A POT-POURRI OF INDIAN ART

Edited by Pratapaditya Pal
MARG PUBLICATIONS
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that such works were primarily intended to emphasize the importance of religious practice in overcoming obstacles to enlightenment.

NOTES
1. For example, Joanna Williams (The Art of Gupta India [Princeton: 1982], p. 150) notes that such figures are problematic: River Painters: Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture (Akaln-Maha-prajapati): An Iconographical Analysis [New Delhi: 1983], p. 60) identifies them as Mara's daughters, but does not explain why they are sometimes shown as emerging from the ground.
2. In the Buddhist Mahayana, the earth is not mentioned. Instead Mara is stopped by an invisible voice which states that nothing can stop the saint seated on the navel of the earth—the spot where earlier Buddhas had achieved Enlightenment. See The Buddha-Images of Ashoka in Buddhist Mahayana Texts, trans. E.B. Cowell (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XXVIII, Oxford: 1894), pp. 140-147.
5. The Lalitavesika Sutra, trans. H.T., pp. 482-5. In other texts such as the Mahasutra, the Buddha strikes the ground when challenged by Mara which causes the earth to shake. See The Mahabodhi, trans. J.J. Jones (Sacred Books of the Buddha, 9 vols., London: 1900), pp. 269.
7. For discussion of sculptures from Andhra Pradesh which use the oblique head, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, p. 13.
8. The Buddha-Images, trans. Cowell, p. 137: "He whom they call in the world Kanyaku, the owner of various weapons, the flower adorned lord of the course of desire... is in whom they also style Mara, the enemy of liberation." See also James Boyd, Samsa and Mara: Christian and Buddhist Symbol of Evil (Leiden: 1975), pp. 111-123, for a discussion of the aspects of Mara's kosa nature.
13. Campbell also makes the interesting suggestion that the pot is substituted in Southeast Asia in many cases by a flower which the woman in the anna carbule wears on her head. She suggests that this is a substitute for the anna carbule, which is not uncommon in Southeast Asia. Campbell makes the interesting suggestion that the pot is substituted in Southeast Asia in many cases by a flower which the woman in the anna carbule wears on her head. She suggests that this is a substitute for the anna carbule, which is not uncommon in Southeast Asia.
15. For discussion of the pre-Pala and Pala-period works from eastern India, see Frederick Astor, The Art of Eastern India, 300-600 (Minneapolis, Minn.: 1980) and Susan L. Huntington, The Pola Sonsa School of Sculpture, 12th Century (Leiden: 1984).
18. For example, M. Bierieu, "La Sculpture du Bouddhisme Indou," in Indo-Indian Journal (1936), pp. 184-188.
19. See, for example, M. Bierieu, "La Sculpture du Bouddhisme Indou," in Indo-Indian Journal (1936), pp. 184-188.
20. The art of sculpture also includes the works of the former Buddhist Sakyamuni. Sculptures are often found in the Gupta period, and are usually found in the form of stelae. For a discussion of these sculptures, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
21. For a discussion of the art of sculpture, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
22. For a discussion of the art of sculpture, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
23. For a discussion of the art of sculpture, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
24. For a discussion of the art of sculpture, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
25. For a discussion of the art of sculpture, see Pincheri, Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture, pp. 184-188.
The later history of Buddhism in peninsular India has aroused little enthusiasm among scholars, and those who have made it their concern speak only of the town of Nagapattinam in the Tamil country. One is left with the impression that this coastal town was a single, lone survivor of Buddhism in peninsular India, perhaps a last outpost of that faith. However, the much wider prevalence of Buddhism in the Tamil country is indicated by a range of stone images, several over life-size, recovered from a variety of sites in the districts of Tanjore and Trichinopoly. It appears that it is necessary to re-evaluate the continuing strength of Buddhism in the Tamil country and highlight the artistic evidence of its persistence. Nagapattinam itself, while known to scholars, has not received the attention it deserves. It was indeed a major centre of Buddhism that commenced casting Buddhist bronzes in the ninth century, and continued to produce such images right into the seventeenth century. This mass of artistic material—a mass three hundred and fifty Buddhist bronzes have been recovered from Nagapattinam—has been largely overshadowed by the even more prolific production of Hindu bronzes under the Chola monarchs. While the Buddhist bronzes may not possess the vital dynamism of contemporary Hindu images, the best pieces from Nagapattinam are elegant figures that emphasize the stately repose and contemplative calm of the Buddha.

It is not really possible to speak of the artistic history of the Tamil country until the end of the sixth century when the imperial Pallavas came into power. We know from literary sources that shrines were built by followers of the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist faiths. But since stone was associated, in the Tamil country, with funerary practices of maghathic origins, sacred shrines were built in the perishable media of wood, brick and stucco, and have not survived the centuries. We thus have a considerable time-lag between the appearance of stone monuments in northern India (and even in the adjoining territory of Andhra), where stone came into use in the first century B.C., and the Tamil country where stone appears as late as the sixth century A.D. When the Pallava monarch Mahendravarman constructed his first stone monument, a rock-cut cave dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, he was aware of his innovation in employing stone and left an inscription proclaiming his feat in constructing a mandapa without brick, without mortar and without wood. Artistic evidence, then, of the early presence of Buddhism in the Tamil country is scant.

Literary sources, however, suggest that Buddhism entrenched itself in the far south at a very early date. One may cite, for instance, the Buddhist text, Candasya, probably written in the first century A.D. (and translated into Chinese by 429 A.D.). Set in the southern region of Dakshinapatha, its hero Sudhana who is in search of the ultimate truth, meets the great Manjusri at Dhanyakara (Dhanyakakata or Buddha Amaravati). The holy bodhisattva does not instruct Sudhana himself, but advises him to travel to various towns further south and acquire Buddhist teachings from a range of holy men. One is left with the impression that peninsular India, including the Tamil country, was indeed a land of Buddhist saints and shrines.

Kanchipuram

A variety of texts indicate the popularity of Buddhism in south India in the sixth and early seventh centuries, and Kanchipuram, today a town of Hindu temples, is mentioned repeatedly as a site that had acquired great renown as a Buddhist centre. The Tamil epic Mambikkañadi, written around 550 A.D., speaks of the prosperous condition of the Buddhist establishments of the south. Describing Kanchipuram, it speaks of one chedi erected in the middle of the city to house a golden bodhi tree with emerald leaves, and another such shrine for an image of the Buddha. These early Buddhist monuments, presumably built of brick and ornamented with stucco, have not stood the test of time. The epic also informs us that the most authoritative Buddhist teachers lived in Kanchi.1

Around the year 600, the Pallava ruler Mahendra wrote a farcical play which amply testifies to the Buddhist presence in Kanchipuram. The play introduces us to a Buddhist monk reminiscing...
over a wonderful meal of fish and meat that he has just eaten at the house of a prosperous Buddhist merchant. On his way back to the royal Buddhist monastery, he wonders why the Buddha, who allowed his monks so many luxuries, should not have given them those two added pleasures which would have made life perfect—wine and women. The play reads thus:

When the most compassionate and holy Enlightened One has ordained for the brotherhood such favours as living in palatial mansions, sleeping on beds with well-made-up mattresses, having food in the morning, tasty drinks in the afternoon, tambula with the five flavoured ingredients and so on, why aren't rules to be found permitting women and drink? How is it that the Omniscient One overlooked these? Deciding that they could not have been overlooked he muses,

Where can I get the unexpurgated original text? Then I'll help the sangha by publishing the complete teachings of the Buddha throughout the world.²

The play is set in the Pallava capital of Kanchipuram where, it is clear, Buddhists and their monasteries were plentiful. When the Chinese pilgrim Hsin-chao visited south India around 630, he too wrote of Kanchipuram, telling us that there were some hundred Buddhist monasteries and 10,000 monks who all studied the teachings of the Shāvāra School of Mahayana.³

Equally telling in its own way is a seventh-century inscription in a cave at Mahabalipuram, the port of the Pallava rulers, that proclaims the Buddha to be the ninth incarnation of the
Hindu god Vishnu. Only in an environment where the strength of Buddhism had been demonstrated, and where the faith was firmly entrenched, would one expect to find mention of the Buddha in a list of Vishnu's incarnations.

Fig 1
An over-life-size standing image of the Buddha, together with six other Buddhist images, was found within the Kamakshi temple at Kanchipuram. 5 It would appear that this Buddhist temple was originally a Vishnu temple, perhaps dedicated to the Buddhist goddess Tara or Vassalakshmi, that was taken over at a later date by the Hindus for their goddess Kamakshi. This suggestion is not as far-fetched as it might seem at first. After all, we have textual evidence of the ruler Mahendra pulling down a Jain monastery and reusing its materials to build a Siva temple in its place. 6 The same must have happened with a Buddhist shrine which was partly dismantled and rebuilt as a temple to Kamakshi. It is otherwise difficult to explain how a monumental stone Buddha could be found in the innermost hall of this temple. No Buddha would have been interested in transporting a two-metre high image into a temple to the goddess, and certainly no Buddhist would have been permitted to do so. The sculpture, which is probably of sixth century date, displays features in common with the earlier style seen at the Aihole Buddhist sites of Amravati and Nagarparkar. The Buddha has a robust body with swelling flesh along the waistline. The robe, which leaves the right shoulder bare, is treated in the fashion seen at Nagarjunakonda, including the heavy sway at the bottom edge. The face is full, and its unsmiling countenance makes it a solemn religious icon.

Within a hundred years of this prosperous Buddhist situation, a series of Hindu saints had largely destroyed the power of the Buddhists. These Hindu saints wandered the Tamil country singing songs in praise of their gods, but at the same time denouncing the Buddhists. 7 The Buddhists suffered a major set-back during the era of the Hindu saints from the seventh to the ninth centuries. In fact the situation got so bad that when the Hindu saint Tirumangai broke into a Buddhist chapel, not an eyebrow seems to have been raised. The Vaishnavas saint raised a vihara at Nagapattinam and made off with a golden image of the Buddha which he then melted down, using the gold to decorate the Vishnu temple at Srirangam. And this act of vandalism is related in a most matter-of-fact manner by the Vaishnavas!

Perhaps it was during this period of persecution that several Kanchi Buddhists moved to the Bihar monastery of Apanada or Kurukshetra, which, it is pointed out, "seems to have cultivated a special relationship with southern Buddhists, particularly from the Kanchipuram region." No less than fifteen Buddhist bronzes from Kurukshetra contain inscriptions informing us that they were gifts from monks who hailed from the Kanchi region which was referred to as Kanchi-basa or Kanchi-mandala. One inscription speaks of an image gifted by Pramanishka who hailed from the village of Narasimha-caturvedi in Nagapattinam, in the Kanchi district; born in a brahmin family versed in the Vedas and Vedangas, he later became a disciple of the revered Buddhist monk Vainava. 8 The images donated by Kanchi residents are all of local Bihar manufacture, and they follow the practice of hollow casting typical of the north, as opposed to the southern technique of solid bronze. These dedications do not belong to a single period, but range from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, the time when Buddhism was re-establishing itself in the Tamil country. Clearly there was a continuous interaction between Bihar and Kanchi, rather than a single phase of contact. Only one Kurukshetra/Kanchi image inscription contains an actual date that places it in the second quarter of the tenth century. Of special interest is a one-metre tall Buddha, one of the largest of the Kurukshetra bronzes, that was donated in the eleventh century by a monk from Kanchi. While it is certainly of local Bihar manufacture, it is intriguing to see the addition of the flame-tipped aureole, which we shall see to be a typical southern motif. Clearly the Tamil donor requested that this feature be included on his dedication.

From the eighth century onwards, while Kanchi increasingly became a town of Hindu affiliation, it appears to have maintained a strong Buddhist presence for several centuries thereafter. Inscriptions in Burmese speak of a learned monk named Ananda, a native of Kanchi, who became the head of the Burmese Buddhist Church for a period of fifty years, and who finally died in Burma in 1245. 9 A Korean inscription of 1375 indicates the continuing importance of the town as a Buddhist stronghold; it informs us of a monk who visited Kanchi and heard an illuminating discourse by a local Buddhist preacher. 10

Nagapattinam

In the ninth century, when the era of the Hindu saints ended in the Tamil country, we find evidence of a vibrant renewal of Buddhist artistic activity, this time in the coastal town of Nagapattinam. The town had a Buddhist presence as early as the seventh century, since the Chinese pilgrim Hiung-tsang speaks of a monk named Wu-hsing stopping at Na-kia-po-tan-na (Nagapattinam) on his journey to Ceylon. In addition, the tale of Tirumangai’s theft of
the golden Buddha indicates the existence of a prestigious monastery of foreign, perhaps Indonesian, construction at Nagapattinam in the eighth century. We are told that Tirumalai
journeyed by sea to Dvijipata in search of the architect, from whom he acquired a plan of the monastery in order to facilitate his nefarious mission. Some three hundred and fifty
Buddhist bronzes, dating from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries, indicate the persisting
importance of Nagapattinam as a Buddhist centre.

Perhaps the most significant of early bronze, now in the collection of the Museum of
Paros, is a magnificent gilt Buddha seated in front of a richly ornamented throne, and originally flanked by two bodhisattvas. Clad in a simply delineated monk’s
robe that leaves his right shoulder bare, the Buddha sits in the lotus position with one hand
in his lap in the dhyana gesture of meditation, and the other raised in the upavishya gesture
of teaching. Above the series of small curls covering his head is a flame-tipped protuberance.
It is evident that in the Tamil country, at some stage between the sixth and the ninth century,
icons of the Buddha acquired this flame-tipped ushnisha. An explanation of this feature is
provided by Buddhist texts, for instance the Lakhavantara, which states,

When the Buddha is in virodhati an ornamental ray called jina (knowledge), proceeding
from the opening in the sunnian, moves above his head.18

The flame-tipped ushnisha is then a symbol of the Buddha’s attainment of supreme knowledge.

An intriguing contrast to the robust strength of the Boston Buddha is provided by the
profusely decorated and seemingly fragile screen that serves as a backdrop for the Buddha
and was part of a throne that is now missing. Above his head, and cast as a separate piece,
is a delicate canopy surmounted with fanciful, stylized foliage. The utter simplicity of the
Buddha is highlighted by placing him against the ornate background, and the contrast,
one may assume, was the intentional concern of the inspired artist who produced the
composite group.

The Boston Museum acquired the screen, on its own, in the year 1967, and it was only
some three years later that the Buddha image appeared on the market. When it became
evident that the two belonged together, the Museum acquired the sculpture and placed it
at lower edge, and these held in place two attendant images, probably of the Bodhisattvas
kilometres north of Nagapattinam, appears to be one of the original figures attendant on
this Buddha. Dressed in royal attire and visualized as a crowned and bejewelled bodhisattva,
the figure has a socket beneath its hollow pedestal that would appear to fit the hooks on
the rear of the throne-back. The image formed part of the collection of the Government
Museum in Madras, but was among a group of objects that disappeared in an unfortunate theft
a few years back. Maitreya’s eyes were inlaid with silver, and indeed the same was done with
the Buddha image. The group is among the most stately and elegant products of the early
workshop at Nagapattinam.

Belonging around the year 900 is a sculpture of the Bodhisattva Lokeshvara seated in
a pose of relaxed elegance. The sinuous figure has his sacred thread tied in a large knot
matted locks, piled high upon his head and crowned with a lotus, bears the seated Bodhisattva
emblems as his crest. The piece possesses a sense of majesty Despite its diminutive size
of Buddha, with the monastic robe draped so as to leave the right shoulder uncovered. As is standard
a band over his left shoulder, while the sash at the bottom progressively decreases. This
appear, they have three tongues of flame, but soon after the tongues become five in number,
that is, if one pursues further the theme of “an ornamental ray called jina,” several Buddhist
images in the tenth century were draped in five-fold knowledge. The Norton mark the lower edge of the garment. While the style of drapery that leaves the right shoulder
of draping the Buddha’s robe. The Chinese pilgrim Hsüing, who visited India in the seventh century,
spoke of the variations in the manner of dress and described an entire chapter to “The Mode
of Wearing Garments”.

There are small points of difference such as where the skirt of the lower garment
is cut straight in one and irregular in another, and the folds of the upper robe are,
in size, narrow in one and wide in another. The Suvastivadin cut the skirt of the
lower garment straight while the other three (Mahayana, Sihavira, Summaitiya)

7. Nagapattinam Buddha. Buddha seated under a
stylized tree, with usnisha, mid-eleventh
century, approximately 1335.
Government Museum, Madras.

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During the eleventh century, perhaps partly due to the impetus provided by a colony of Buddhists from the kingdom of Srivijaya in Indonesia, Buddhism in south India seems to have been given an infusion of new blood. With the approval of the Chola rulers, a monastery known as Culla-mani-varna-vihara, “of such lustrousness as bell-etched Kamakura (mount Meru),” was erected by the Saliendra kings “at Nagarpatnam, delightful on account of many a temple, ... brilliant with arrays of various kinds of manastis.” The monastery took its name from the ruler Culla-mani-varna of the Saliendra dynasty, whose son was responsible for its construction. Within this monastery was built a chapel called the Raja-raja-perum-palli (“great chapel”), named after the Chola king Raja-raja, who, though a staunch Vaishnavite, granted the village of Asaipandalam to the Buddha of this vihara in the year 1000. In the year 1090, during the reign of the later Chola king Kulottunga I, we hear of the arrival of two ambassadors from the Saliendra kingdom, and the grant of further privileges to the monastery Culla-mani-varna-vihara. A new chapel was now built and named Rajendra-chola-perum-palli, taking its name from the ruler Kulottunga who was also called Rajendra.

Fig. 7. Made perhaps to be placed in such a prestigious chapel is a nearly one-metre high figure of the Buddha seated in meditation under a stylized tree. It is instructive to compare this sculpture with the mid-eleventh century with the earlier Boston piece, since the two are conceptually similar. The Buddha sits on a lotus seat upon a plain throne, and rests on a bolster placed against a sparsely decorated rectangular throne-back. A circular flame-tipped halo that frames the Buddha’s head, supports a small parasol, and above this rises a semi-circular arrangement of stylized foliage, consisting of creepers and full-blown lotuses and lilies. Two naga attendants with fly-whisks in hand flank the Buddha. These images are carved only down to the knees, being attached at that point to the throne-back. The intricate detail of the Boston throne-back, its elaborate umbrella, and the fanciful nature of its foliage, has here given way to a simpler rendering, while the Buddha himself is a more slender image in keeping with the general trend of Nagarpatnam bronzes.

Fig. 8. Such a bronze of around 1100 is an elegant four-armed figure holding a rosary and a bunch of flowers in two of his four hands. The image bears a close resemblance to Hindu bronzes from Vaishnava; only the stupa in Maitreya’s flaming crown provides a clue to his Buddhist identity.

Fig. 9. Nagarpatnam bronzes also include the Buddhist goddess Tara seated gracefully upon a lotus pedestal, and pot-bellied Jambhala, the Buddhist god of wealth together with his consort Vanavasa; Jambhala, a close counterpart of the Hindu deity Kubera, holds the mongoose, considered to be the receptacle of all gems, which digresses riches that are collected into bags. With his right foot, Jambhala pushes forward one such bag of wealth towards his devotees. A large number of bronze vajra stupas were dedicated at Nagarpatnam. A striking feature of these stupas is that they were cast in two pieces, so that the upper rounded dome may be lifted off to reveal a seated Buddha within. In the example pictured, the drum of the stupa displays an image of the Buddha Amitabha with his hands in the gesture of meditation; if the rounded dome was lifted off, it would reveal a seated figure of the Buddha Akshobhya in the earth-touching gesture.

Fig. 10. A monastic building that may have been constructed during the phase of Saliendra inspiration is the three-storied tower known in modern parlance as the Padu-veli-gopura (“New Pagoda Tower”), which until a century ago served as a landmark for vessels approaching Trichinopoly. The tower, built in 1067 by the French Jesuits in order to erect their college buildings on the site of the British College, is of three huts placed side by side, each of which is enclosed in a tower of three stories. The tower, a brick tower, with central windowed openings on each level, was pulled down in 1848. In the ancient city of Nagarpatnam, a brick tower at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka, was turned into a Buddhist temple.

Fig. 11. The structure, as far as we can gauge from drawings made in 1848, bears closer to any other building in India. The Buddhist association of this tower was established by the board of Buddhist images that emerged during demolition work.

Nagarpatnam bronzes display strong stylistic similarities to Hindu bronzes of corresponding periods. Just as there are Chola Hindu bronzes and Vijayanagar Hindu bronzes, so too there are images in bronze, clearly the result of a local bronze-casting workshop centred at Nagarpatnam, in contrast with the Hindu bronzes. South Indian Hindu bronzes were rarely inscribed; rather, the inscription was placed on the walls of the temple to which the image was gifted.
The Nagapattinam bronze, by contrast, put his records, glorificatory or doatory,
on the base of the bronze itself. For instance, a thirteenth-century seated Buddha has an
inscription which reads, "The Nayakar (Lord) whose omnipotent feet are easy of access,
even to the illiterate."\(^{10}\) A fifteenth-century epigraph on the pedestal of a standing Maitreyeva
reaches, "The Great Being, Akalanaka, who is both father and mother to the world."\(^{16}\)
Frequently the urwak (mark between the eyebrows) of Buddha images, and indeed their eyes, were inset with
silver, and occasionally they were inset with rubies. Rubies were also set into the flame tip of
the ushnisha, as in the fifteenth-century Buddha pictured here. Traces of gilt seen on
several Nagapattinam images indicate that gilt bronzes were commoner than now appears to
be the case.

The latest known inscriptive reference to Nagapattinam belongs to the late fifteenth century
and comes from the Kalyani inscriptions of the year 1467, which comprise a set of ten stone slabs
in the town of Pegu in Burma.\(^ {12}\) The contents of the second slab has an incidental reference
to Nagapattinam. We read of a group of Burmese theras who travelled to Sri Lanka in order to
bring back their method of ordination. Shipwrecked on their return journey, they made it by raft
to India and on foot to Nagapattinam. There, we are told, they visited the Padurikarama and
worshipped the image of the Buddha in a cave constructed by the command of the maharaja of
Chandavasa (China). Sadly none of the Buddhist architectural monuments mentioned in the
inscription survives.

It is of interest to note that the south Indian flame-tipped ushnisha was adopted by Sri Lankan
Buddhists who presumably maintained close contacts with the nearby port of Nagapattinam;
from Sri Lanka, this feature appears to have been transmitted to Burma and Thailand. One may
assume too, although firm evidence for this is lacking, that the proximity of Buddhist Sri Lanka
was one of the features that acted as a stimulus for the continuing strength of Buddhism in the
Tamul country.

Buddhist Nagapattinam continued to thrive throughout the sixteenth century. Among later
pieces is a sixteenth-century bronze found in worship in Tanjore town before it was transferred to
the Madras Museum. This large piece, almost one metre in height inclusive of its flame halo
(urna), is a highly stylised but fine example of this late period. The curls of the Buddha's hair
have now been flattened, the flame tips to a non-existent ushnisha protuberance have been


17. Avalokitesvara, Nagaaram, bronze, c. 1750 A.D., approximately 1 m. Government Museum, Madras.
18. Granite image of seated Buddha, Nagapattinam region, c. 900 A.D., approximately 2 m. The Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Miss Alice Boney.
19. Seated Stone Buddha, eleventh century, approximately 1.2m. The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrew Brown Sculpture Gift.


considerably enlarged; and the arms is incised so as to resemble an inverted question mark. Holes in the pedestal, into which poles would have been inserted to enable the image to be carried in procession, clearly indicate that the bronze was a festival image, an atma vishnu. Several smaller images of this period, all with "question mark" arms, exist. Latest of the bronzes from Nagapattinam is a large image with an ornate flame-tipped halo, which at first sight could be Fig 17 mistaken for the Hindu god Vishnu. A closer look, however, reveals a tiny image of a seated Buddha ornamenting the full crown, and thus indicates the identity of the figure as Avalokiteshvara. The image, just under one metre in size, with holes in its pedestal indicating its character as a festival bronze, implies a prosperous bronze workshop at Nagapattinam and a generous patronage of Buddhism as late as 1700 A.D. It is indeed ironical that today Nagapattinam retains not a single trace of its erstwhile Buddhist splendour.

Other Tamil Sites

It was not only at Nagapattinam, nor exclusively in the medium of bronze, that Buddhism in south India found expression. Stone images of the Buddha exist in large numbers and may be seen in
many museum collections both in Tamilnadu and abroad. An early example, probably produced around 900, is an almost two-metre granite slab carved in high relief to depict the Buddha seated upon a lion-throne under the bodhi tree. An oval flame-tipped halo, a pendant above the Buddha’s head, the cushion placed against the throne-back, the tree, and the flanking bodhisattvas are all reminiscent of the Boston and the early Nagapattinam bronze groups of this type. The Buddha’s robe returns as a hand over his left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder bare, and a prominent flame tops his aushika. The broad-shouldered figure seated in meditation exudes great strength and power, and its large size indicates that it must have graced an impressive temple.

Fig. 20

Another colossal granite image, of the eleventh century, is now in the Norton Simon Collection. The impassive face, the locked legs, the hands placed in the gesture of meditation and the solid columnar mass of the body make this Buddha an image of great presence. Of similar quality and character is a seated image, over one and a half metres in size, in the Chicago Collection. Few stone images remain in a comparable state of preservation, and one may hence admire the sharp line of the Buddha’s nose and the strongly delineated features.

Fig. 21

Recovered from Madras city itself are two stone Buddhas, unfortunately headless, that perhaps belong to the tenth century. From Erayur in the Tanjore district comes a high-relief slab depicting a seated Buddha in the style of the Nagapattinam bronzes, with a five-flamed tip to the aushika. Several similar pieces may be seen in the Madras Museum, while the Tanjore Art Gallery possesses an exceptionally fine twelfth-century seated Buddha. A number of monumental granite standing Buddhas, well over two metres high, may be seen in the Madras Museum. One such comes from Kuranam and another from Tiruvaranallur, and both appear to date from the thirteenth century.

The large number of Buddhist stone images recovered from varying parts of the districts of Tamilnadu and Trichinopoly, indicates that coastal Nagapattinam was not a lone outpost of Buddhism in peninsular India. We may recall, in this context, that the Chola emperor Rajaraja’s sister built Jain temples at Daulaparam and Tirumalai, while one of his queens built a Jain shrine at Ongappuram, all sites in the district of South Arcot.® One may assume that Buddhist chapels too continued to be erected throughout the reign of the Hindu Chola emperors. Certainly, Nagapattinam was the most prominent artistic and religious centre of Buddhism after the twelfth century, but stone sculptures from the hinterland indicate that the Buddhist faith persisted in the Tamil country with greater strength and for a longer period than has hitherto been realised. This final chapter in the artistic history of Buddhism in peninsular India needs to be more widely recognised.

NOTES
1. N. Rabanan, Studies in Muniakshara (Madras: 1935), passim.
4. Deri Janamacharita, samadhisthatha nisadasya nacacchana nisadasya buddhaha aushiktha h Stewart.
7. Besides the Saiva and Vaishnavas saints spoke successfully of the Buddhists and Jains. The Saiva child-novice Sambandar, who lived in the seventh century, carried on a voluble tiruvada against these heterodox faiths, setting aside the tenth verse of each hiriyar for this specific purpose, see Vidyarthi Debiha, op. cit.
16. Ibid.
19. T. N. Ramachandran, op. cit., p. 44.
20. Ibid., p. 53.

DETERMINING THE REGION OF ORIGIN OF HIMALAYAN COPPER ALLOY STATUES THROUGH TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

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There are a number of features of the paintings that cannot be explained by any of the versions of the story thus far known. In all the paintings except those from Punjab, Mewar and Oudh, the figures of Sohni and Mahanwari are shown wearing ornate shielded swords. Mahanwari also has a shield in the vertical paintings as well as a bow and arrow in the works from Bundi and Kota. There is nothing in any of the earlier versions of the story that would explain the presence of the weapons. Even if they are meant to be merely defensive weapons, they are the type associated with the nobility rather than the peasantry. Perhaps the weapons symbolically raise the lovers to the level of heroes in the eyes of society. Also perhaps to indicate her esteemed status, Sohni is clothed in urban finery as a princess or a well-to-do lady, even though she is really a village potter’s daughter.

The identification of the accretive is a particularly interesting feature of the paintings that has been ignored by previous scholars. Archer, following Bandhawra, suggests merely that the figure is praying for Sohni’s protection to the river god Elwaja Khazir. A more likely interpretation of the figure is that it represents the accretive with whom Mahanwari went to live after being ordered never to see Sohni again by her father. If this is the case, it suggests that various incidents in the story have been encapsulated into a compositionally balanced iconography without regard to a proper chronological sequence.

This interpretation of the iconography is also implied by the presence of the buffaloes beside Mahanwari since at the point in the tale when Sohni swans over to Mahanwari, he was no longer employed by Sohni’s father to tend the animals and had moreover begun to practise austerity. Another feature of the paintings that is unexplained by the narrative is the frequent presence of a city in the distance. Probably it is meant to represent Sohni’s village but, if so, then it is shown on the wrong side of the river from the ascending heroine. Both of these temporal and spatial inconsistencies are nullified when the iconographic system is seen as an incorporation of specific elements of the legend rather than a chronological portrayal of the events.

There is a peculiar aspect of the story that is often mentioned by scholars. It is considered odd that Sohni, a potter’s daughter, did not recognize the unadorned pot that was switched for the fired vessel by her sister-in-law, or by her brothers in some versions of the story. According to the narrative, however, Sohni was worried about entering into the turbulent river but braved the danger in order to keep her rendezvous with her beloved. In such a situation on a stormy night, it would be natural to seize a minor detail like the feel of the pot’s surface. In any event, the issue of Sohni’s awareness of the type of pot is perhaps too logical a question in the context of a romantic legend.

The romance of Sohni and Mahanwari continues to be popular today. It is frequently recounted in collections of folk legends of the Punjab and Pakistan, with contemporary drawings illustrating the story. A type of vessel associated with the tale is still made by the potters in the present-day Pakistani town of Gujrat where the romance allegedly occurred.

There was a well-developed oral, literary, and pictorial tradition of portraying famous lovers in northern India during the late medieval and Mughal periods. The romance of Sohni and Mahanwari was an especially popular theme, as the frequency and range of its depiction in art testifies. Its widespread appeal across hundreds of kilometres and among different religious creeds indicates that it must have struck a responsive chord in the imagination of the Indian people, and suggests why this simple love story gave birth to a dramatic and unique genre of painting.

NOTES
1. The following Punjabi and Persian literary references were supplied by Professor Christopher Shackle in a personal communication to the contributor, May 3, 1988.
5. For a more complete retelling of the tale than normally found in exhibition catalogues and scholarly books, see Naiin Mejid Ali, Folk Tales of Pakistan (Karachi: 1967), p. 27-36; M. Ahmad, Folk Tales of Pakistan (Karachi: n.d.), pp. 25-45; Carabash and Carved Painters, Folk Tales of Pakistan (Lahore: 1963), pp. 9-25; F. A. Shah, Jastaluddin,
6. Sohni is also the name of a specific category of rug-paintings found in some regional sets. The iconography of this type of painting is totally different from those illustrating the romance of the lovers and thus constitutes a distinct class of imagery.
10. The painting is not illustrated here, but will be published by Naval Krishna in his forthcoming Bhikmr Court Miniature Painting.
11. Archer, Indian Paintings, I: 151.

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While the murals located in the palace complex of the rulers of Travancore at Padmanabhapuram are generally included among published examples of the strikingly distinctive school of Kerala painting, little has been written about their religious and political significance. This article will discuss the subject-matter of these paintings which depict various Hindu deities but emphasize a particular divinity who had important political implications for the southern Kerala kingdom of Travancore and in particular for the maharaja who ruled during the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

Padmanabhapuram, originally known as Kalkulam, is today part of the Thrissur district of Kerala, though the palace and the surrounding site come under the purview of the Kerala State Archaeology Department since Padmanabhapuram/Kakkulam once served as the capital of the erstwhile southern Kerala kingdom of Travancore (Pattom). The Padmanabhapuram murals cover the walls of the uppermost chamber of a building at the site called the upparika maalika (literally, “storeyed building of a king”). These paintings depicting deities of the Hindu pantheon are divided into separate compositions by painted borders. They have been dated to between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, but there are no inscriptions or other fixed means for these attributions; indeed, there are no certain dates in Kerala painting and such a variety within the region that it is also difficult to date these on style alone (particularly because there are elements of style that seem to be unique to this group). At any rate, they are not likely to be later than the end of the eighteenth century, since another capital was built at Trivandrum (fifty-three kilometres to the north) about the middle of the century, and Padmanabhapuram seems to have declined in importance after the end of that century. However, some aspects of the imagery of these paintings may be significant in indicating their authorship and placing them more firmly in the eighteenth century.

The central image on the west wall of the room, depicting a suparna or reclining Vishnu, is clearly the dominant image in the room. This is due primarily to its large size relative to all the other paintings, and because, while the images on the north and south walls are clearly separate and unrelated compositions, here not only the other parts of this wall, but even the adjoining sections of the north and south walls seem to be part of the total scheme, relating to the reclining Vishnu. Vishnu, depicted in green, according to local convention, reclines on the serpent, whose coiled body forms a pattern of concentric squares around him. A lotus issues from his navel, upon which Brahma is seated. A female consort appears on either side in the lower part of the composition, flanking what would seem to be an icon of Vishnu and two females in the lower centre. Noteworthy are the prabhavatamandala (auricles) and pedastal that are common to portable metal icons of Ashtalakshmi. The female consorts are accompanied or attended by figures that seem to be Vedic sages, who have matted locks, beards, lower garments, and wear necklaces of rudraksha beads. Directly above the reclining Vishnu is a row of Vaishnavas figures holding conches, perhaps the Vishvakarmas mentioned in the description of this form of Vishnu. At the upper part of the wall, there are figures similar to those attending the females, also with matted locks, beards, and beads; they are probably the asipuru (seven sages) appropriate to Yogasvatamurti (the form in which Vishnu is in yogic sleep).

The representation of Vishnu is flanked by doors above which are depictions of Chandras and Surya, the moon and the sun gods. At the feet of the reclining Vishnu, a group of figures faces the main image but is immediately focused on a seated image of the moon, the figure is two-armed, frontal, bearing flowers in each hand, and is seated before the lunar dharani (the pigment here actually glows). Above the left door a similar group again faces the recumbent Vishnu. The glowing circle is red rather than white and the personalification of the sun is a variation of Surya-Narayana, his lower two hands in the meditation posture. The attendants to the left include ascetics, a female, Garuda (with the crown and wings, and in an angry aspect), one of the horse-faced Aswins, and the sage Narada at the extreme left with the vina. The wall is framed at the two ends by guardian deities.

The scene continues around the upper segments of the adjoining walls. On the south or left, the
section above the door includes a row of identical figures turned toward Vishnu. These standing figures are four-armed; their lower hands display the anjali mudra (the gesture of adoration) while each one holds a discus in his upper right hand. The figures above them, whose heads only are depicted, have Vishnus markings on their foreheads, and seem to have their hands in anjali mudra; this entire section may depict the hosts of purosas danata (subsidiary deities) and Vishvakarmas appropriate to this form of Vishnu. A similar group on the north or right wall is Siva; the figures are also four-armed, and depicted with the third eye, Fig. 14. The row of figures above them is Vaishnava—the figures represent the avatars of Vishnu, beginning with the fish and the tortoise at the left. This group also faces toward the main image of Vishnu in the centre of the west wall. Thus this elaborate and complex composition, which occupies the entire west wall and adjoining sections of the north and south walls, seems intended to focus attention on the main image in the room, the large reclining Vishnu that the local tradition identifies as a depiction of Sri Padmanabha, the deity enshrined in the Padmanabha temple at Trivandrum.

It is important to point out that the local tradition identifying the reclining Vishnu here as Sri Padmanabhapuram can only be of fairly recent date, since Padmanabhapuram fell into disuse by the royal family during the nineteenth century, and the murals were unknown even to them until 1934, when James Coutts was exerted to the palace by the members of the family who "discovered" them. Thus the identification of the Vishnu here as a depiction of the deity of the Trivandrum temple dates only from after this discovery. Nonetheless, the iconography supports this identification, and there are compelling reasons why the image would figure so prominently among the Padmanabhapuram murals. Furthermore, I believe the paintings are to be associated with Marthanda Varma, Maharaja of Travancore from 1728-1758.

The reclining Vishnu image at Padmanabhapuram, facing east, with his head to the south and his feet to the north, corresponds with the image enshrined at Travancort (Trivandrum) the city of sacred Anant. The two-armed Yogasayana, with the left hand bent at the elbow and held in the kumbha pose and the right hand held over a small linga, compares with the ivory image of this deity from Trivandrum which Copisiris Rao discusses. Rao indicates that "The local Purana extolling the god at Trivandrum informs us that Vishnu absorbed Siva at Anantapuram (i.e., Trivandrum) of some sin from which he was afflicted, hence the image of Vishnu in the temple at Trivandrum is also shown...in holding his right hand..."
over the Linga-image of Siva in the talam pose. The small linga also appears below the right hand of the Padmanabhacaram Vishnu, and although the hand is not in the gift- 
bestowing pose (as is also the case in Rao’s example), it is making an offering to the linga 
as is Rao’s). Even a more convincing proof of the identity of this painted depiction is to be found 
by comparing it to the following description of the Trivandrum temple from a Kerala government 
publication on Hindu temples in the State:

The main deity in the temple is Sri Padmanabha in a lying posture. There are 
also the figures of the seven great sages, Sanaka, Sanatkumara, etc., standing and 
worshipping by his side. In front of the lying Lord are Sri Bhagavathy near the breast 
and Bhumi Bhagavathy near the knee. There are also installed by the side of Sri 
and Bhumi Bhagavathy the sages Kandaliya, and Divakara, the founder of the 
temple. In front of the Ananthasayana Murthy is the Archa Vigna (movable 
image) of Chathurbahu Visnu with Lakshmi and Bhumi on either side.

All these figures mentioned in this description are present in the painting, including the seven 
figures of the sages, the female consorts, the sages accompanying the females, and the moveable image, 
suggesting that this image indeed is intended as the Trivandrum deity. Beyond simply 
identifying the image, however, I would like to consider why this image might have been so 
preeminent among the palace paintings, and why I believe it is to be associated with 
Marthanda Varma.

Sri Padmanabhaswami is the tutelary deity of the Travancore royal family. This relationship 
seems to have had ancient origins, for earlier rulers of this region also claimed a special 
relationship with the deity enshrined at Tiruvananthapuram, and there are inscriptions linking 
the Vemana rulers that is, the ancestors of the Travancore rajas) to the temple from at least 
the twelfth century. While literature indicates that it has always been a prominent shrine, 
the Trivandrum temple seems to have become even more important in the eighteenth 
century, during the reign of Marthanda Varma. The Sanskrit text Padmanabhacaritam 
was written by Sanda-Kair during his reign, and this ruler himself honoured the deity of 
the Padmanabhaswami temple in a number of dramatic ways.

Marthanda Varma undertook extensive rebuilding and repairs at the Padmanabhaswami 
temple, which probably began fairly early in his reign, and he may have even been responsible 
for the creation of a new image for the temple. He also performed two noteworthy ceremonies.
focusing attention on Padmanabhawami and emphasizing his own connection with the deity.

The first of these, the bhadrachalam (auspicious lamp), was initially performed in M.E. 919
(that is, 1744 A.D. ) .

The ceremony was conducted "in expiation of the sin incurred by war
and annexation" (since Marthanda Varma had spent the first twenty years of his reign in
a campaign of conquest), and involved convening a meeting of learned brahmins of Malabar
(that is, Kerala), Tinevelly and Madura at the Trivandrum temple. The ceremony is described
as a kind of sun-worship performed at the solstice, in which the priests transfer the spirit
of the sun to sacred lamps by means of mantras, and circumambulate the temple with images.

It is interesting to consider the painted image of the reclining Vishnu at Padmanabhapura
in the light of this, for there are elements of the painting which seem to parallel this ceremony
as described. There is the portable image of Vishnu, such as might have been used in the
procession, at the lower centre of the composition. The depiction of the sun and moon at the
upper left and right, while appropriate to many forms of the recumbent Vishnu, may also
refer to the solstice, when the ceremony took place. The fact that the sun here has been
elevated to a form of Vishnu himself is significant in the light of the description of the ceremony
as a kind of sun-worship. Furthermore, it is interesting to consider that the group along
the upper part of this wall and the Vaidhavamsa Saiva groups on the adjoining walls represent
figures circumambulating the shrine, as described for the ceremony, since they seem almost
to encircle Vishnu. The absence of the brahman priests in this depiction is perhaps problematic.

Marthanda Varma performed another dramatic ceremony at the Trivandrum temple
in Kochi or M.E. 923 (that is, 1750 A.D.), when he laid his sword of state before Sri
Padmanabhawami at the temple; so doing he "made over the whole territory to the
Devavoom and assumed its management as vassal of that deity"; from thenceforth he termed
himself "Padmanabhadasa", that is, the servant of Padmanabha. This is also when he must have
10. Door guardian, detail of figure 2, to right of right door.
11. Door guardian, detail of figure 2, to left of left door.
decided to build a capital at Trivandrum, perhaps to emphasize his ties with the Trivandrum deity. Most sources assume he moved the capital to Trivandrum in 1750 A.D. However, there is some evidence that rather than actually shifting the capital of the kingdom, he created a second capital at Trivandrum, while Kalkulam retained its former role for some time. A missionary in Travancore, who visited Padmanabhapuram in 1783 and Trivandrum in 1787, refers to Padmanabhapuram as "where the king resides and keeps his treasure," and Trivandrum as "the summer residence of the king."32 Indeed, Fra Paulino's reference to the ancient capital as Padmanabhapuram rather than Kalkulam is the earliest reference to the site as Padmanabhapuram that I have come across. An edict of one of the Travancore rulers dated M.E. 810 (1655 A.D.) refers to the capital as Kalkulam, the same name that is used by John Nichols in 1664, and a dynastic record relating to Marthanda Varma's ascent to the throne in 1728.33 It would seem that the ancient capital was renamed after the deity enshrined in the Padmanabhaswami temple in Trivandrum after Marthanda Varma became king and before Fra Paulino's visit in 1783, meaning that either Marthanda Varma or his successor, who was still king in 1783, must have been responsible for this. Since Marthanda Varma carried on extensive rebuilding at both Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram/Kalkulam, and because his devotion to the deity has already been discussed, it seems quite likely that he is to be credited with this other act honouring Sri Padmanabhaswami, that is, the renaming of the ancient capital after the deity.

In short, not only is there iconographic evidence to support the local tradition identifying the reclining Vishnu at the Padmanabhapuram palace complex as a depiction of the deity enshrined at Trivandrum, but there are also compelling factors explaining the significance of this deity to the kingdom and its welfare. Furthermore, though there is no direct evidence linking Marthanda Varma with the murals, the focus on Sri Padmanabhaswami in these paintings certainly strongly parallels the pivotal role of the Trivandrum deity in the reign of Marthanda Varma, in particular from the mid-1740s to the end of his reign; elements of the imagery may even refer to ceremonies Marthanda Varma performed at the Trivandrum temple. It seems quite likely that Maharaja Marthanda Varma commissioned the paintings at Padmanabhapuram to commemorate his rebuilding of the temple at Trivandrum, his dedication of the kingdom to Sri Padmanabhaswami, and his renaming of the ancient capital, Kalkulam, after Padmanabhaswami. In that case, they would date from c. 1750 A.D., the year in which he assumed the title "Padmanabhadra". The paintings, then, would depict, as Susan Huntington has pointed out, "an image of an image,"34 which may also be the case with
other paintings in this chamber and even in other palaces and temples of Kerala. In any case, there are features about this room—such as its placement in the uppermost storey of the tallest building at the site, its relative inaccessibility, and the balcony surrounding it that would permit circumambulation of the chamber—that point to its sacred nature, and suggest that the only room with mural paintings at the palace complex was a royal retreat, a kind of shrine, where the king could worship the deity that was both the source of his rule and the object of his devotion.

NOTES
1. H.V. Pedwell, in Pedwell, S. Kramerich and J.H. Cousens, The Arts and Crafts of Kerala (Cochin: 1971), pp. 105-69, suggests they are sixteenth century, while S. Kramerich, in the same text, places them in the eighteenth (pp. 107-08).
2. E. Henderson, South Indian Painting (New Delhi: 1966), p. 150, dates them to the eighteenth century.
6. C. Rama Rao, ed., pp. 316-17, describes the form of Surya, though his example is a standing form.
10. E. Henderson, p. 150.
14. Siva's figures on north (right) wall.
FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dot jacket
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Preliminary Pages
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After Philip Rawson. Erotic Art of India (New York: 1977), cat. no. 39: fig. 10
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After Mohandas Singh Randhawa and Jodhendra Nath Ghelathi, Indian Painting: The Scene, Themes and Legends (Boston: 1986), p. 89: fig. 12
After A. F. A. Steel, Jainism, and Carved Painters, Folk Tales of Pakistan (Lahore: 1901), p. 12: fig. 13
Smithsonian Institution, catalogue no. 417347-B, Department of Anthropology: fig. 14

The Palace Murals at Padmanabhapuram: The Politics of an Image
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