-Renault, "Le programme iconographique du temple de Kailasanatha a Ellora," *Arts Asiatiques* 56, 2001 (5-23), as well as Doris Clark Chattam, "Stylistic Sources and Relationships of the Kailasa Temple at Ellora," PhD diss. (UCB, 1977). For a detailed discussion of the plinth reliefs at the Kailasanatha temple, see Stephen Markel, "The *Ramayana* Cycle on the Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 59-71.

³²⁰ David Sanford, "Early Temples Bearing *Ramayana* Relief Cycles in the Chola Area: A Comparative Study," (PhD diss., UCLA, 1974), 340 fig. 35b.

either Sugriva or his son Angada. At right, Valin's wife Tara mournfully flails her arms above her head. To the right of Tara, a second female figure, perhaps Sugriva's wife Ruma performs a gesture of respect and gratitude towards two standing figures of Rama and Sugriva.³²¹

The reliefs on the plinth of the Kailasanatha temple are episodes from the *Ramayana* carved in horizontal registers that were meant to be viewed from top to bottom, similar to the scrolling narrative format of the Virupaksha pillar. **(Figure 68)** It is as though the artists adapted this format to a magnified scale for greater legibility and that allowed the artists to include additional scenes resulting in a more cohesive narrative. Interestingly, the north side of the plinth was carved with similar scenes from the *Kiratarjuniyam* and the *Krishnacarita* to those found on the other pillars inside the Virupaksha *mandapa*.³²²

Several of the same scenes depicted at earlier sites of Deogarh, Badami, and Pattadakal likewise appear on the plinth of the Kailasanatha temple. Rama's departure from Ayodhya and journey to the Panchavati Forrest occupies the entire first register, beginning at the far right with Rama and Sita taking leave from Dasharatha and ending on the far left with their crossing of the Ganges river. The narrative continues on the left end of the second register with Surpanakha's mutilation, followed by the battle with Khara and Dhusana ending on the right. The third register then begins on the right end with the episode of the Golden Deer, Sita's abduction, and ends on the left with the battle of Ravana and Jatayus. The entire fourth register is devoted to the story of Sugriva and Valin, including a detailed depiction of Sugriva's coronation on the right. The fifth register begins on the left with scenes from the search for Sita, including Angada's battle with a demon, a scene familiar from the Papanatha temple. Hanuman is featured prominently in the reliefs, with episodes recounting his heroic efforts to rescue Sita beginning on the right side of

³²¹ I find Czuma's previous identification of this scene as the reunion of Rama and Sita unconvincing. Czuma, "The Brahmanical Rashtrakuta Monuments of Ellora," 155-156.

³²² See note 313.

the fifth register and continuing throughout the sixth register. The construction of the bridge to Lanka occupies the seventh register, with detailed carvings of monkeys carrying boulders to Nala, the chief engineer of the monkey forces. Finally, the bottom register depicts a series of battle scenes from the *Yuddha Kanda*.

Conclusion

Having completed this analysis of sixth-to-eighth century relief sculptures, I end this chapter by outlining the similarities and differences between representations of Rama on Hindu temples to Rama's depiction in plays based on the *Ramayana* discussed in chapter 3. The main similarity between the plays and the reliefs is in the technique of selecting and framing episodes from the *Ramayana* that highlight Rama's loyalty, bravery, and righteousness and presenting them to an audience in a series of vignettes or sequential narrative. In this way, audiences will easily recognize the subject of the *Ramayana*, whether it is presented as a drama or in narrative reliefs. However, a critical difference here is that the playwrights used the *Ramayana* as a point of departure, presenting the epic interpretively to their audience by making small alterations to the original storyline. By contrast, the visual reliefs emphasize certain episodes over others, but generally remain faithful to the original *Ramayana* storyline. Furthermore, through careful looking at individual reliefs, it is evident that sculptors took care to include visual cues within the composition that would allow viewers would to recognize key episodes from the *Ramayana* through the major characters Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Surpanakha, Sugriva, Valin, and Ravana. One can extrapolate from this comparative analysis, that temple audiences would have an emotional response to the relief sculptures similar to what they experienced in the re-enactment of the *Ramayana* performed on stage.

While there are notable similarities between the representation of Rama in drama and narrative reliefs, there are distinguishable differences with regard to the audience's physical relationship with Rama. First, while the plays emphasize Rama's heroic character, the narratives emphasize Rama's heroic actions. This is apparent in the distinction between the emphasis on dialogues between characters in the dramas, which is in keeping with the conventions of the *nataka*, as opposed to the graphically detailed battle scenes between Rama and each of his adversaries that are commonly found on relief sculptures. This feeds into another distinction between the two modes of representation, and that is the viewer's relationship to Rama. In the dramas, the viewer's experience of Rama is more contemplative, and the audience does not physically move with the characters. In viewing narrative reliefs on Hindu temples, the experience of Rama is more active, and the audience is more physically engaged with the images by moving from one scene to the next.³²³ Finally, even though the playwrights took more creative license in their interpretation of the *Ramayana* on the stage, they adhered to the standardized conventions for presenting a heroic drama as outlined in the aesthetic treatises. Thus audience members would have some sense of what to expect from the performance. With the relief sculptures, such expectations would require knowledge or prior viewing of sculptures at other temple sites. There are no instructions for how to view the *Ramayana* sculptures at the temples except for the rare cases in which there are label inscriptions identifying the scenes, which is only present at Pattadakal. I have shown above that artists alternated the placement and scale of the reliefs from one site to the next – for example the seventh century reliefs at Badami were placed beneath the viewer's eye level as a decorative frieze on the base of the temple while at places such as the Papanatha, and the Virupaksha they were enlarged and given pride of place

³²³ We got some insight to how this worked in the plays with Bharata's visit to the portrait gallery. One can imagine temple viewers recalling the glory of Rama's heroic exploits as they move from one scene to the next.

in the architectural niches. At the same, Virupaksha temple carvings were made smaller to fit on pillar columns. At Ellora, the scrolling format is writ large on the plinth of the temple. The variation in placement and scale of the reliefs suggests a degree of flexibility but also that the viewer's expectations temple sculpture may have not have been as clearly defined as that of dramatic performance. In either case, the intention is to celebrate the heroic deeds of Rama for the benefit of the community, as a form of courtly entertainment, and as a kind of offering to please the deity that resides within the temple. In the conclusion of my dissertation I will address supplemental literary and inscriptional evidence that supports this claim.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to consider the secular meaning of Hindu temple sculpture in the sixth to eighth century through the lens of Indian courtly culture. The term secular has been used throughout my dissertation heuristically, in order to explore alternate meanings for the iconographic program of Hindu temples beyond their religious symbolism. Studies by Ali and Pollock served as a point of departure for my initial research. Both scholars describe the formation of a shared aesthetic tradition that took shape between the first and fifth centuries, when Sanskrit became the diplomatic language of the courts. These studies provided a framework for my project, which was to understand how members of the ancient Indian court may have engaged with and responded to Hindu temple sculpture. I chose to focus my analysis on the heroic narrative tradition in literature, and specifically the early representations of the Hindu god Rama. Rama was considered emblematic of the ideal Hindu ruler– a nobleman who observes the rules of diplomacy and ethics, but also exhibits bravery and martial prowess. Recalling and hearing the life of Rama was considered highly auspicious for the king and the community, and the Valmiki *Ramayana* in particular was considered the most appropriate story for honoring heroic figures such as the king or a deity. My approach was to draw connections between the experience of watching Rama’s life story re-enacted on stage in Sanskrit dramas, and the viewing of narrative relief sculptures on the outside walls of Hindu temples.

In chapter 1, I reviewed the major studies of Hindu temple sculpture that have impacted the field of Indian art history. The main scholars considered here were James Fergusson, E.B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Stella Kramrisch. Fergusson was an early proponent of the archaeological approach to the classification of Indian architecture that separates monuments first by religion and then by region. The symbolic approach to the study of Hindu temples

developed from critiques of the archaeological approach led by scholars such as E.B. Havell, who felt that a more meaningful way of understanding Indian temples was to trace their origins in Indo-Aryan culture and Vedic literature. The most influential scholars of the symbolic approach were Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch. These studies were heavily informed by ancient religious and philosophical texts describing the Hindu temple as a representation of the cosmos, not actual descriptions of what the Hindu temples looked like or what impressions they made on actual temple audiences. The tendency of these scholars was to only see the Hindu temple in terms of ritual devotion, as an exclusively sacred space. While both the archaeological and symbolic approaches remain fundamental to art historical research on Hindu temples, recent scholarship employs a more integrated strategy that considers the social and political context in which the art was produced. Additional studies of courtly literature such as inscriptions, poetry, plays, and epics (*itihasa*) such as those by Granoff and Van Kooij pointed to similarities between Hindu temple sculpture and descriptions of celestial palaces in literature. These studies convinced me that the representation of scenes from heroic narratives on the walls of Hindu temples could be viewed as objects of entertainment rather than part of a complex system of religious symbolism.

In chapter 2, I looked at dramatic treatises and plays. For treatises, I looked at passages from the *Natyasastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana* relating to audience, character development, and aesthetic appreciation of plays. My key point here was to show that a successful dramatic performance required audience participation through their emotional response, and that certain aspects of the drama catered to a particular class of cultivated individuals who had extensive knowledge of aesthetic theory (*rasa*). Allusions in the treatises to a divine audience may reflect the fact that the plays were commissioned to be performed on the occasion of festivals honoring deities, perhaps even religious icons in temple settings. The characters and storylines in Sanskrit

dramas were designed to present an idealized view of the world, and perhaps one could say this was the courtly view of the world, where men and deities co-existed. Among the different types of dramatic genres that existed, I found the *nataka* to be the closest parallel to the narrative tradition in Hindu temple sculpture. Thus I turned to an analysis of heroic archetypes in *nataka* plays, focusing on depictions of the life of Rama, who was admired by all for his bravery, loyalty, and martial prowess

Four eighth century plays by Bhasa and Bhavabhuti were analyzed for clues to interpret the depiction of scenes from the *Ramayana* on Hindu temples. In my analysis of the *Mahaviracarita* and the *Abhisekanatika*, I showed how Rama's heroic qualities were depicted through dialogue and character opposition. I talked about the playwrights' technique of selecting and framing particular episodes intended to highlight aspects of Rama's character. I then looked at how descriptions of portraiture and sculpture galleries from Act III of the *Pratimanatika* and Act I of the *Uttaramacarita* were included in the storyline to induce an emotional response from the characters. This proved useful for formulating ideas about how the same audience would have looked at narrative reliefs on Hindu temples.

In chapter 3, I used my analysis of the *Ramayana* plays in chapter 2 to consider the visual evidence of narrative reliefs on Hindu temples dating between the sixth and eighth centuries. Here I found similarities to the plays in the emphasis of Rama's heroic qualities of loyalty, bravery, and righteousness that suggest the emotional response to narrative reliefs was similar to that of watching the dramatization of a *Ramayana* episode on stage. While the plays provided a more contemplative experience, the reliefs required a more embodied experience where the viewer physically moved with Rama through his heroic exploits. I determined that although there were differences between the two genres, both appear to have been created with a courtly audience in mind. That is to say that both plays and narrative reliefs on Hindu temples were

created to appeal to an audience well versed in the epics, and perhaps also in the different modes of representing Rama in drama versus visual art. These were members of society, such as the king and his royal entourage, who had mobility to circulate between temple sites. In this way, the Hindu temple sculptures could be viewed as an expression of courtly culture as a form of entertainment in the same way plays a form of entertainment for the court.

Tracing the development of *Ramayana* reliefs at a group of temple sites located within relative proximity to one another allowed me to identify a pattern in the selection, framing, and placement of episodes from the epic on the plinths, niches, and columns of the structures. This pattern would have been familiar to patrons and artists who circulated between the temple sites. The Vishnu temple at Deogarh and the Kailasha temple at Ellora established a beginning and end point for this survey of the sixth to eighth century, and enabled me to see a common practice and common visual vocabulary across the subcontinent at this time. The reliefs always feature the key characters Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Ravana, Surpanakha, Vali, and Sugriva. The episodes most frequently highlighted in the reliefs – Rama’s departure, the mutilation of Surpanakha, Sita’s abduction, the conflict of Valin and Sugriva – were similar to those series of vignettes presented in the plays of Bhasa and Bhavabhuti.

Having summarized my findings, I want to briefly look at supplemental evidence from the prologues to the plays discussed in chapter 3, and selected inscriptions from Hindu temples. Together these provide additional clues to the significance of the *Ramayana* for a courtly audience. The prologues introduced the audience to the author, subject matter of the play, and the occasion of the performance, which was generally a religious festival.

In the prologue of Bhavabhuti’s *Mahaviracarita*, the *Ramayana* is declared the most fitting subject of a play created in honor of the Hindu god Shiva:

Today, indeed, in the procession in honor of the divine Shiva, the gentlemen appoint that play to be acted in which there are the exploits of the mighty hero, grand and terrible; in

which the language is gentle, and again cruel, and of deep meaning; and in the peerless characters of which the heroic spirit is assigned to each by fine but clear divisions. (Joyfully) Then we must present the life of the great hero Rama; thus in truth they have ordered. [The *Ramayana*] is the poem of a poet to whom speech is submissive, and that story is of Rama; and we have obtained an audience that can test the utterance of words, as a touchstone the friction of gold: By him, whose teacher is chief of holy ascetics as Angiras is chief of great sages, and who as his name imports is rich in knowledge, was composed this life of the offspring of Raghu [Rama], who punishes those who violate justice, whereby the root of sorrow to the three worlds was plucked up, and wherein the great vigor of the heroic spirit abounds, and which is marvelous; through his great love for the hero he composed it. Therefore you should hallow it; and that son of a learned sire has said –That holy life of the chief of Raghu’s line, which Valmiki, best of sages and first of poets, traced out, in it the speech of me too, a votary, took pleasure: that life let the good with well-pleased minds revere.³²⁴

Significantly, the first line of this citation declares the play is being performed on the occasion of a procession honoring Shiva at the request of the noblemen of the court (I will return to this later). These men of the court have specified that the type of play performed is a *nataka*. Bhavabhuti declares the obvious choice for the heroic play is the Valmiki *Ramayana*. In staging a version of the epic for an audience of “well-pleased minds,” Bhavabhuti is linking himself to Valmiki and to the tradition of reciting Rama’s heroic exploits.

Prologues of the *Pratimanatika* and the *Abhisekanatika* also indicate that Rama and other characters from the *Ramayana* were invoked at the beginning of the play for protection. In the prologue to the *Pratimanatika*, the stage-manager begins with an allusion to characters from the *Ramayana*, and asks for their protection:

May the Fortune of the Furrow guard us, he that is pleased with lovely verses, charming with his beauteous neck, and every auspicious mark the supporter whose soul inspireth awe, matchless foe of him that made the goddess cry, may he protect us in every birth.³²⁵

The prologue of the *Abhisekanatika* more directly invokes Rama:

³²⁴ *Mahaviracarita*, 3.

³²⁵ The translator of the text explains that, “by paronomasia this verse introduces the names of Sita, Sumantra, Sugriva, Lakshmana, Ravana, Vibhisana, and Bharata.” See Woolner and Sarup, *Thirteen Plays of Bhasa*, 158.

May Rama protect you – he that slew the obstructers of Vishvamitra’s sacrifice, vanquishing in battle the valor of [the *raksasa*] Viradha [and Khara and Dushana], he that killed Kabanhdha and the Monkey King [Valin], swelling with overwhelming pride, and smote the house of the demon chief.³²⁶

In the prologue of the *Uttaramacarita*, the stage-manager declares that the play pays “homage to the poets of old” (i.e. Valmiki), and is being performed on the occasion the festival honoring the deity of Kala-priya.³²⁷ These prologues therefore provide direct evidence that plays were performed during religious festivals, and that they served an honorific function.

Turning to inscriptions, these are important because they provide evidence of royal temple patronage, which is rare for this period, and give a sense of how the courts supported the development of temple precincts through royal land charters. In some instances, specific donations are made for the recitation of epic poetry within a temple precinct. For example, a copper plate inscription of the Pallava king Parameshvarvarman I (ruled 669-690) mention the distribution of land from the village of Kuram (a village near present-day Kancipuram) in twenty-five parts, three of which were given to the priests who performed the rituals and oversaw repairs of a Shiva temple located there.³²⁸ Proceeds from the land were also set aside for the recitation of the *Bharata* (*Mahabharata*) at the temple.³²⁹ That this practice continued in subsequent periods is attested by another copper plate inscription found at Tandantottam, near Kumbakonam in Thajavur, dated to the reign of a later Pallava ruler, Nandivarman III (ruled 846-69).³³⁰ This inscription records a land grant made at the request of the king’s treasurer

³²⁶ Woolner and Sarup, *Thirteen Plays of Bhasa*, 147.

³²⁷ Pollock translates “Kala-priya” as “a town south of Kanauj.” There is a difference of opinion as to which deity the play was performed in honor of. Pollock believes it is Surya, the Sun god. David Schulman believes it is Shiva. See David Schulman, “Bhavabhuti on Cruelty and Compassion,” in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, 61n15.

³²⁸ *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. I, 144-154 The temple itself was built by a Vidyavinita-Pallava, perhaps a member of the king’s family

³²⁹ *South Indian Inscriptions* 1:154-155.

³³⁰ *South Indian Inscriptions* 2:517-535.

Dayamukha, with shares allotted not only for the recitation of the *Bharata* in a special hall, but for three arbitrators to judge the performance.³³¹

Finally, references to Rama and the *Ramayana* often appear in verses of inscriptions, and are typically used to describe a ruling king's outstanding qualities and accomplishments.³³² Of particular interest here is a line from the Mahakuta pillar inscription of the Chalukya ruler Mangalesha dated to the year 603 CE stating that, "like Rama, he [Mangalesha] has never been conquered."³³³ Previous scholars have deduced from this evidence that *Ramayana* reliefs were similarly placed on the Upper Shivalaya, the Papanatha, and the Virupaksha temples Hindu temples as an allusion to the ruling king, or to specific coronation ceremonies and kingship rituals that were periodically performed by the king to renew his royal power.³³⁴ That temples were used in conjunction with kingship rituals is certainly known from later periods. However, for the earlier temples of the sixth to eighth century there is little documentation of such rituals taking place at temples and even more difficulty linking them to specific rulers or royal patrons. For this reason, theories of kingship or royal legitimation can only be applied with limited success. What the inscriptions do affirm is the court's desire to celebrate ancient Indian rulers in terms of heroic archetypes such as Rama, and in the same poetic style of the *Ramayana*.

In this dissertation, I have cross-referenced inscriptional, literary, and art historical evidence to reinterpret the meaning and function of Hindu temple sculpture. From my findings, it is now possible to view the iconographic program of a temple as a source of entertainment and amusement for the refined members of the ancient Indian court. The *itihasa* tradition was widely

³³¹ *South Indian Inscriptions* 2:519. See also Sanford, "Early Temple Bearing *Ramayana* Relief Cycles," 16-18.

³³² This has been traced as far back as the second century C.E. See C. Sivaramamurti in "Ramayana in Inscriptions," in *Asian Variations in Ramayana*, 181-191.

³³³ *Indian Antiquary* 19 (1890): 19.

³³⁴ Buchanan, "Chalukya Temples," 66 says each king had a favorite – i.e. Kirtivarman preferred Krishna while Mangalesha preferred Rama. See also Cummings, "Virupaksha."

known to the court through inscriptions, poetry, and plays and used to celebrate the heroic deeds of men and gods. Visitors to the Hindu temple would take pleasure in finding these heroic narratives carved in stone reliefs. The courtly audience would also consider these narratives appropriate for honoring the temple deity that resides within the *garbagriha*. Perhaps it is even possible to think of the *Ramayana* reliefs on Hindu temples as providing the same benefits of reciting the Valmiki epic, or re-enacting the life of Rama on stage?

Returning to the excerpt from the prologue of the *Mahaviracarita* above, if the plays were commissioned on the occasion of festivals honoring Shiva, is it not possible to say that *Ramayana* reliefs were likewise placed on the walls of the Hindu temple to honor the deity that resides within the *garbagriha*? This may help us to understand the presence of Rama, an avatar of Vishnu, on the outside walls of Saivite temples that previous scholars have struggled to explain. It would mean that the iconographic program of a Hindu temple is not necessarily determined by its sectarian affiliation. It would also help to explain why the reliefs are not placed to be viewed as part of a circumambulation ritual. Rather these are signifiers of the ideal and divine hero that were placed there to inspire and bring prosperity to the king and his court.



Figure 1. Vishnu temple at Deogarh.

Figure 2. Elevation of Vishnu temple. Drawing from Vats (1952, plate V).

Figure 3. Floor plan and plinth of Vishnu temple. Drawing from Cunningham (1880, plate XXXIV).



Figure 4. Scene from *Krishnacarita* (left). Vishnu temple.

Figure 5. Rama lifts Ahalya's curse. Vishnu temple. Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XV).

Figure 6. Lakshmana, Rama, and Sita walking in the forest. Vishnu temple. Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XV).

Figure 7. Visit to hermitage of Anasuya and Atri. Vishnu temple. Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XVI).

Figure 8. Mutilation of Surparnakha. Vishnu temple. Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XVII).

Figure 9. Rama takes aim against Khara and Dusana as Lakshmana holds his bow. Vishnu temple.
Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XVI).

Figure 10a. Remaining fragments from *Ramayana* sequence from Vishnu temple. Photograph from Vats (1952, plate XVII).

Figure 10b. Nachna panels. Photograph from AIIS? ASI?

1. Hanuman covers his ears to block Surpanakha's voice.
2. Ravana approaches the unattended Sita in the guise of an aging ascetic.
3. Sugriva asks Rama and Lakshmana to help him win his kingdom back.
4. The Battle of Vali and Sugriva Part I.
5. The Battle of Vali and Sugriva Part II.
6. Hanuman is captured at Lanka and brought before Ravana.



Figure 11. Upper Shivalaya temple, Badami

Figure 12. Site map of Badami. From Mitchell (1975, plate 2).



Figure 13. View of Upper Shivalaya temple from south side of tank.

Figure 14. Elevation and ground plan of Upper Shivalaya temple. From Michell (1975, plate 3).

Figure 15. Drawing of plinth of Upper Shivalaya temple. From Meister and Dhaky (1986, vol. 1, pt. 2, fig. 1a).

Figure 16. Key to narrative reliefs at Upper Shivalaya temple. Adapted from Michell (1975, plate 3).



Figure 17. Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita departing from Ayodhya [Left]; Court Scene [Right]. Southern plinth projection, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 18. The mutilation of Surparnakha. Southern plinth interstitial panel, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 19. Surparnakha at Ravana's court. Southern plinth projection, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 20. [From right to left] Ravana travelling in his chariot to Marica's ashram; Three men in an ashram; Lakshmana, Rama, and Sita in forest ashram. Southern plinth interstitial panel, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 21. Episode of the golden deer. Southern plinth projection, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 22. Scenes following Sita's abduction. Southern plinth interstitial panel, Upper Shivalaya temple.



Figure 23. Waking of Kumbhakarna. Southern plinth projection, Upper Shivalaya temple.

Figure 24a. *Devakoshta* on southern wall of Mahakutesvara temple, Mahakuta. Photograph from American Institute for Indian Studies (No 31127).

Figure 24b. Drawing of plinth of Mahakutesvara temple. From Meister and Dhaky (1986, vol. 1, pt. 2, fig. 22).

Figure 25. Map of Malprabha Valley. From Michell (1975, plate 1).



Figure 26. Overall view of Pattadakal temples.

Figure 27. View of southern wall of Papanatha temple, Pattadakal. Photograph from American Council for Southern Asian Art (ACSAA) Collection (University of Michigan), South Wall (ID Number 5660).

Figure 28a. Elevation and ground plan of Papanatha temple with key to narrative reliefs. From Wechsler (1994:29).

Stage I: 720-730

Stage II: 730-734

Stage III: 735-750

Figure 28b. Three stages of construction on the Papanatha temple. From Bolon (1981:411-412).



Figure 29. Royal sages in conversation. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 30. Dasharatha presents offering to officiating priests for performing the son-making sacrifice. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 31. Vishvamitra in conversation with Kausalya and Dasaratha. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 32. Vishvamitra leads Rama and Lakshmana to his ashram for tutelage. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 33. Rama kills Tataka. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 34. Sacrifice resumes in Vishvamitra's ashram. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 35. Ahalya holding a waterpot, flanked by Rama and Lashmana, with Vishvamitra in background. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 36a-b. Janaka and Sita, with Vishvamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana (upper register). Rama breaks the bow of Shiva archery scene (lower register). Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 37a-b. Vishvamitra leads Lakshmana, Rama, and Sita to Ayodhya (upper register). Rama stretches Vishnu's bow for Parasurama as Lakshmana and Sita observe (lower register). Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 38. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana visiting the sage Suyajna (?). Niche panel, west face of outer *mandapa* on southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 39. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana walking. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 40. Surpanakha and Lakshmana (?). Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 41a. Rama and Lakshmana take aim at Khara's army as Sita looks on. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 41b. Khara's army. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 42. Surparnakha at Ravana's court. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 43. Episode of the Golden Deer. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 44. Sita visited by Ravana in guise of holy man. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 45. Ravana conquers Jatayus. Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 46. Rama and Sugriva form an alliance (upper register). Rama is unable to distinguish between Valin and Sugriva (lower register). Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 47. Sugriva, Lakshmana, Rama in conversation (upper left). Vali and Sugriva wrestle (right). Rama shoots at Valin, who falls to the ground (lower left). Niche panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 48. Angada kills a demon. Interstitial panel, southern wall of Papanatha temple.

Figure 49. Angada slays a demon. Detail from southern plinth of Kailasanatha temple, Ellora.
Photograph from Markel (2000, fig. 16).



Figure 50. Building a bridge to Lanka. Niche and interstitial panels, southern wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 51a. Marching to Lanka (south face of panel). Carvings on southeast corner of Papanatha temple.



Figure 51b. Rama and Lakshmana take aim (east face of panel). Carvings on southeast corner of Papanatha temple



Figure 52. Kumbhakarna and Indrajit. Niche panel, east wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 53. Battle scene. East wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 54. Ravana engaged in battle from his chariot. Niche panel, east wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 55. Ashram scene. Niche panel, east wall of Papanatha temple.



Figure 56. Joint coronation scenes in upper and lower registers. Southern face of pillar on east-facing entrance porch, Papanatha temple.



Figure 57. Virupaksha temple, Pattadakal.

Figure 58. Elevation of Virupaksha temple. From Michell (1975, plate 38).

Figure 59: Pillar 7 of the inner *mandapa* with *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes. Virupaksha temple.
Photograph from American Council for Southern Asian Art (ACSAA) Collection
(University of Michigan) ID Number 11873.

Figure 60. Ground plan of Virupaksha temple with key to narrative reliefs. From Bolon (1981, fig. 12).

Figure 61. Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana. Niche sculpture, Virupaksha temple. From Wechsler (1994, fig. 5).



Figure 62. Ravana and Jatayu. Niche panel, Virupaksha Temple.



Figure 63: Vali and Sugriva in battle. Niche panel, Virupaksha temple.



Figure 64. Kailasanatha temple, Ellora.

Figure 65a-c. Elevation and ground plan of Kailasanatha temple. From Meister and Dhaky (1986, vol. 1, pt. 2, figs. 47-49).

Figure 66. Ravana and Jatayus. Kailasanatha temple. Photograph from American Institute for Indian Studies (No 56267). Digital South Asia Library.

Figure 67. Vali and Sugriva (top). Death of Valin (bottom). Kailasanatha temple. Photograph from American Institute for Indian Studies (No 52685).

Figure 68. *Ramayana* sequence on the southern plinth of Kailasanatha temple. Photograph from American Council for Southern Asian Art (ACSAA) Collection (University of Michigan), ID Number 1544.

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