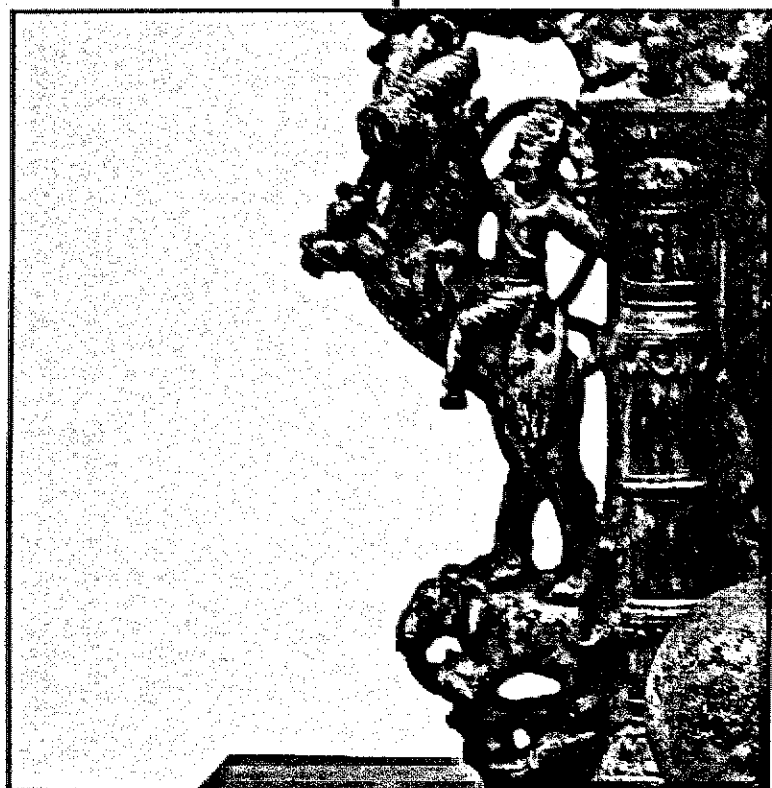




A POT-POURRI OF INDIAN ART

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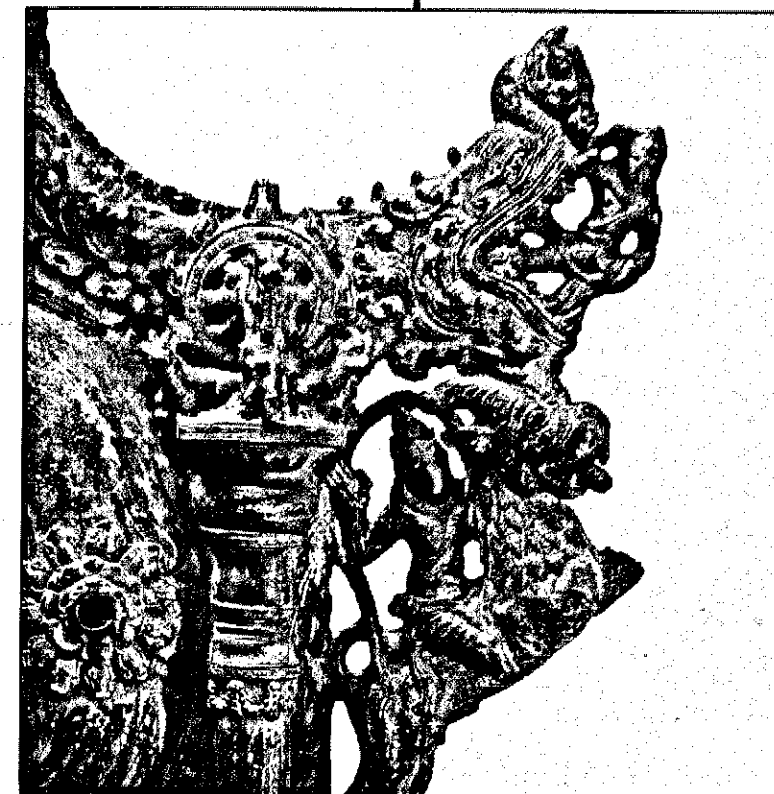
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that such works were primarily intended to emphasize the importance of religious practice in overcoming obstacles to enlightenment.

NOTES

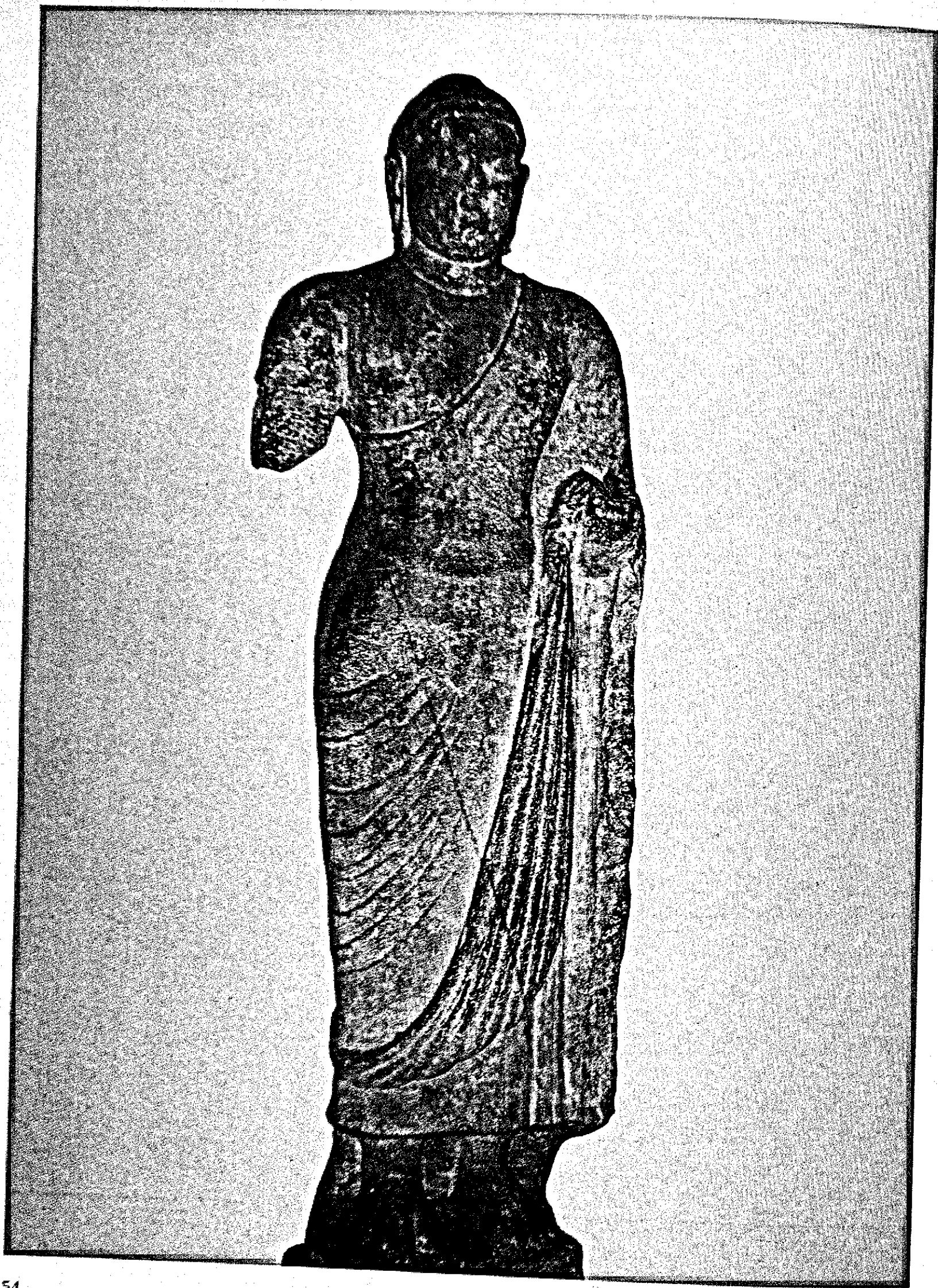
1. For example, Joanna Williams (*The Art of Gupta India* [Princeton: 1982], p. 150) notes that such figures are problematic; Ratan Parimoo (*Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture (Ashta-Maha-pratiharya): An Iconological Analysis* [New Delhi: 1982], p. 65) identifies them as Mara's daughters, but does not explain why they are sometimes shown as emerging from the ground.
2. In the *Buddhacarita* Sakyamuni touching 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 Buddhacarita of Āśvaghoṣa in Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, trans. E.B. Cowell (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XLIX, Oxford: 1894), pp. 146-147.
3. *The Lalitavistara Sutra. The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion*, trans. Gwendolyn Bays (2 vols., II, Berkeley, CA: 1983), pp. 479-483.
4. *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, trans. Bays (II), p. 482.
5. *The Lalitavistara Sutra*, trans. Bays (II), pp. 482-3. In other texts such as the *Mahāvastu*, the Buddha strikes the ground when challenged by Mara which causes the earth to shake. See *The Mahāvastu*, trans. J.J. Jones (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, 3 vols., II, London: 1956), p. 366.
6. *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Nidāna-Kathā)*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids (London: 1925), p. 101.
7. For discussion of sculptures from Andhra Pradesh which use the *abhaya mudra*, see Parimoo, *Life of the Buddha in Indian Sculpture*, p. 18.
8. *The Buddhacarita*, trans. Cowell, p. 137: "He whom they call in the world Kamadeva, the owner of various weapons, the flower-arrowed lord of the course of desire—it is he whom they also style Mara, the enemy of liberation." See also James Boyd, *Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil* (Leiden: 1975), pp. 111-122, for a discussion of the aspects of Mara's *kama* nature.
9. For a complete discussion of these steles, see Joanna Williams, "Sarnāth Gupta Steles of the Buddha's Life" in *Ars Orientalis* (X, 1975), pp. 171-92.
10. Mara's despondency results from his inability to stop Sakyamuni from achieving enlightenment. See *The Buddhacarita*, trans. Cowell, p. 139; *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Nidāna-Kathā)*, trans. Rhys Davids, pp. 106-7; *The Mahāvastu*, trans. Jones (II), p. 281.
11. J.N. Banerjee, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (2nd ed., Calcutta: 1956), p. 30.
12. Kalpana Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu* (New Delhi: 1973), p. 12. For discussion and illustration of the earth goddess in Viṣṇu images from Kashmir, see Pratapaditya Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir* (New Delhi: 1975), pp. 64-69. An eighth or ninth century bronze of the Buddha in *bhūmisparsa mudra* from the Norton Simon Collection that Pal also publishes (*Bronzes of Kashmir*, pl. 22a) indeed suggests that different conventions for the earth goddess were used depending upon whether it was a Buddhist or Vaiṣṇava context. In this Buddhist bronze the earth goddess holds the pot and is not emerging from the ground.
13. O.C. Ganguly, "The Earth Goddess in Buddhist Art" in *Indian Historical Quarterly* (XIX, March 1943), pp. 3-4. Ganguly also makes the interesting suggestion that the pot is substituted in Southeast Asian images by her hair which she wrings to release the accumulated evidence of Sakyamuni's gifts. He quotes from a text popular in Thailand and Cambodia, the *Pathamasambodhi*, which states that the earth goddess in response to Sakyamuni said, "Respected Superman, I know the magnitude of thy (spiritual) riches, the tresses of my hair are saturated with the ritual water of your gifts, let me wring the water now."
14. Samuel Beal, *Sī-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the World Translated from the Chinese of Hsüen Tsang (A.D. 629)* (2 vols., II, London: 1884), p. 121.
15. For discussion of the pre-Pala and Pala-period works from eastern India, see Frederick Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800* (Minneapolis, MN: 1980) and Susan L. Huntington, *The Pala-Sena Schools of Sculpture, Studies in South Asian Culture* vol. X edited by J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (Leiden: 1984).
16. Asher (*The Art of Eastern India*, p. 28, footnote 138) discusses the pedestal and its inscription.
17. Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'iconographie du tantrisme bouddhique* (Paris: 1975), p. 103. For illustrations of Pala-period sculptures of Aparajita, see S.K. Saraswati, *Tantrayana Art: An Album* (Calcutta: 1977), figs. 184-87.
18. See, for example, Mallar Ghosh, *Development of Buddhist Iconography in Eastern India: A Study of Tārā, Prajñās of Five Tathāgatas and Bhrikuti* (New Delhi: 1980), p. 1; Bhagwant Sahai, *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities* (New Delhi: 1975), p. 235.
19. Alex Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra" in *Indo-Iranian Journal* (3, 1959), pp. 112-13. The various *maras* are also discussed by Boyd (*Satan and Māra: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil*, pp. 122-23). For the *sadhana* Baroda: 1925), p. 403; Mallmann, *Introduction à l'iconographie du tantrisme bouddhique*, p. 103.
20. Geri Malandra ("Ellora: The Archaeology of a Maṇḍala" in *Ars Orientalis* [XV, 1985], pp. 72-3) discusses the appearance of eighth-century figures at Ellora that are also ambiguous and may be Aparajita.
21. Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra", pp. 116-117. Ananda Coomaraswamy (*Elements of Buddhist Iconography* [Cambridge, MA: 1935], p. 42) perceptively pointed out that the Buddha's seat of Enlightenment is called the *maṇḍala* where Aparajita (also known as Prajñantaka—wisdom's end) appears below Sakyamuni paired with his spouse Aparajitavidyārājñi. They are meant to symbolize the victory of Sakyamuni over the four *maras* at the moment of his Enlightenment. For this description, see Ryujun Tajima, *Les deux Grands Maṇḍalas et la doctrine de l'esoterisme shingon*, Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise n.s. VI (Paris: 1959), pp. 99-102.
22. D.C. Bhattacharyya, "The Vajrāvalī-nāma-maṇḍalopayika of Abhayākara-gupta" in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein*, vol. I, edited by M. Strickman, *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, vol. XX (Bruxelles: 1981), 74.
23. The Nepalese innovations in this bronze are noted by Pratapaditya Pal, (*Art of Nepal* [Los Angeles: 1985], p. 104).
24. For information about Vasudhara and Nepalese rituals connected with her worship, see Pratapaditya Pal, "Two Buddhist Paintings from Nepal" in *Bulletin of the Museum van Aziatische Kunst* (vol. 5, no. 43, Amsterdam: 1967).
25. A twelfth-century Cambodian sculpture which is an example from Southeast Asia that prominently depicts the earth goddess with a Buddha in *bhūmisparsa mudra* is illustrated in Pratapaditya Pal et al, *Light of Asia* (Los Angeles: 1984), p. 103.

□



THE PERSISTENCE OF BUDDHISM IN TAMILNADU

Vidya Dehejia



1. Over life-size stone Buddha from the innermost hall of the Kamakshi temple, Kanchipuram, probably sixth century, 2m. Government Museum, Madras.

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—some 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 megalithic 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 Mahendra 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 mansion 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, *Gandavyuha*, probably written in the first century A.D. (and translated into Chinese by 420 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 Buddhist 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 *Manimekhalai*, written around 550 A.D., speaks of the prosperous condition of the Buddhist establishments of the south. Describing Kanchipuram, it speaks of one *chaitya* 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

2. Seated Buddha from the region of Nagapattinam, gilt bronze with silver inlay, ninth century, 39 cm. (figure), 60 cm. (throne-back). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Marshall H. Gould and Keith McLeod Funds.

3. Maitreya, found at Melaiyur, gilt bronze, ninth century. Formerly in the Government Museum, Madras.

4. Bodhisattva Lokeshvara, Nagapattinam, bronze, c. 900 A.D., 10 cm. Government Museum, Madras.

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 Hsuan-tsang 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 Sthavira 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.⁴ 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 Hindu temple was originally a Buddhist shrine, perhaps dedicated to the Buddhist goddess Tara or Vasudhara, 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 Hindu 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 Andhra Buddhist sites of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. 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 swag 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 Vaishnava saint raided 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 Apanaka or Kurkihar, which, it has been pointed out, "seems to have cultivated a special relationship with southern Buddhists, particularly from the Kanchipuram region."⁸ No less than fifteen Buddhist bronzes from Kurkihar contain inscriptions informing us that they were gifts from monks who hailed from the Kanchi region which was referred to as Kanchi-desa or Kanchi-mandala. One inscription speaks of an image gifted by Prajnasimha who hailed from the village of Narasimha-caturvedi-mangalam, 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 Vairocanasimha.⁹ 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 bronzes. 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 continued interaction between Bihar and Kanchi, rather than a single phase of contact. Only one Kurkihar/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 Kurkihar 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 *ushnisha*, which we shall see to be a typical southern motif. Clearly the Tamil donor requested that this feature be included on his dedication.

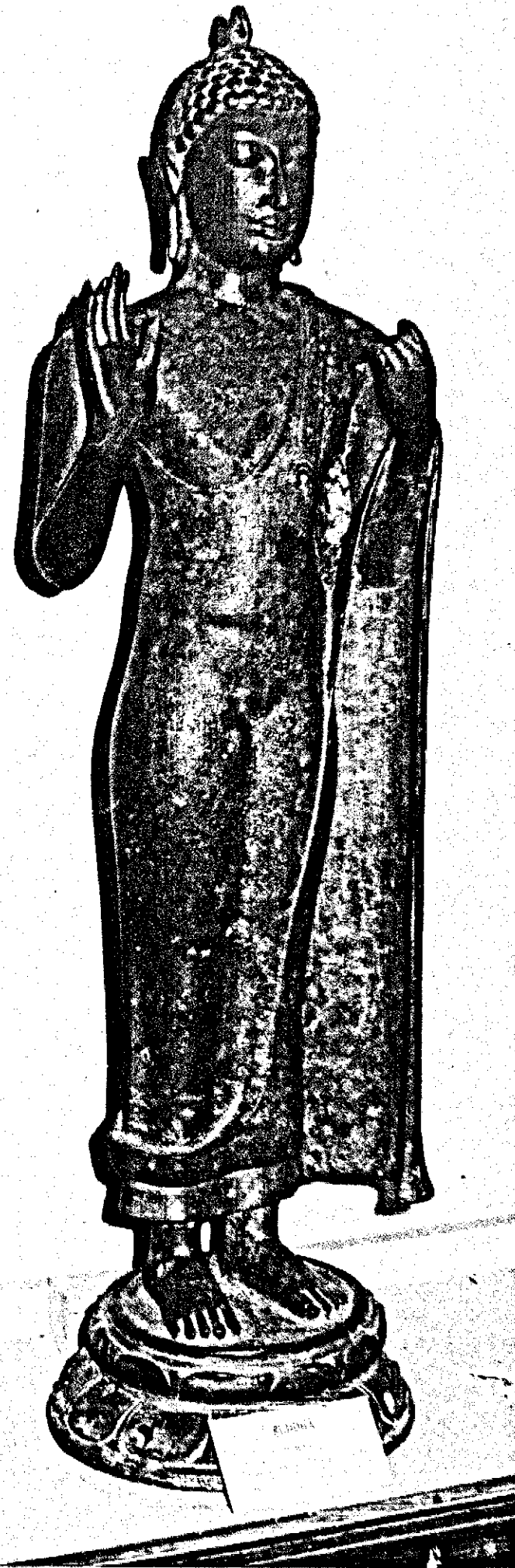
From the eighth century onwards, while Kanchi increasingly became a town of Hindu affiliation, it appears to have maintained a strong Buddhist presence for several centuries thereafter. Inscriptions in Burma speak of a learned monk named Ananda, a native of Kanchi, who became the head of the Burmese Buddhist Church for a period of fifty years, and who finally died in Burma in 1245.¹⁰ A Korean inscription of 1378 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.¹¹

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 I-tsing speaks of a monk named Wu-hing stopping at Na-kia-po-tan-na (Nagapattinam) on his journey to Ceylon.¹² In addition, the tale of Tirumangai's theft of

5. Nagapattinam bronze Buddha, c. 900 A.D., 1m. Government Museum, Madras.

6. Bronze Buddha from Nagapattinam, eleventh century, 80 cm. Norton Simon Museum of Art at Pasadena.



5



6

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 Tirumangai journeyed by sea to Dvipantara 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 bronzes, now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, is a magnificent gilded Buddha seated in front of a richly ornamented throne-back, 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 *vyakhyana* 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 *Lalitavistara*, which states,

When the Buddha is in *samadhi* an ornamental ray called *jnana* (knowledge), proceeding from the opening in the *ushnisa*, 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, 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 against its original backdrop. The rear of the throne-back has a hook at either end, along its lower edge, and these held in place two attendant images, probably of the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Maitreya. A gilt bronze Maitreya, found at Melaiyur, some forty-eight kilometres north of Nagapattinam, appears to be one of the original figures attendant upon 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.

Fig. 3 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 upon his left shoulder so that it almost appears like the snake of god Siva. Lokeshvara's matted locks, piled high upon his head and crowned with a lotus, bear the seated Buddha emblem as his crest. The piece possesses a sense of majesty despite its diminutive size of around ten centimetres.

Fig. 4 Another image cast around the same time is a one-metre high standing Buddha, with the monastic robe draped so as to leave the right shoulder uncovered. As is standard from this time onwards in south Indian images, the end of the Buddha's robe returns as a band over his left shoulder, while the swag at the bottom progressively decreases. This image too displays a small and elegant flame-tipped *ushnisha*. When the flame tips first appear, they have three tongues of flame, but soon after the tongues become five in number, as in a serene standing Buddha from the Norton Simon Collection. It is interesting to note that if one pursues further the theme of "an ornamental ray called *jnana*," several Buddhist texts divide such gnosis into five categories and speak of five-fold knowledge. The Norton Simon Buddha's robe is draped so as to cover both shoulders, and a series of rippling folds mark the lower edge of the garment. While the style of drapery that leaves the right shoulder bare is the more popular mode in the Tamil country, it is clear that there were varying methods of draping the monk's robe. The Chinese pilgrim I-tsing, who visited India in the seventh century, spoke of the variation in the manner of dress and devoted 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 Sarvastivadins cut the skirt of the lower garment straight while the other three (Mahasanghika, Sthavira, Sammitiya)

7. Nagapattinam bronze. Buddha seated under a stylized tree, with naga attendants, mid-eleventh century, approximately 1m. Government Museum, Madras.



cut it of irregular shape.¹⁴

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 Cula-mani-varma-vihara, "of such loftiness as belittled Kanakagiri (mount Meru)," was erected by the Sailendra kings "at Nagapattinam, delightful on account of many a temple . . . brilliant with arrays of various kinds of mansions."¹⁵ The monastery took its name from the ruler Cula-mani-varma of the Sailendra dynasty, whose son was responsible for its construction. Within this monastery was, built a chapel called the Rajaraja-perum-palli ("great chapel"), named after the Chola king Rajaraja, who, though a staunch Saivite, granted the village of Anaimangalam to the Buddha of this vihara in the year 1006.¹⁶ In the year 1090, during the reign of the later Chola king Kulottunga I, we hear of the arrival of two ambassadors from the Sailendra kingdom, and the grant of further privileges to the monastery Cula-mani-varma-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.¹⁷

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 of 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 Nagapattinam bronzes.

While seated and standing Buddhas comprise the major part of the output of the Nagapattinam workshops, a certain number of bronzes of other Buddhist deities, apart from Lokeshvara, were also produced. Second in popularity to the historic Buddha are images of the future Buddha Maitreya, invariably visualized by Nagapattinam artists as a crowned and jewelled bodhisattva—his form in the present aeon, prior to his descent as the future Buddha. One

Fig. 8 such 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 such as those of Siva as Vinadhara; only the stupa in Maitreya's flaming crown provides a clue to his Buddhist identity.

Fig. 9 Nagapattinam 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 Vasudhara. Jambhala, a close counterpart of the Hindu deity Kubera, holds the mongoose,

considered to be the receptacle of all gems, which disgorges 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 votive stupas were dedicated at Nagapattinam. A striking feature of these stupas is that they were cast in two pieces, so that the upper

Fig. 11 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 were lifted off, it would reveal a seated figure of the Buddha Akshobhya in the earth-touching gesture.

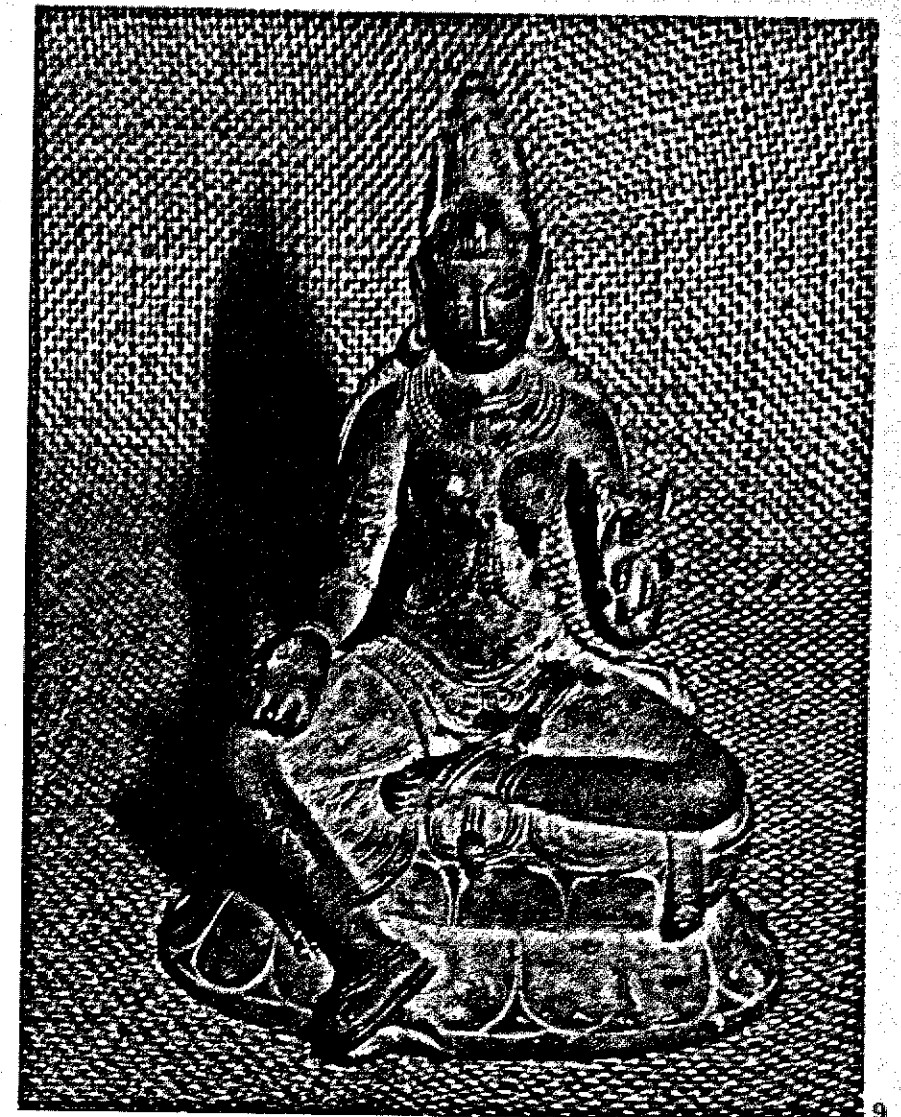
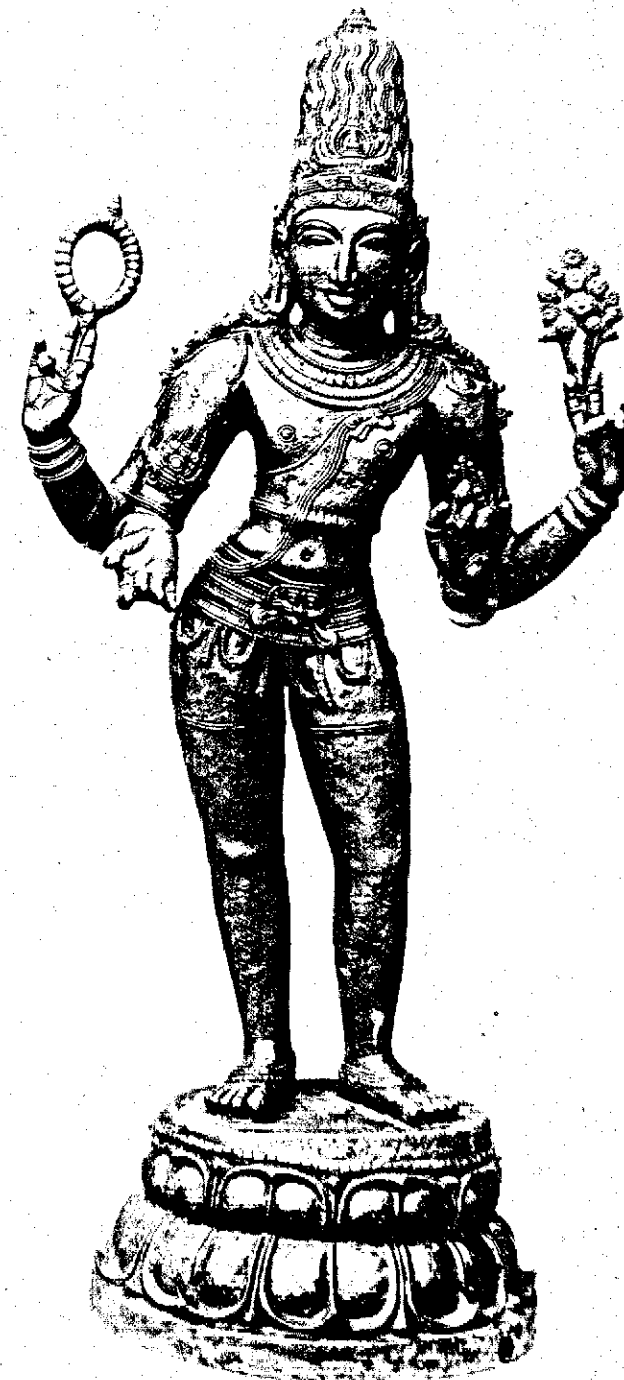
A monastic building that may have been constructed during the phase of Sailendra inspiration is the three-storeyed tower known in modern parlance as the Pudu-veli-gopuram ("New Watch-tower"), which until a century ago served as a landmark for vessels approaching Nagapattinam. This four-sided brick tower, with central windowed openings on each level, was pulled down in 1867 by the French Jesuits in order to erect their college buildings on the site.¹⁸ The structure, as far as we can gauge from drawings made in 1846, bears a closer resemblance to the Sat-Mahal-Pasada, a brick tower at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka, than to any other building in India. The Buddhist association of this tower was established by the hoard of Buddhist images that emerged during demolition work.

Fig. 12 Nagapattinam 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 Chola Buddhist bronzes and Vijayanagar Buddhist bronzes. However, the Buddhist images are clearly the result of a local bronze-casting workshop centred at Nagapattinam itself. The majority of the Buddhist images are inscribed and this feature reveals a practice at variance with that of 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.

8. Future Buddha Maitreya as a bodhisattva, Nagapattinam, bronze, c. 1100 A.D., Government Museum, Madras.

9. Buddhist goddess Tara, Nagapattinam, bronze, eleventh century. Government Museum, Madras.

10. Jambhala, Buddhist god of wealth, with his consort Vasudhara, Nagapattinam, bronze, eleventh century. Government Museum, Madras.



The Nagapattinam bronze-caster, by contrast, put his records, glorificatory or donatory, 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."¹⁹ A fifteenth-century epigraph on the pedestal of a standing Maitreya reads, "The Great Being, Akalanka, who is both father and mother to the world."²⁰ Frequently the *urnas* (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 gilding seen on several Nagapattinam images indicate that gilt bronzes were commoner than now appears to be the case.

The latest known inscriptional 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.²¹ 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 Padarikarama and worshipped the image of the Buddha in a cave constructed by the command of the maharaja of Chinadesa (China). Sadly none of the Buddhist architectural monuments mentioned in the inscription survives.

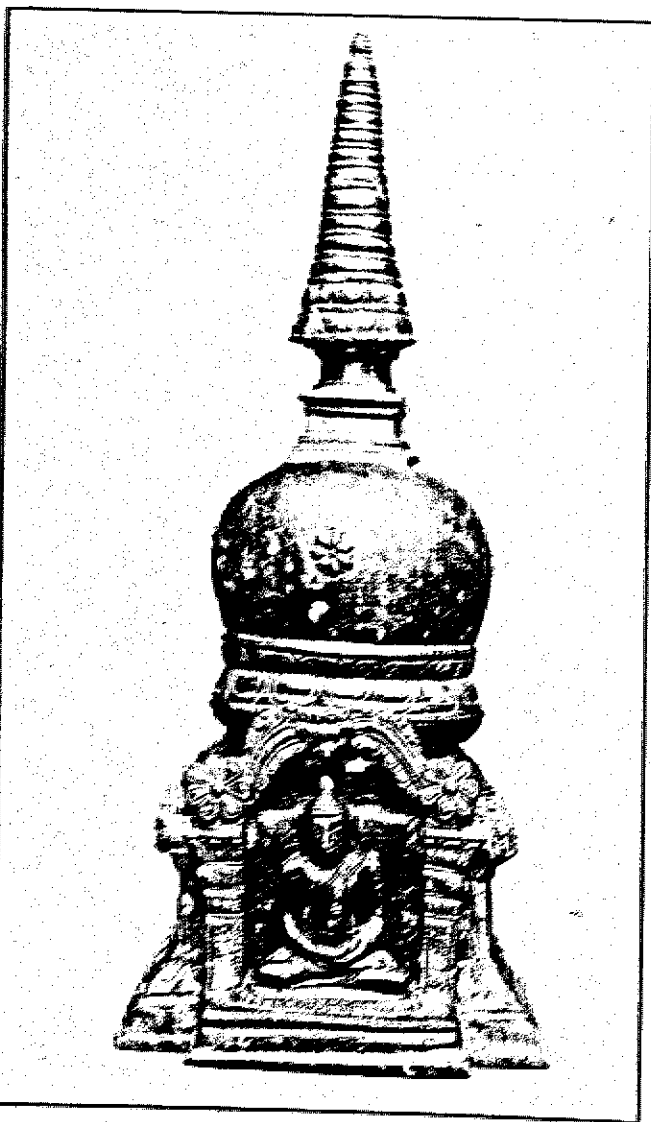
It is of interest to note that the south Indian flame-tipped *ushnisha* was adopted by Sri Lankan Buddhists who presumably maintained close contacts with the nearby port of Nagapattinam; from Sri Lanka, this feature appears to have been transmitted to Burma and Thailand. One may assume too, although 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 Tamil 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 (*tiruvatchi*), is a highly stylized 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

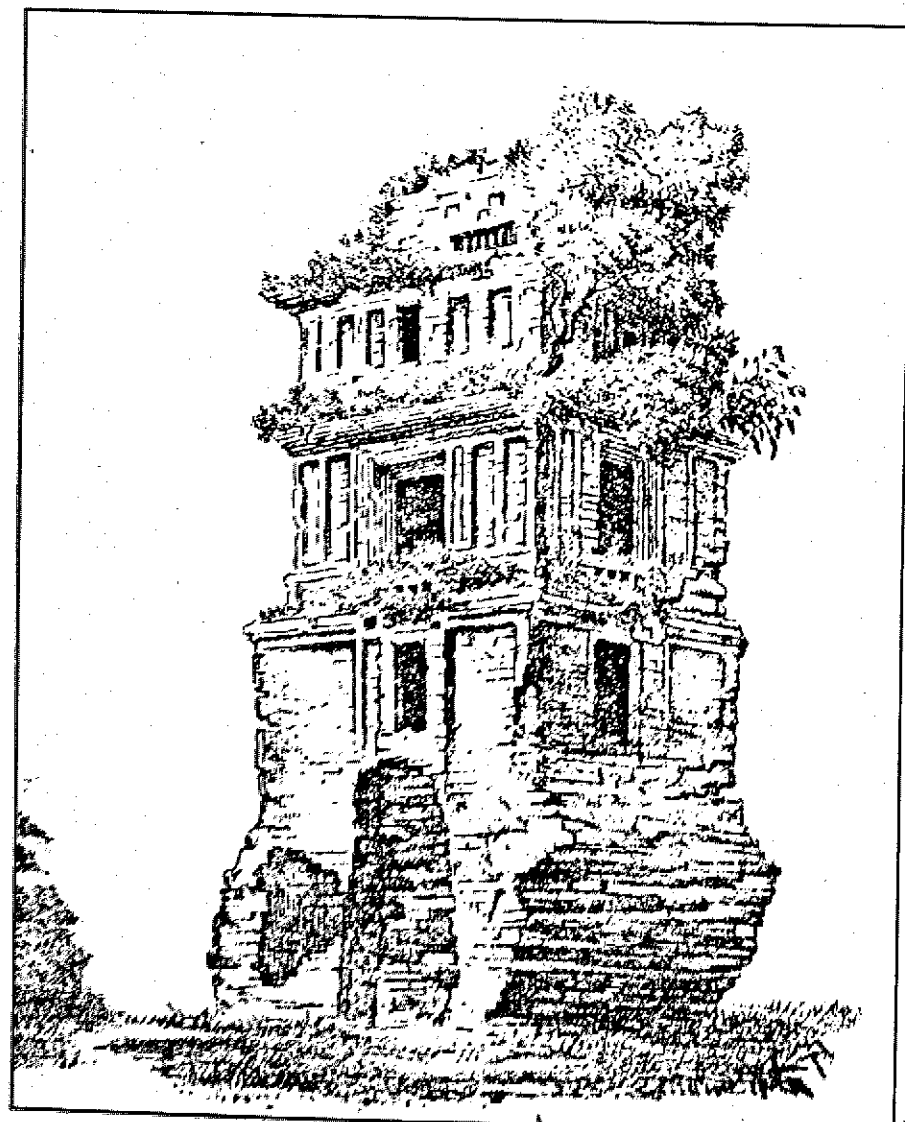
11. Bronze votive stupa from Nagapattinam. Government Museum, Madras.

12. Pudu-veli-gopuram, Nagapattinam, as per the 1846 drawing by Sir Walter Elliot.

13. Nagapattinam seated bronze Buddha (inscribed), thirteenth century. Government Museum, Madras. The inscription reads "The Nayakar whose omnipotent feet are easy of access, even to the illiterate."



11



12



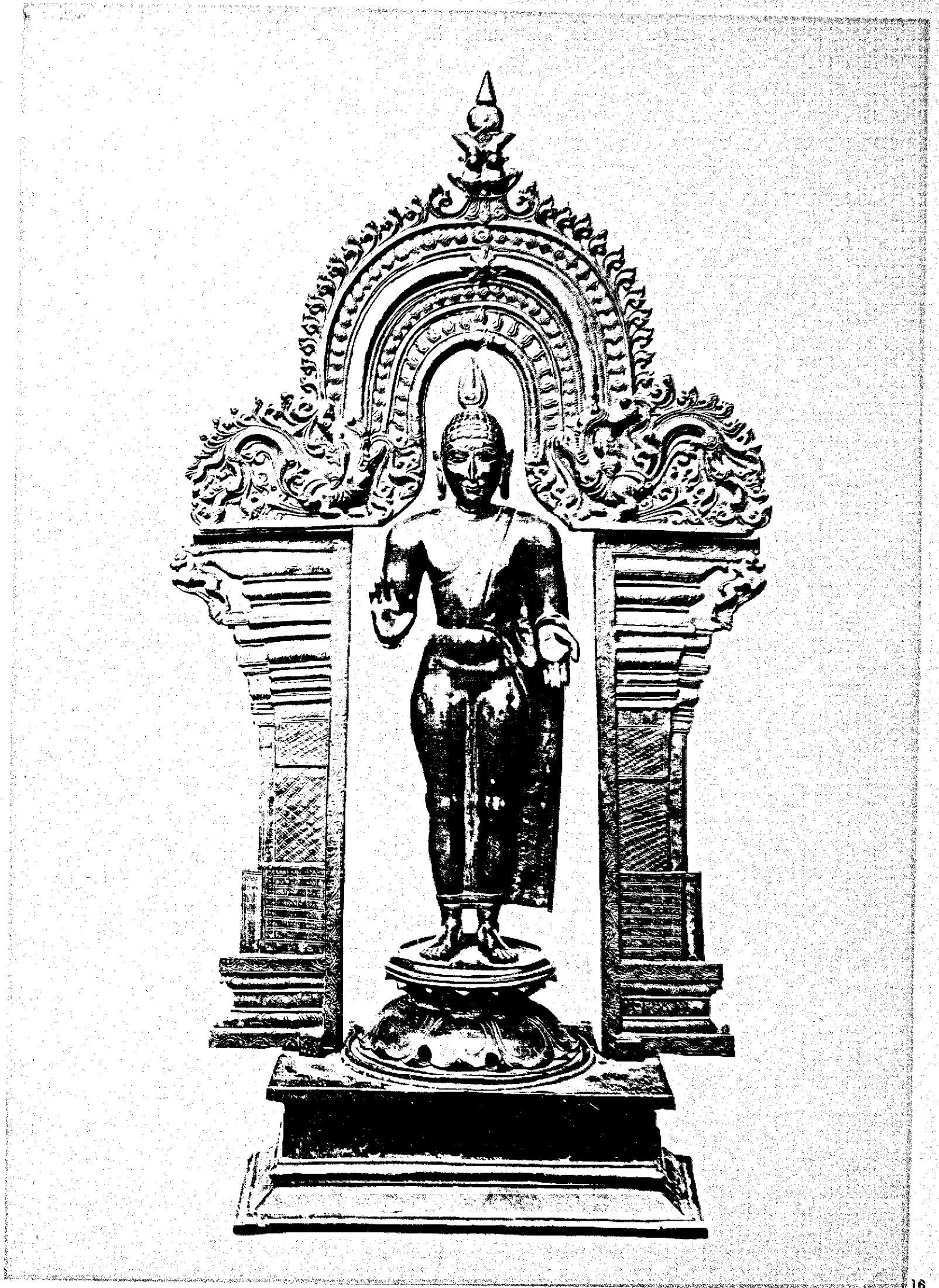
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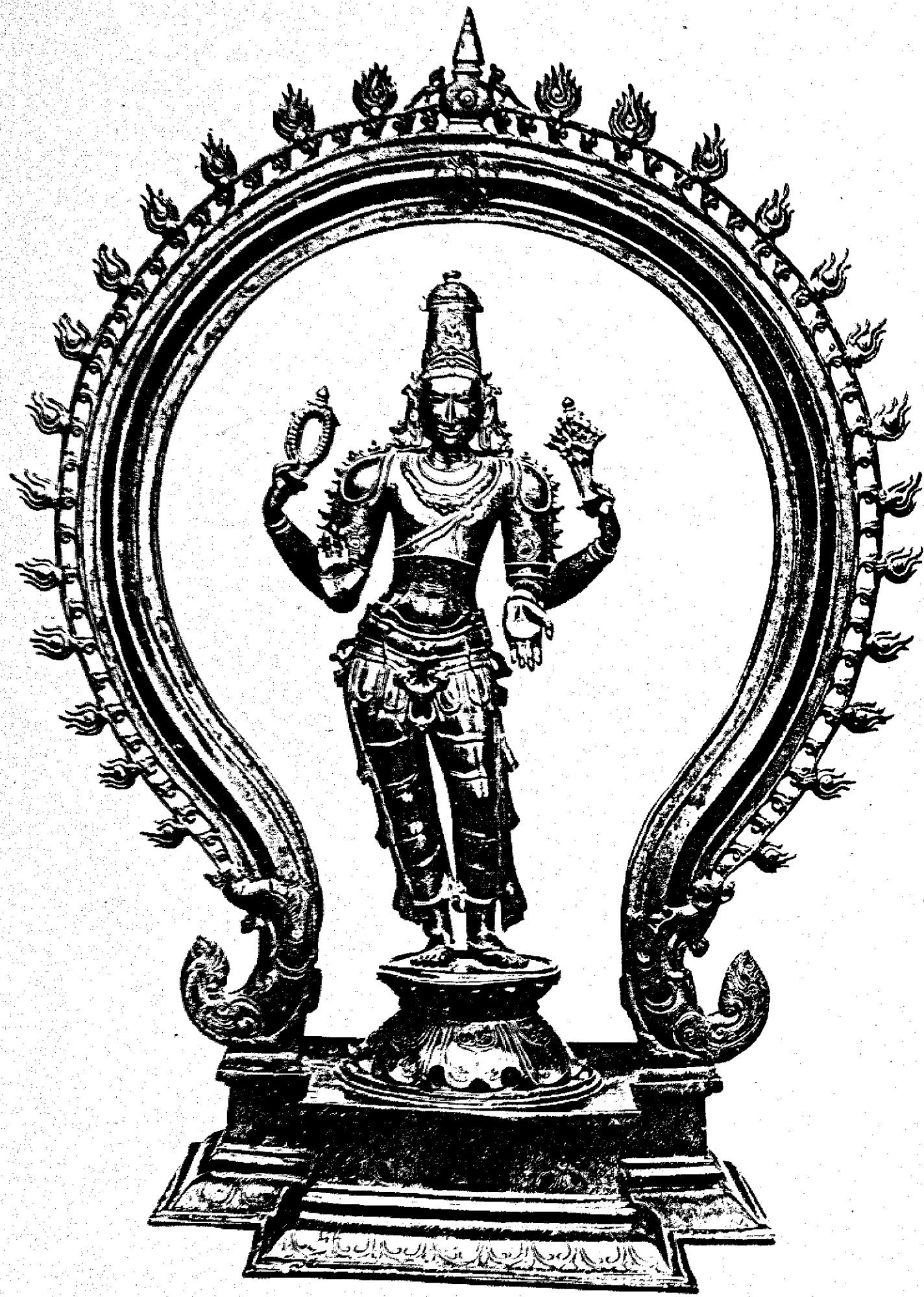


14. Maitreya (inscribed), Nagapattinam, bronze, fifteenth century. Government Museum, Madras. The inscription reads "The Great Being, Akalanka, who is both father and mother to the world."

15. Nagapattinam seated bronze Buddha, with ruby in flame tip of *ushnisha*, fifteenth century. Government Museum, Madras.

16. Sixteenth century bronze Buddha from Nagapattinam, approximately 1m. Government Museum, Madras.





17

68

17. Avalokiteshvara,
Nagapattinam, bronze,
c. 1700 A.D., approximately 1m.
Government Museum, Madras.

18. Granite image of seated
Buddha, Nagapattinam region,
c. 900 A.D., approximately 2m.
The Brooklyn Museum, Gift
of Miss Alice Boney.



18

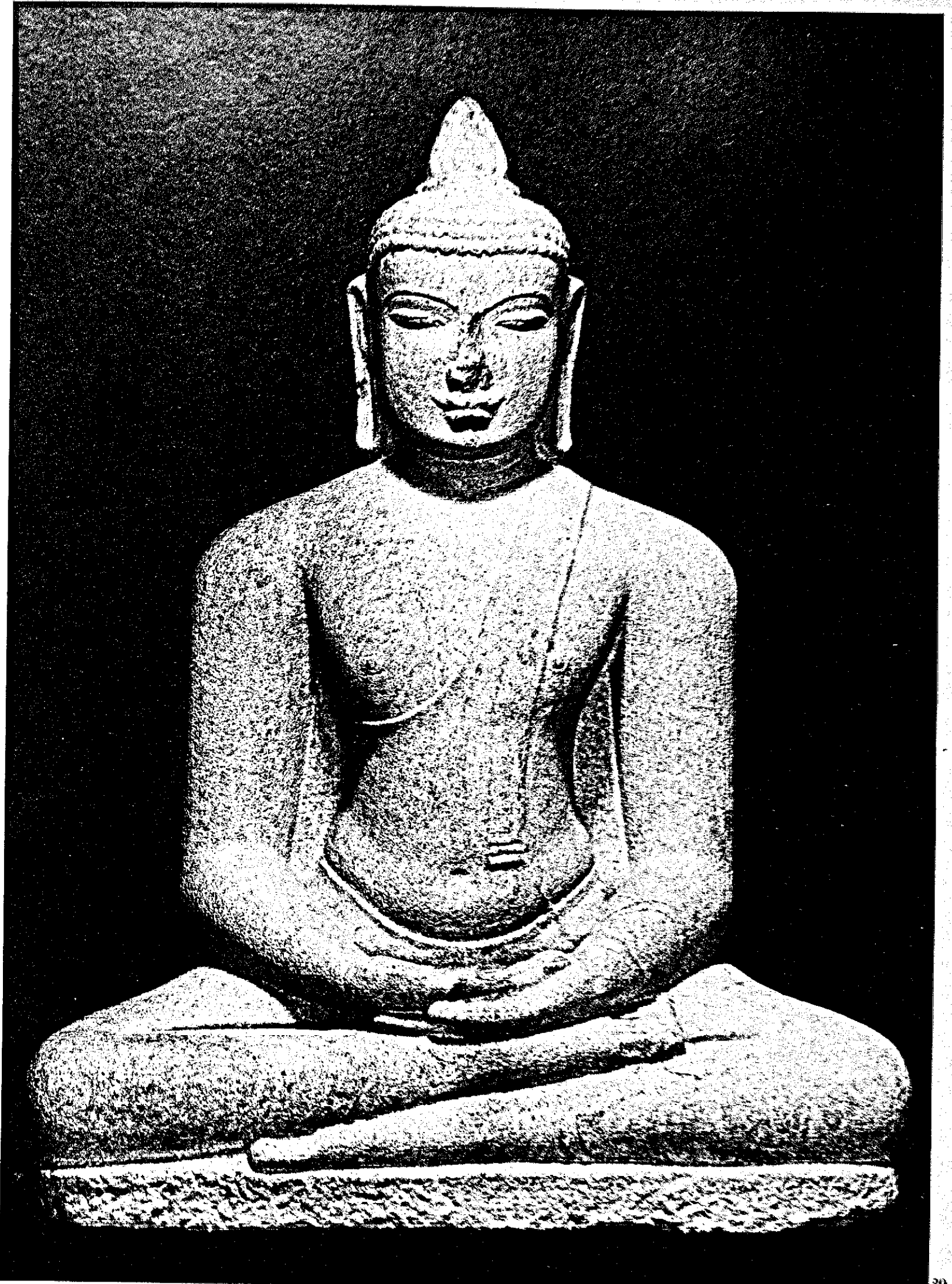
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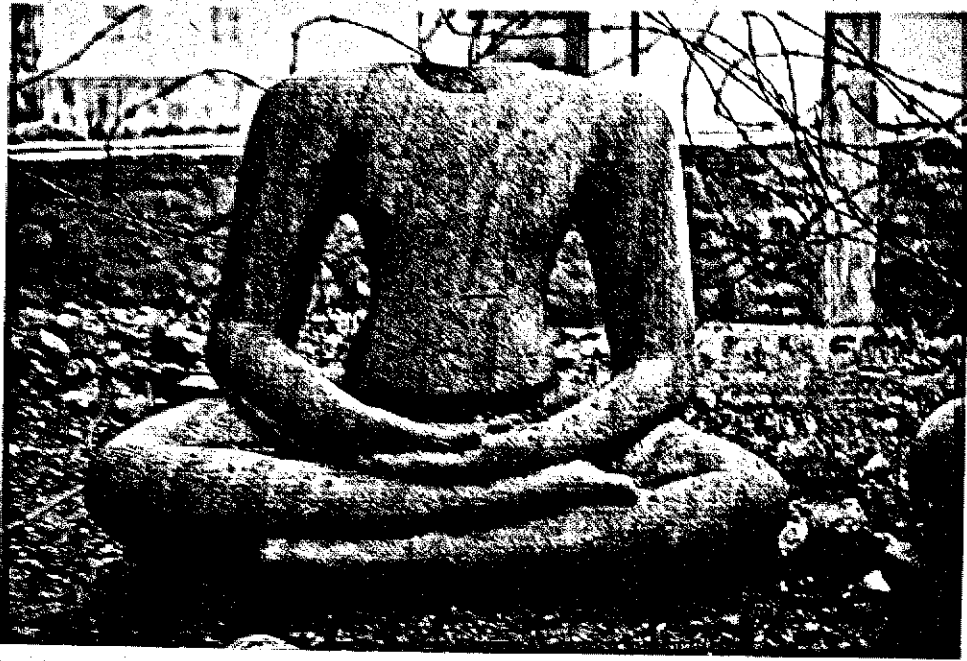
19. Seated Stone Buddha, eleventh century, approximately 1.5m. The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrew Brown Restricted Gift.

20. Seated granite Buddha, eleventh century, approximately 1m. Norton Simon Museum of Art at Pasadena.

19



20



21. Stone image of the Buddha, Madras city, probably tenth century. Government Museum compound, Madras.

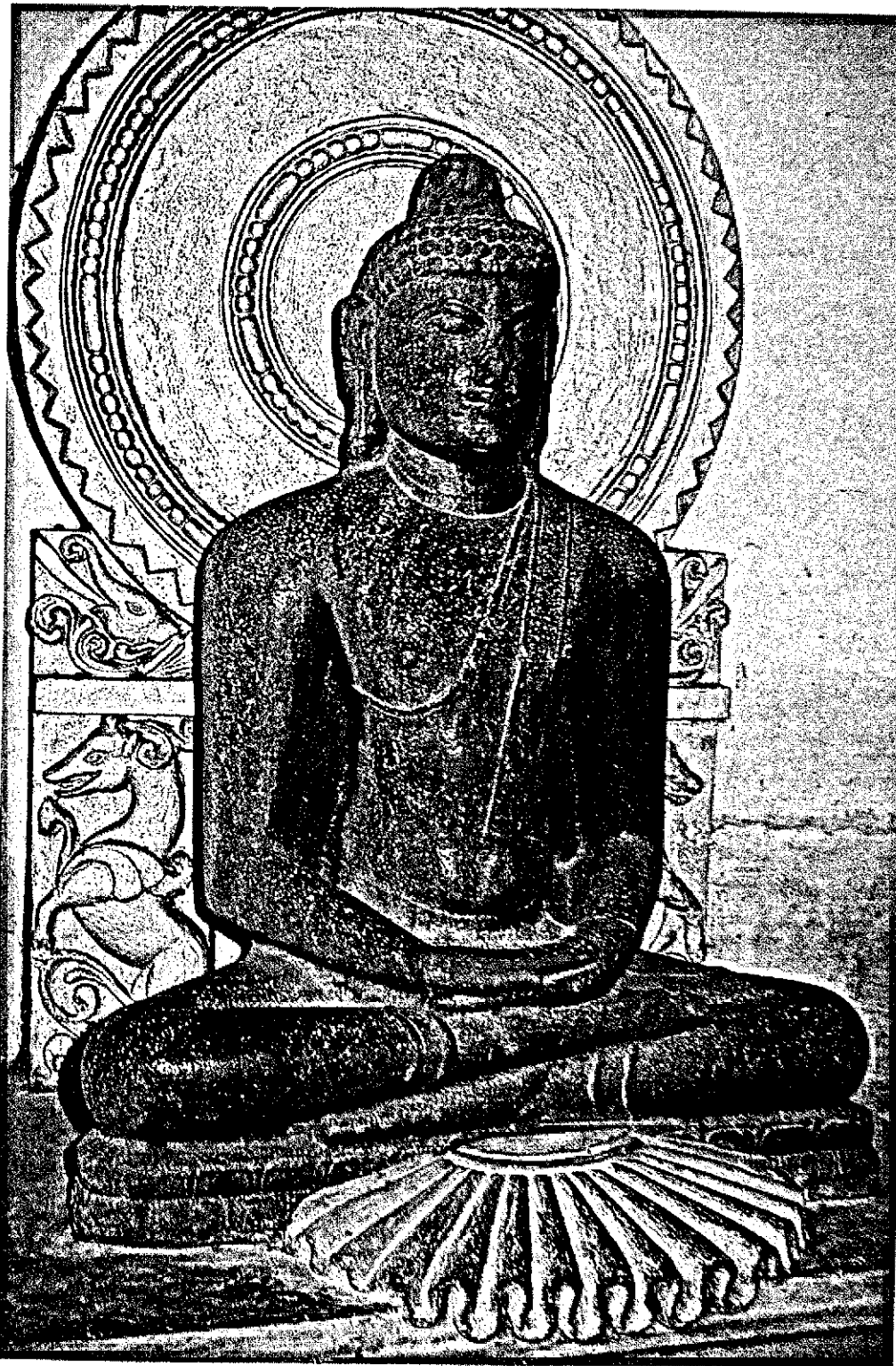
22. Stone relief of the Buddha, Eraiyur, eleventh century. Government Museum, Madras.



22

23. Stone Buddha, twelfth century. Tanjore Art Gallery.

24. Monumental granite Buddha, Tiruvalanjuli, thirteenth century, 3m. Government Museum, Madras.



23



24

considerably enlarged; and the *urna* 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 *utsava vighraha*. Several smaller images of this period, all with "question mark" *urnas*, exist. Latest of the bronzes from

Nagapattinam is a large image with an ornate flame-tipped halo, which at first sight could be mistaken for the Hindu god Vishnu. A closer look, however, reveals a tiny image of a seated Buddha ornamenting the tall 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.

Fig. 17

Other Tamil Sites

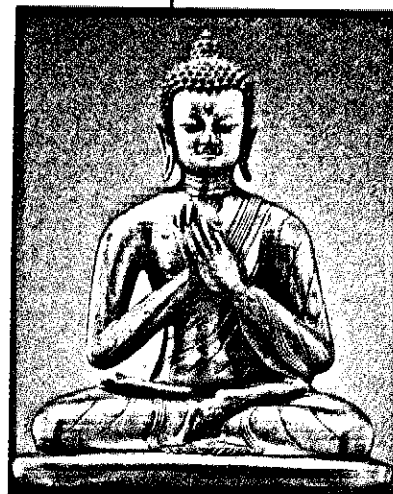
It was not only at Nagapattinam, nor exclusively in the medium of bronze, that Buddhism in south India found expression. Stone images of the Buddha exist in large numbers and may be seen in

- 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 parasol 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 band over his left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder bare, and a prominent flame tops his *ushnisha*. 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. 19 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 here 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 Eraiyur 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 *ushnisha*. 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 Kuram and another from Tiruvalanjuli, and both appear to date from the thirteenth century.

The large number of Buddhist stone images recovered from varying parts of the districts of Tanjore 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 Dadapuram and Tirumalai, while one of his queens built a Jain shrine at Olagapuram, all sites in the district of South Arcot.²² One may assume that Buddhist chapels too continued to be erected throughout the age 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 realized. This final chapter in the artistic history of Buddhism in peninsular India needs to be more widely recognized.

NOTES

1. N. Balusamy, *Studies in Manimekalai* (Madurai: 1965), *passim*.
2. Michael Lockwood and Vishnu Bhat, *Mattavilasa Prahasana* (Madras: 1981), pp. 43-45.
3. Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu Ki—Buddhist Records of the Western World* (vol. II, Delhi: 1969 reprint), p. 229.
4. *matyuh kurmo varahascha narasimhascha vamanah rama ramascha buddhah kalkischa hi dasa*.
5. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, "Baudha Vestiges in Kanchipura" in *Indian Antiquary* (June 1915), pp. 127-29.
6. The *Periya Purana* gives us this information. See Vidya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord: the Path of the Tamil Saints* (Delhi: 1988).
7. Several of the Saiva and Vaishnava saints spoke scornfully of the Buddhists and Jains. The Saiva child-saint Sambandar, who lived in the seventh century, carried on a relentless tirade against these heterodox faiths, setting aside the tenth verse of each hymn for this specific purpose. See Vidya Dehejia, *op. cit.*
8. Pratapaditya Pal, "A Forgotten Monastery of Ancient Bihar" in *South Asian Studies* (forthcoming).
9. P. L. Gupta, *Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities* (Patna: 1965), pp. 125-159.
10. T. N. Ramachandran, *Nagapattinam and other Buddhist Bronzes in the Madras Museum* (Madras: 1965), p. 8.
11. Debala Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* (Calcutta: 1971), p. 194.
12. J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion* (Delhi: 1968 reprint), p. xlvi.
13. *jnanalokamkaram nama rasmi usisavivarantarat uparistan murdhnah*—text p. 3, as quoted in T. N. Ramachandran, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
14. As quoted in T. N. Ramachandran, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
15. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, "The Larger Leiden Plates of Rajaraja I" in *Epigraphia Indica* (XXII), pp. 213-66, verse 34.
16. *Ibid.*
17. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, "The Smaller Leiden Plates of Kulottunga I" in *Epigraphia Indica* (XXII), pp. 267-81.
18. Sir Walter Elliot, "The Edifice formerly known as the Chinese or Jaina Pagoda at Negapatam" in *Indian Antiquary* (Sept. 1878), pp. 224-27.
19. T. N. Ramachandran, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
21. Sein-ko Taw, "A Preliminary Study of the Kalyani Inscriptions of Dhammачeti, 1476 AD" in *Indian Antiquary* (XXII), pp. 11-53.
22. B. Venkataraman, *Temple Art under the Chola Queens* (Faridabad: 1976).



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

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 Guler, the figures of Sohni and Mahinwal are shown wearing ornate sheathed swords. Mahinwal also has a shield in the vertical paintings as well as a bow and arrow in the works from Bundi and Kotah. There is nothing in any of the different 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 ascetic is a particularly interesting feature of the paintings that has been ignored by previous scholars. Archer, following Randhawa, suggests merely that the figure is praying for Sohni's protection to the river god Khwaja Khazir.¹¹ A more likely interpretation of the figure is that it represents the ascetic with whom Mahinwal 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 Mahinwal since at the point in the tale when Sohni swims over to Mahinwal, he was no longer employed by Sohni's father to tend the animals and had remorsefully begun to practise austerities. 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 ahead of the swimming 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 unbaked 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 miss 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 Mahinwal 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.¹²

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 Mahinwal 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.

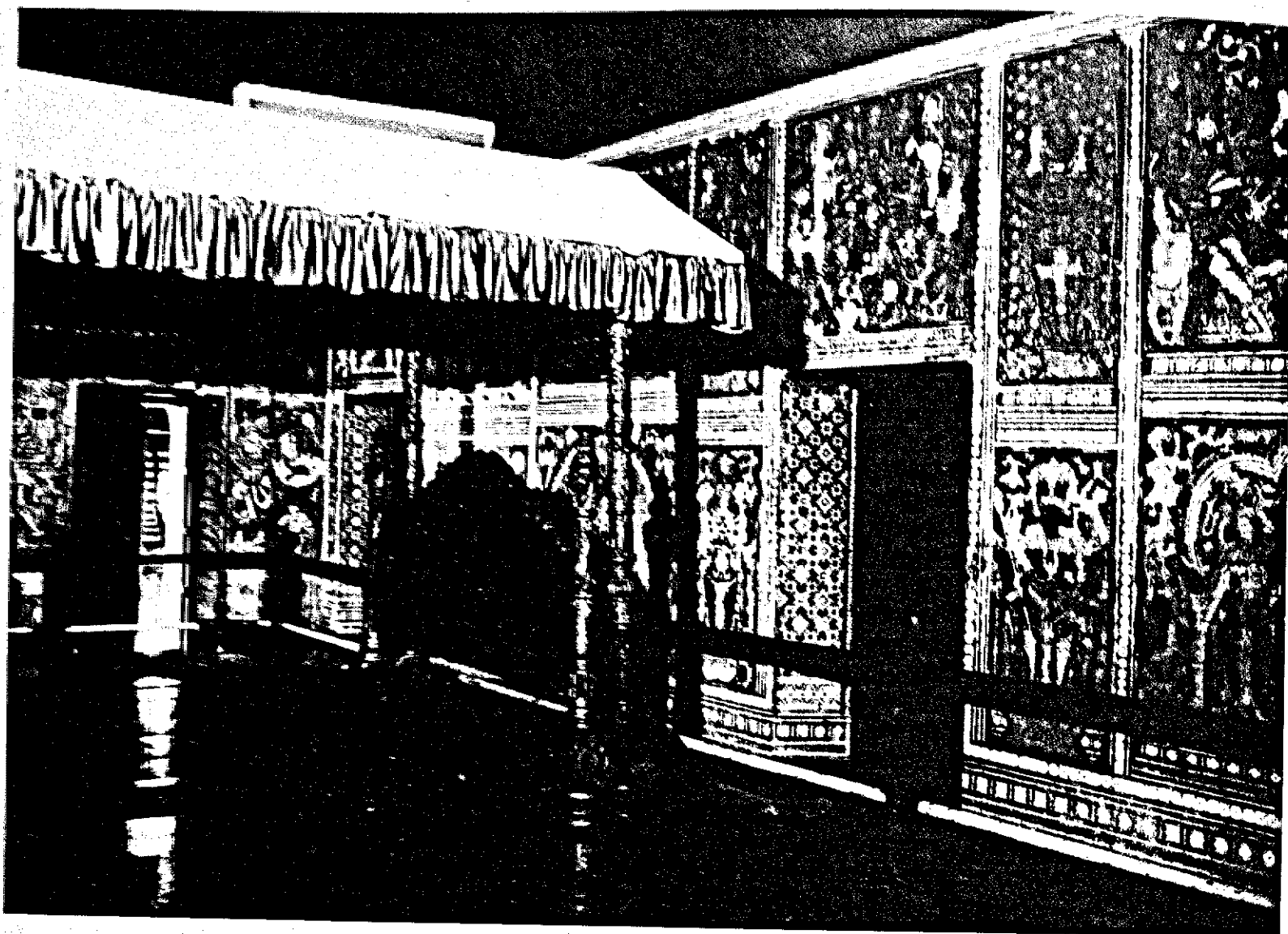
NOTES

1. The following Punjabi and Persian literary references were supplied by Professor Christopher Shackle in a personal communication to the contributor, May 2, 1988.
2. Herbert Tower Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit: His Poetry, Life and Times* (London: 1940), pp. 392ff.
3. Muhammad Baqir, *Punjabi qisse farsi zaban men* (I, Lahore: 1957), pp. 193ff.
4. Divan Singh and Roshan Lal Ahuja, *Sohni Mahinwal Fazal Shah* (3rd ed. [in Gurmukhi], Jullundur: 1976).
5. For a more complete retelling of the tale than normally found in exhibition catalogues and scholarly books, see Zaimab Ghulam Abbas, *Folk Tales of Pakistan* (Karachi: 1957), pp. 87-96; Laxman Komal, *Folk Tales of Pakistan* (New Delhi: 1976), pp. 45-52; Masud-ul-Hasan, *Famous Folk Tales of Pakistan* (Karachi: n.d.), pp. 35-45; Gurbakhsh Singh, *Immortal Lovers. Tender Tales of Great Love* (New Delhi: 1973), pp. 9-45; and F. A. Steel, Jasimuddin, and Carvel Painter, *Folk Tales of Pakistan* (Lahore: 1961), pp. 6-13.
6. Sohni is also the name of a specific category of ragini paintings found in some ragamala 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.
7. W. C. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills* (2 vols., London: 1973), 1:151.
8. B. N. Coswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (exhibition catalogue, San Francisco: 1986), catalogue nos. 35 and 96, pp. 67 and 135.
9. Translated by Naval Krishna, personal communication to the contributor, October 2, 1987.
10. The painting is not illustrated here, but will be published by Naval Krishna in his forthcoming *Bikaner Court Miniature Painting*.
11. Archer, *Indian Paintings*, 1:151.
12. Owen S. Rye and C. Evans, *Traditional Pottery Techniques of Pakistan* (Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, no. 21, Washington: 1976), pp. 57.

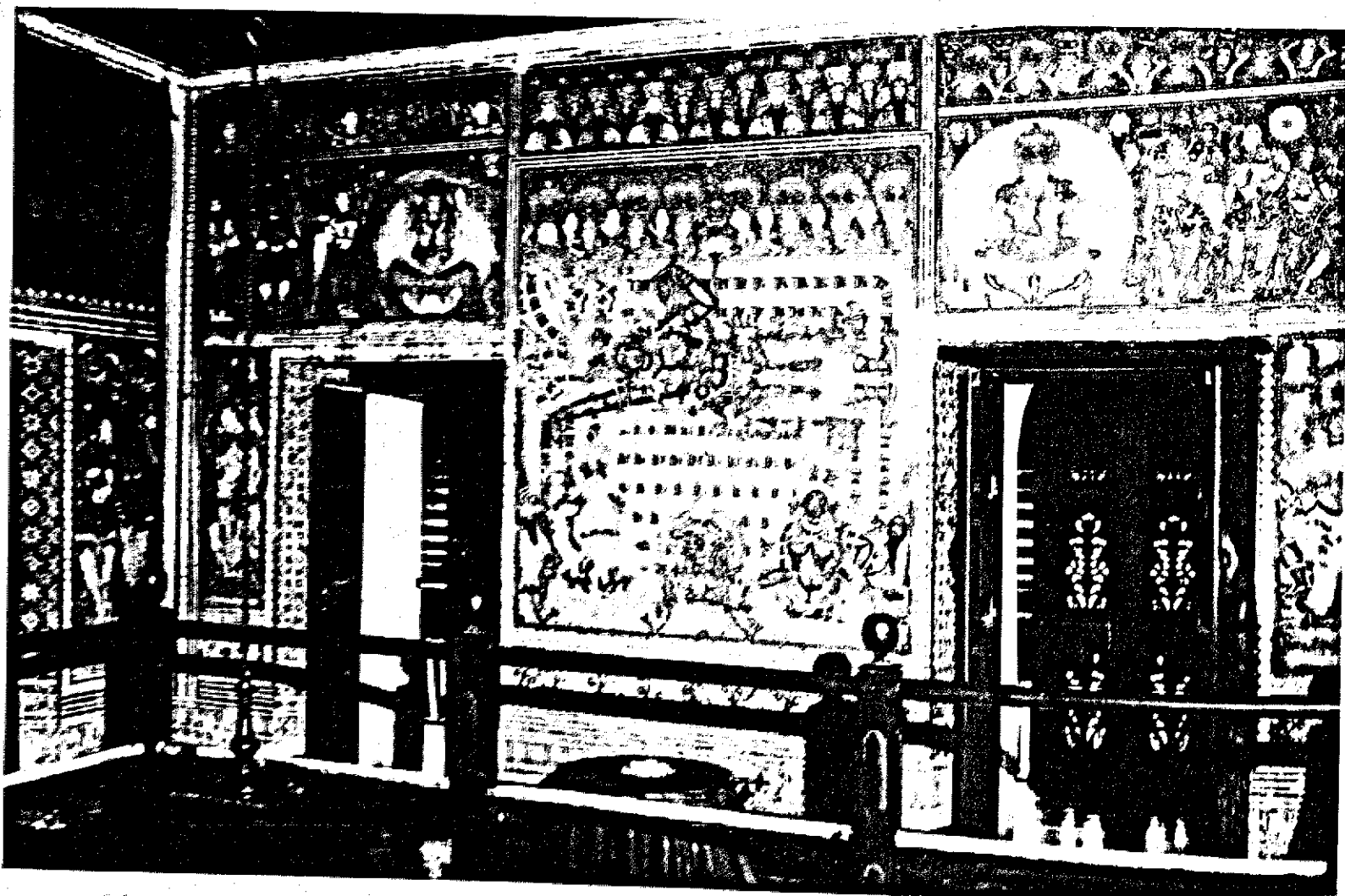


THE PALACE MURALS AT PADMANABHAPURAM: THE POLITICS OF AN IMAGE

Mary Beth Coffman Heston



1



2

All the photographs are of the walls of the uppermost chamber of the *uppirika malika* at the Padmanabhapuram palace complex, Padmanabhapuram, Tamilnadu.

1. General view.
2. West wall with central image of recumbent Vishnu.

W

hile 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 Tamilnadu district of Kanyakumari, though the palace and the surrounding site come under the purview of the Kerala State Archaeology Department since Padmanabhapuram/Kalkulam once served as the capital of the erstwhile southern Kerala kingdom of Travancore (Tiruvitamcode). The Padmanabhapuram murals cover the walls of the uppermost chamber of a building at the site called the *uppirika malika* (literally, a "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,¹ but there are no inscriptions or other fixed means for these attributions; indeed, there are so few 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.² 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 *sayana* 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 a portable icon of Vishnu and two females in the lower centre. Noteworthy are the *prabhamandala* (aureole) and pedestal that are common to portable metal icons of south India. 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 Vaishnava figures holding conches, perhaps the Vishvakshenas mentioned in the description of this form of Vishnu.³ At the upper part of the wall is a row of figures similar to those attending the females, also with matted locks, beards, and beads; they are probably the *saptarshi* (seven sages) appropriate to Yogasayanamurti (the form in which Vishnu is in yogic sleep).

The representation of Vishnu is flanked by doors above which are depictions of Chandra 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 disc (the pigment here actually glows). Above the left door a similar group again faces the recumbent Vishnu. Here the glowing circle is red rather than white and the personification of the sun is a variation of Surya-Narayana, his lower two hands in the meditation posture.⁴ 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 Asvinis, 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

Fig. 1

Figs. 2, 3, 4

Fig. 3, 5

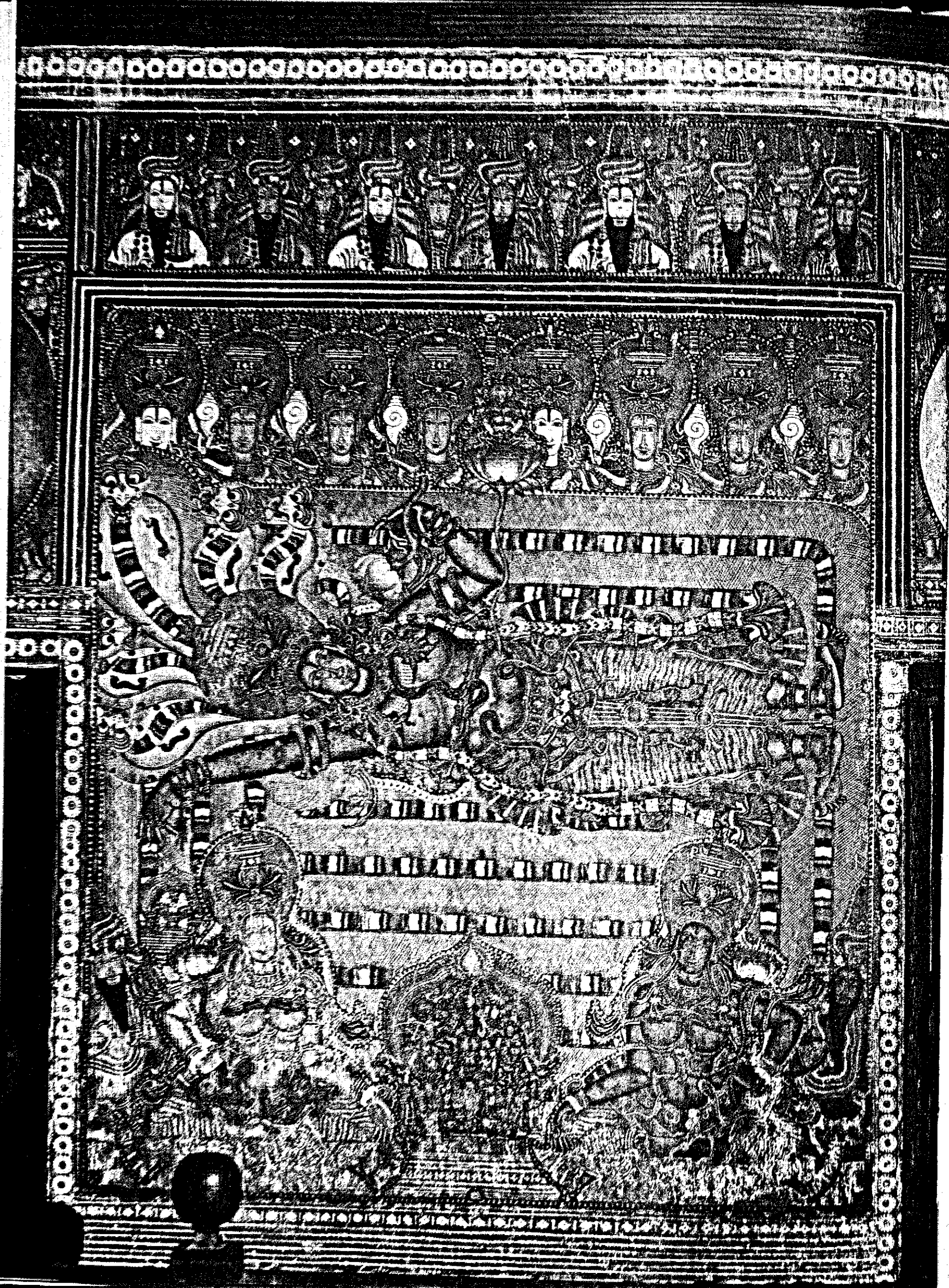
Fig. 6

Figs. 3, 7

Fig. 2, Fig. 8

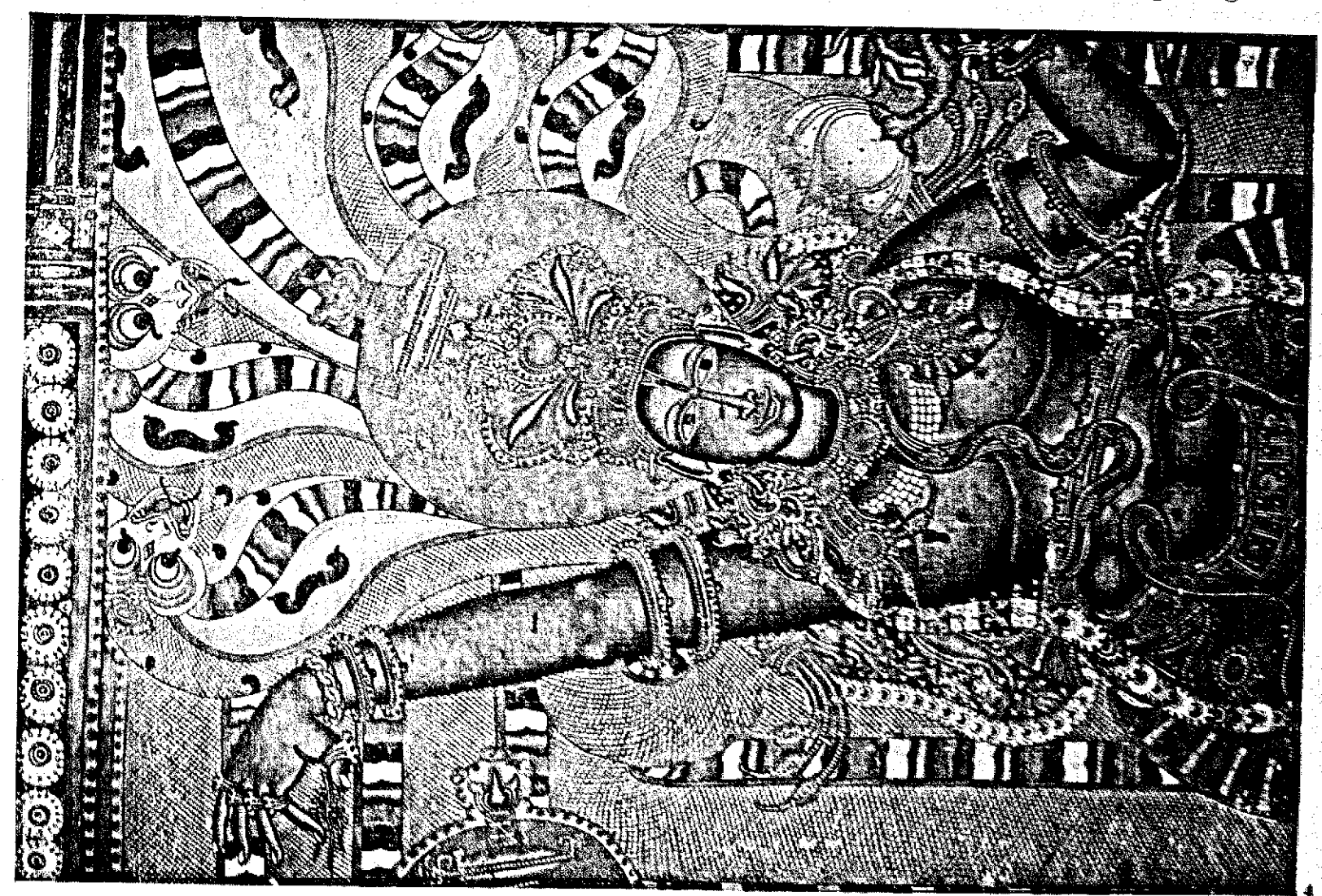
Fig. 9

Figs. 2, 10, 11



3. Centre of west wall with recumbent Vishnu.

4. Detail, Vishnu.



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 Vaishnava markings on their foreheads, and seem to have their hands in *anjali mudra*; this entire section may depict the hosts of *parivara devatas* (subsidiary deities) and Vishvakshenas appropriate to this form of Vishnu. A similar group on the north or right wall is Saiva: the figures are also four-armed, and depicted with the third eye, matted locks with crescent moon, and holding a deer. 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 Padmanabhaswami, the deity enshrined in the Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum.

It is important to point out that the local tradition identifying the reclining Vishnu here as Sri Padmanabhaswami 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 Cousins was escorted to the palace by the members of the family who "discovered" them.⁵ 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 recumbent Vishnu image at Padmanabhapuram, facing east, with his head to the south and his feet to the north, corresponds with the image enshrined at Tiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum),⁶ the city of sacred Ananta. The two-armed Yogasayanamurti, with the left hand bent at the elbow and held in the *kataka* pose and the right hand held over a small linga, compares with an ivory image of this deity from Trivandrum which Gopinatha Rao discusses.⁷ Rao indicates that "The local Purana extolling the god at Trivandrum informs us that Vishnu absolved Siva at Anantasayanam (i.e., Trivandrum) of some sin from which he was afflicted; hence the image of Vishnu in the temple at Trivandrum is also shown . . . as holding his right hand



5

5. Detail, female figure, lower right.

6. Detail, portable image, lower centre.

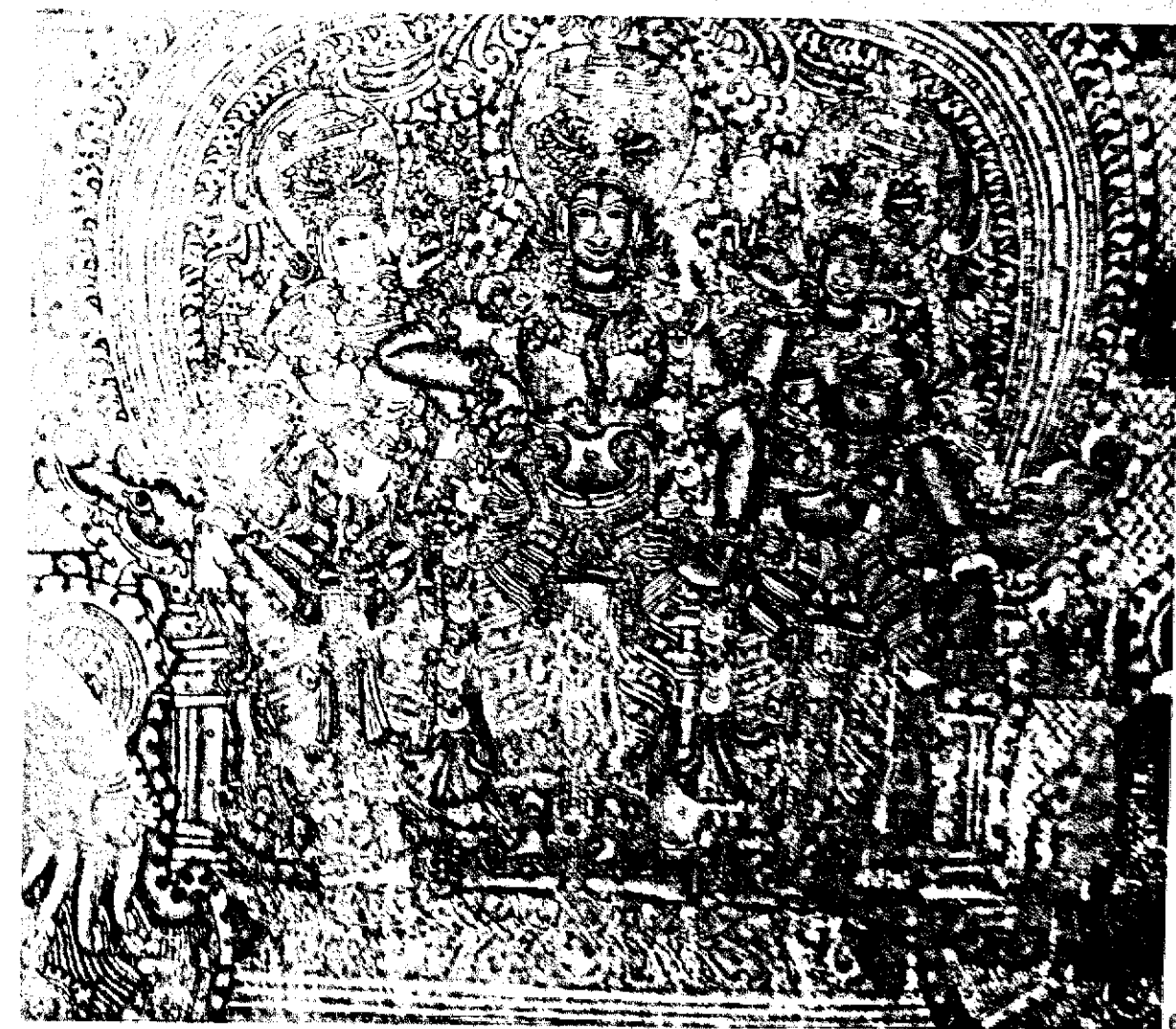
over the Linga-image of Siva in the *varada* pose.⁸ The small linga also appears below the right hand of the Padmanabhapuram Vishnu, and although the hand is not in the gift-bestowing pose (as is also the case in Rao's example), it is making an offering to the linga (as is Rao's). Even a more convincing 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, Sanathkumara, 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 Kaundilya, and Divakara, the founder of the temple . . . In front of the Ananthasayana Murthy is the Archana Vighraha [moveable image] of Chuthurbahu Visnu with Lakshmi and Bhumi on either side.⁹

All the figures mentioned in this description are present in the painting, including the seven 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 prominent 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 Venadu rulers (that is, the ancestors of the Travancore rajas) to the temple from at least the twelfth century.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ The Sanskrit text *Padmanabhodayam* was written by Sanka-kair during his reign,¹² 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.¹³ He also performed two noteworthy ceremonies



6



7. Detail, Vaishnava figures and sages, upper left.

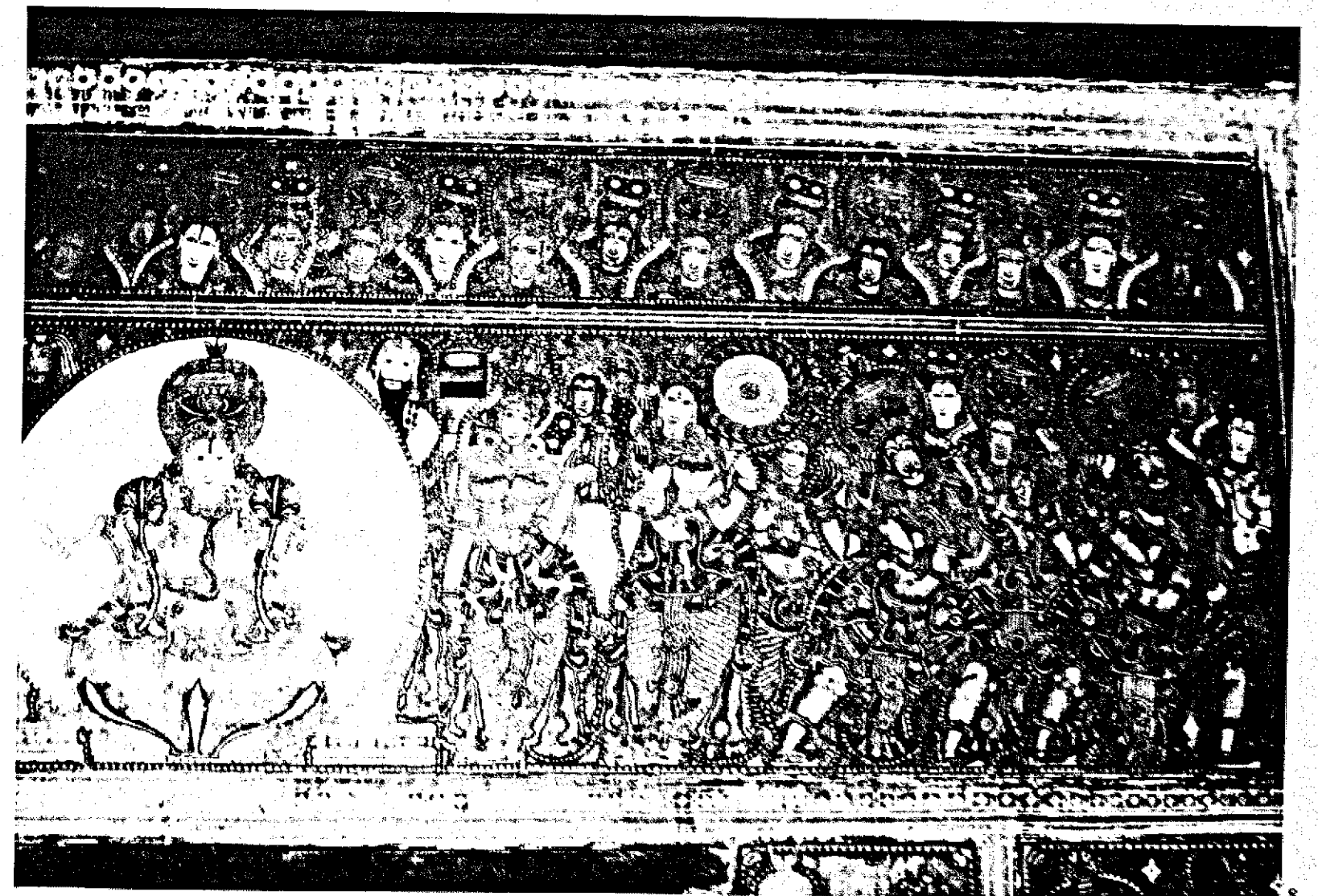
8. Chandra and attendants, detail of figure 2, above right door.

9. Surya-Narayana and attendants, detail of figure 2, above left door.

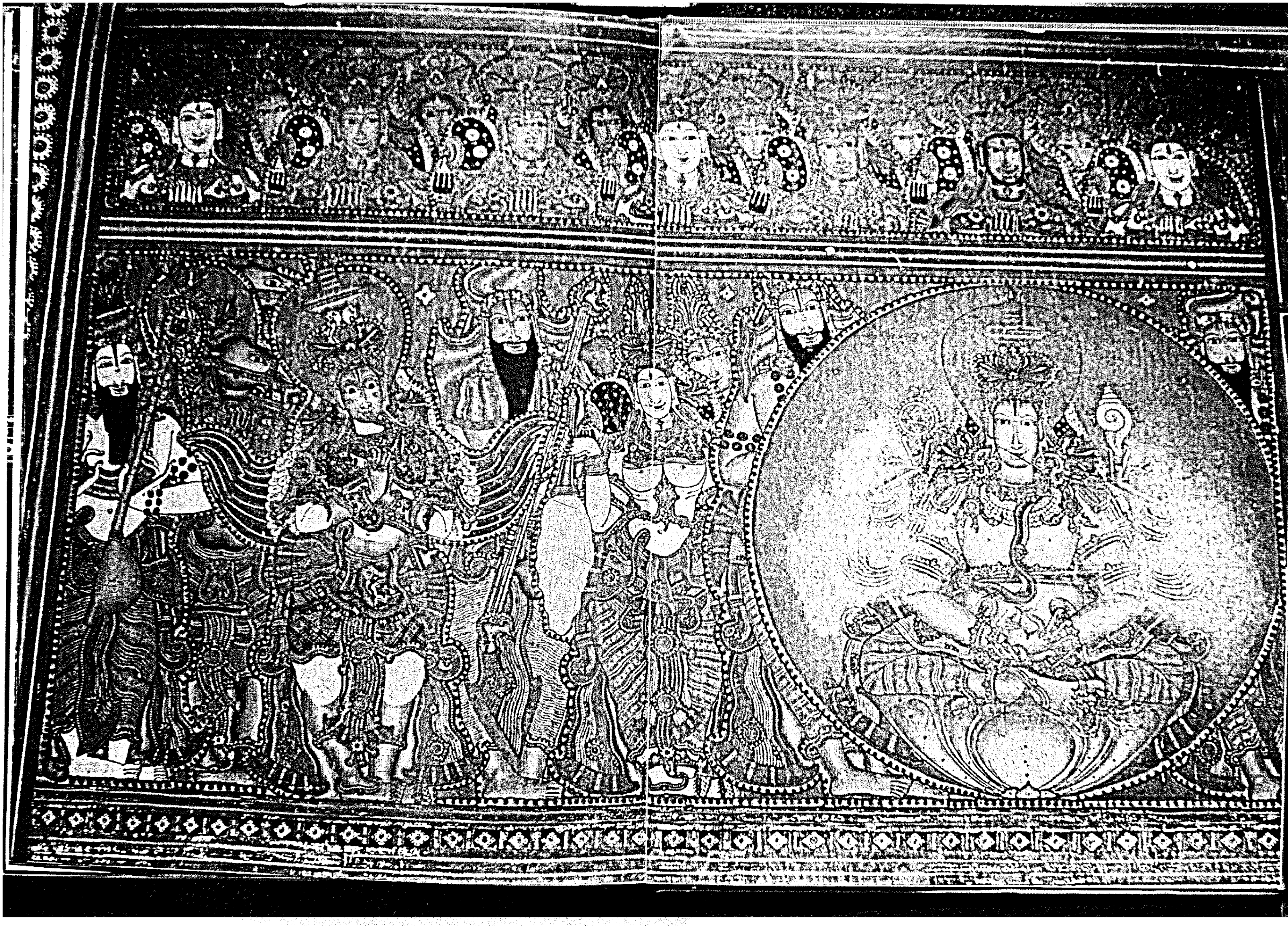


focusing attention on Padmanabhaswami and emphasizing his own connection with the deity. The first of these, the *bhadradipam* (auspicious lamp), was initially performed in M.E. 919 (that is, 1744 A.D.).¹⁴ The ceremony was conducted "in expiation of the sin incurred by war and annexation" (since Marthanda 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), Tinnevely and Madura at the Trivandrum temple.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ It is interesting to consider the painted image of the reclining Vishnu at Padmanabhapuram 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 depictions 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 Vaishnava and 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 brahmin priests in this depiction is perhaps problematic in trying to explain the painting in terms of the *bhadradipam*, but the *dvarapalas* flanking the doors that flank the reclining Vishnu are noteworthy; before their faces are bells like those that appear at the shrine entrance in Kerala temples, as if to emphasize that this is a shrine around which all the other figures are assembled in procession. Whether or not the imagery is related to the *bhadradipam* ceremony, it seems once again to refer to an enshrined image, and in this case to the Trivandrum deity.

Marthanda Varma performed another dramatic ceremony at the Trivandrum temple in Kollam or M.E. 925 (that is, 1750 A.D.), when he laid his sword of state before Sri Padmanabhaswami at the temple; in so doing he "made over the whole territory to the Devaswom and assumed its management as vassal of that deity"; from thenceforth he termed himself "Padmanabhadasa", that is, the servant of Padmanabha.¹⁷ This is also when he must have

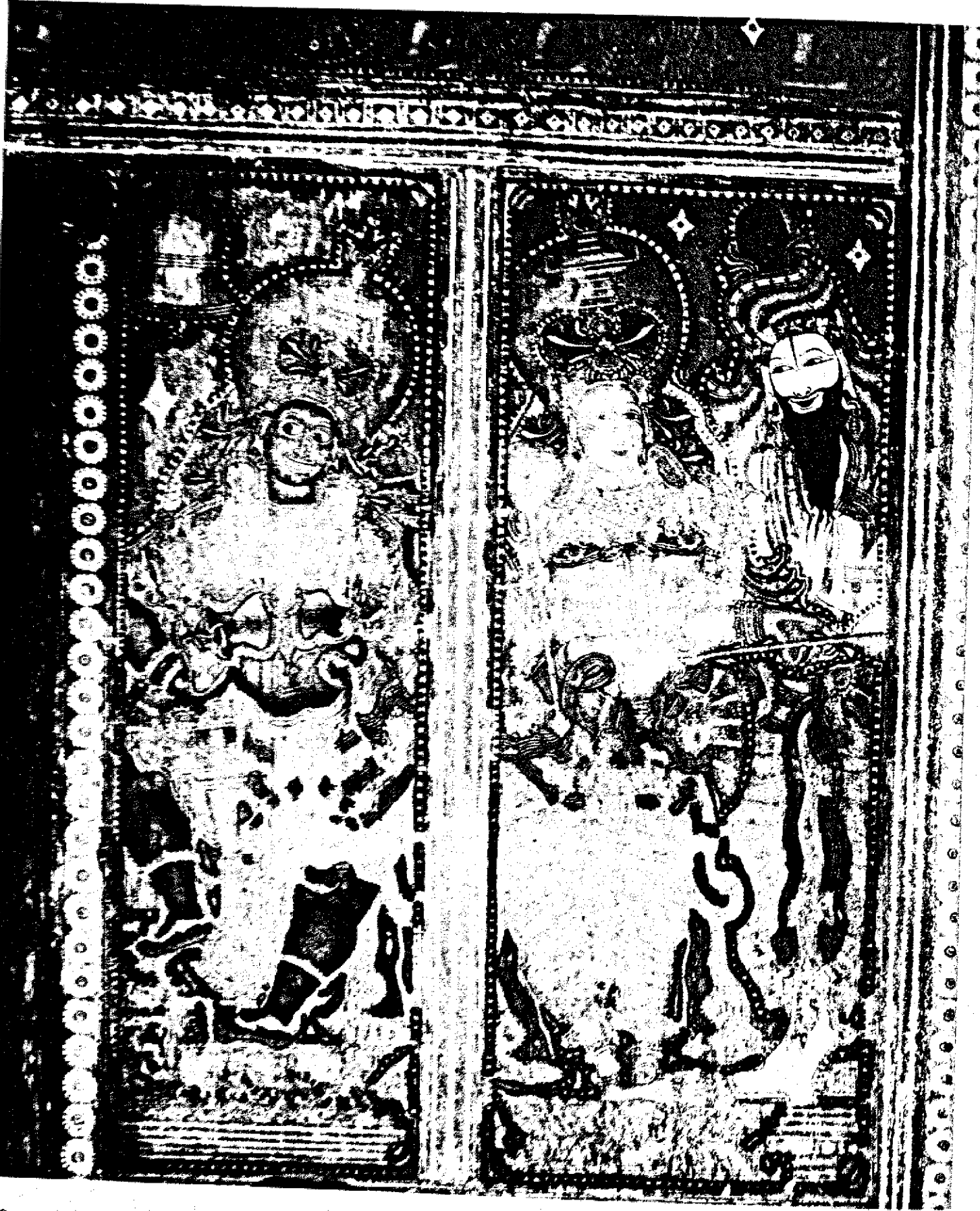


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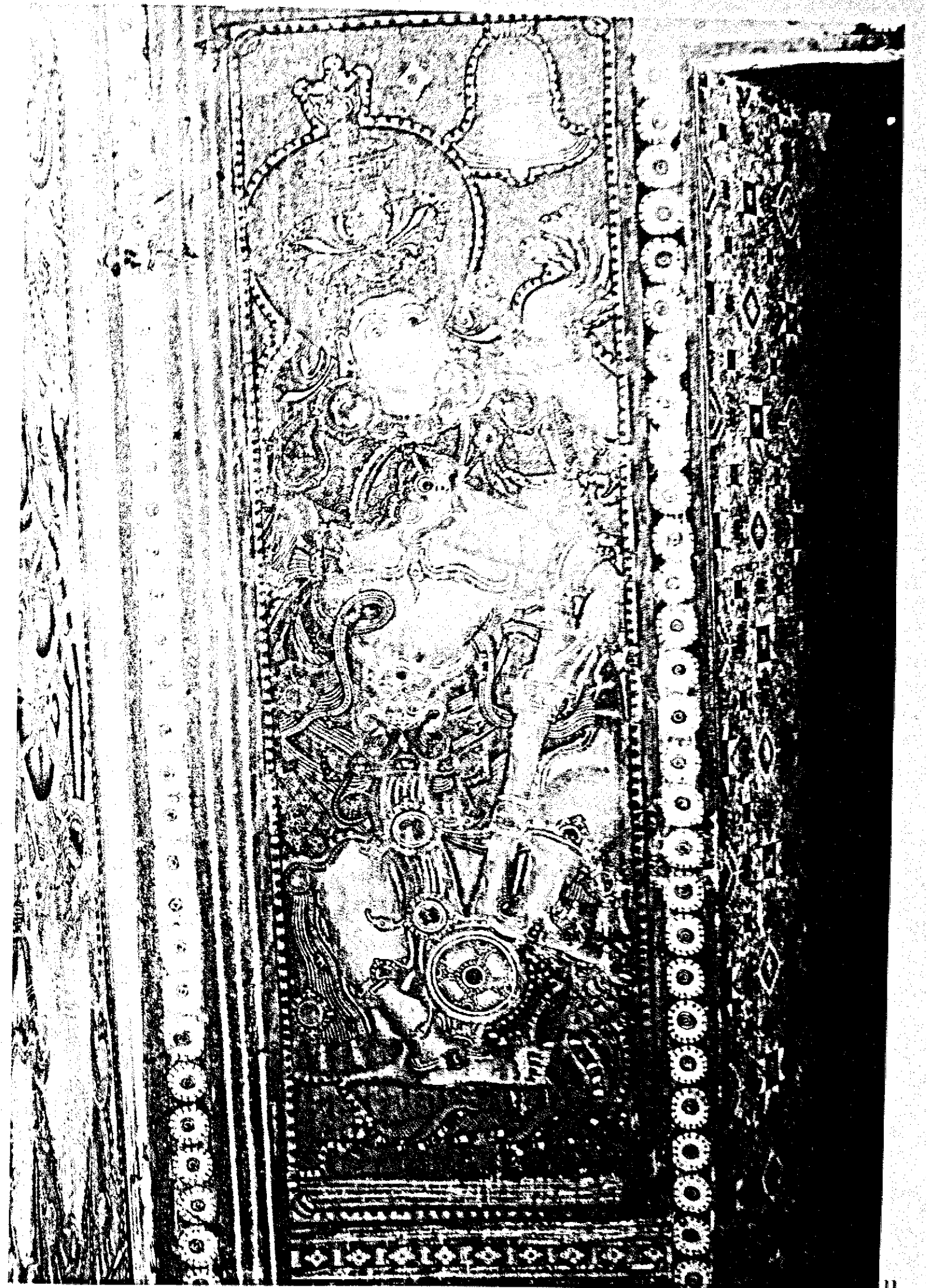


10. Door guardian, detail of figure 2, to right of right door.

11. Door guardian, detail of figure 2, to left of left door.



10



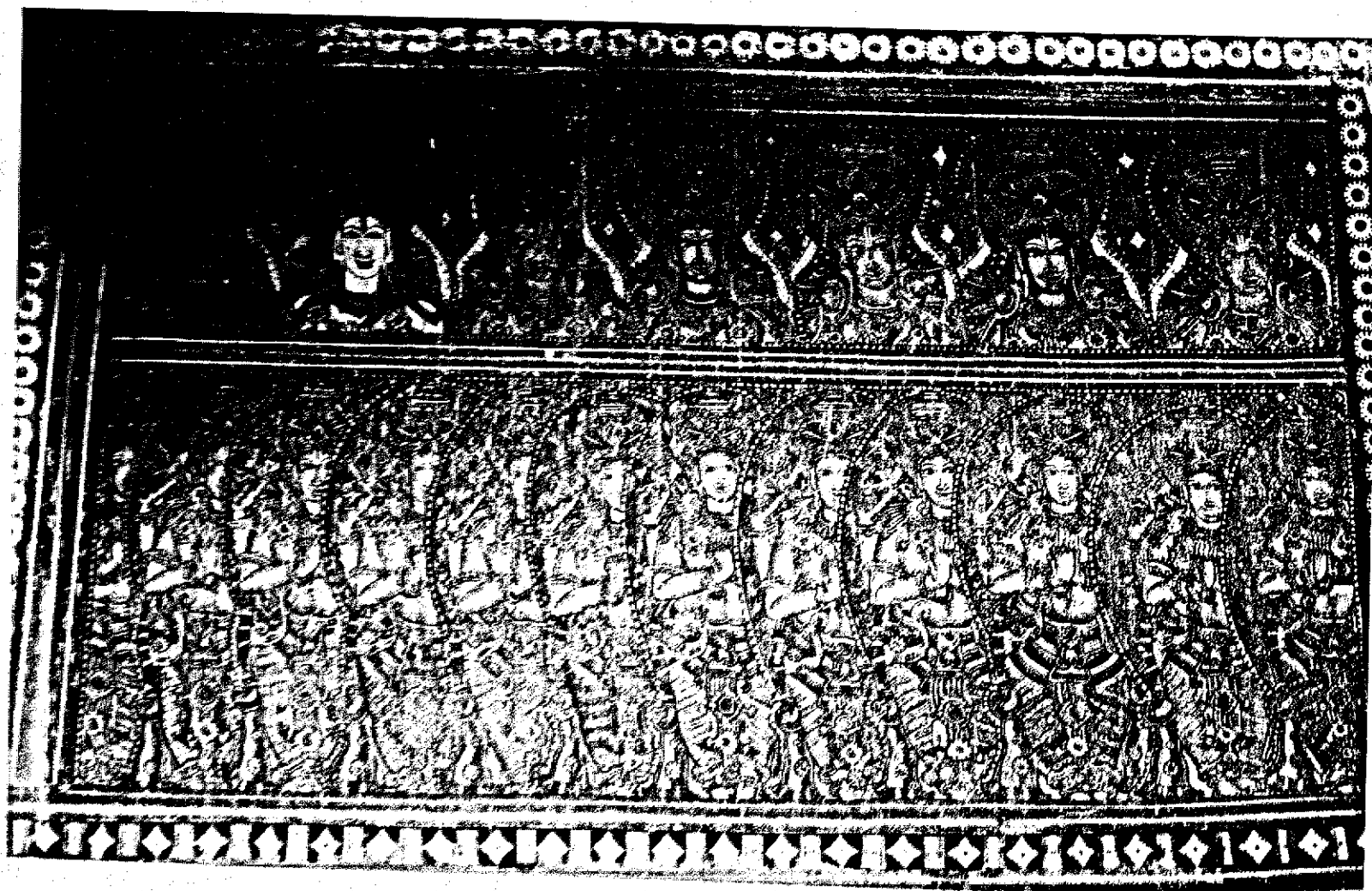
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decided to build a capital at Trivandrum, perhaps to emphasize his ties with the Trivandrum deity. Most sources assume he moved the capital to Trivandrum in 1750 A.D. However, there is some evidence that rather than actually shifting the capital of 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."¹⁸ 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 (1635 A.D.) refers to the capital as Kalkulam, the same name that is used by John Nieuhoff in 1664, and a dynastic record relating to Marthanda Varma's ascent to the throne in 1728.¹⁹ 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.

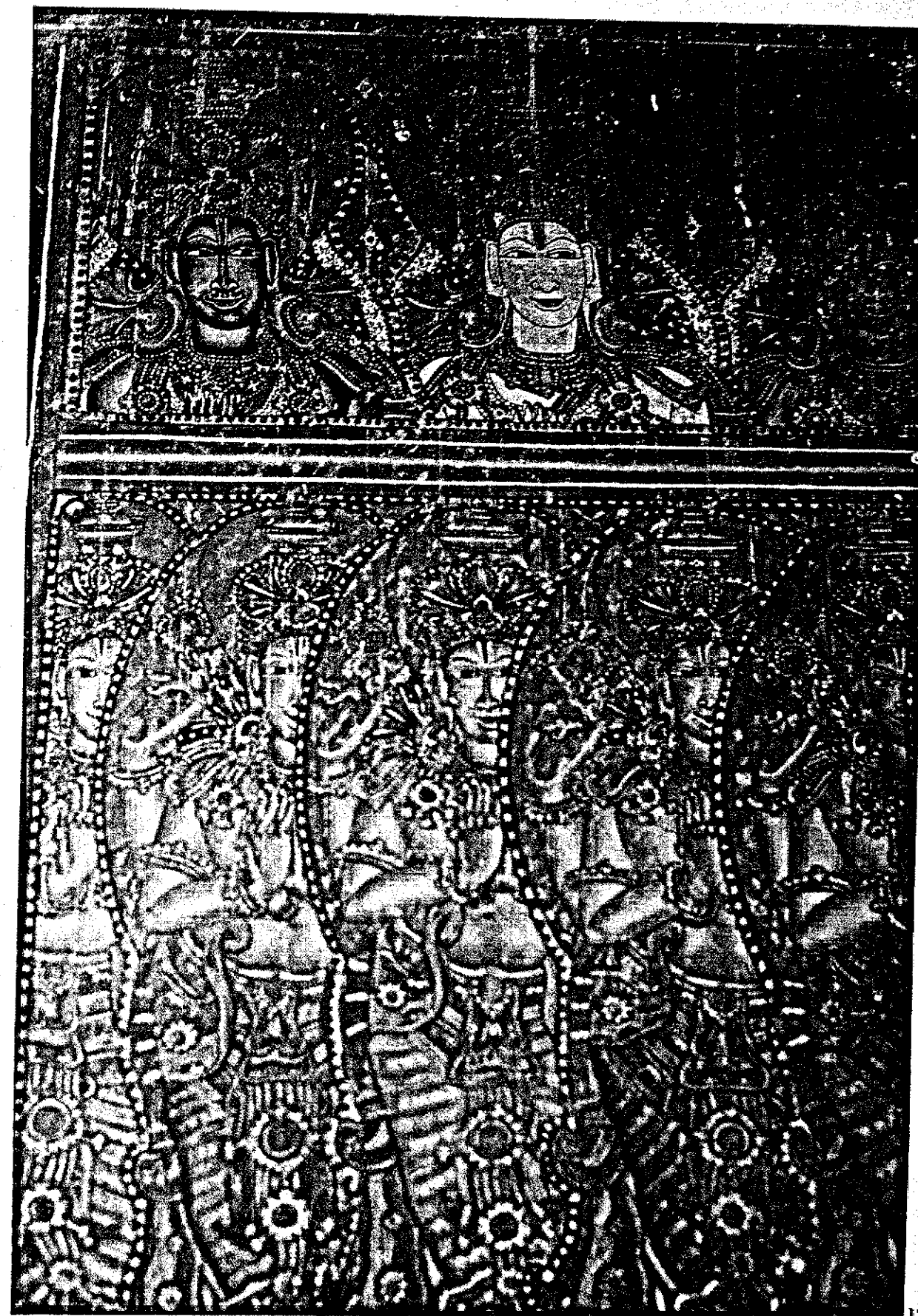
In short, not only is there iconographic evidence to support the local tradition identifying the reclining Vishnu at the Padmanabhapuram palace complex as a depiction of the deity enshrined at Trivandrum, but there are also compelling factors explaining the significance of this deity to the kingdom and 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 "Padmanabhadasa". The paintings, then, would depict, as Susan Huntington has pointed out, "an image of an image,"²⁰ which may also be the case with

12. Vaishnava figures on south (left) wall.

13. Detail of figure 12.



12



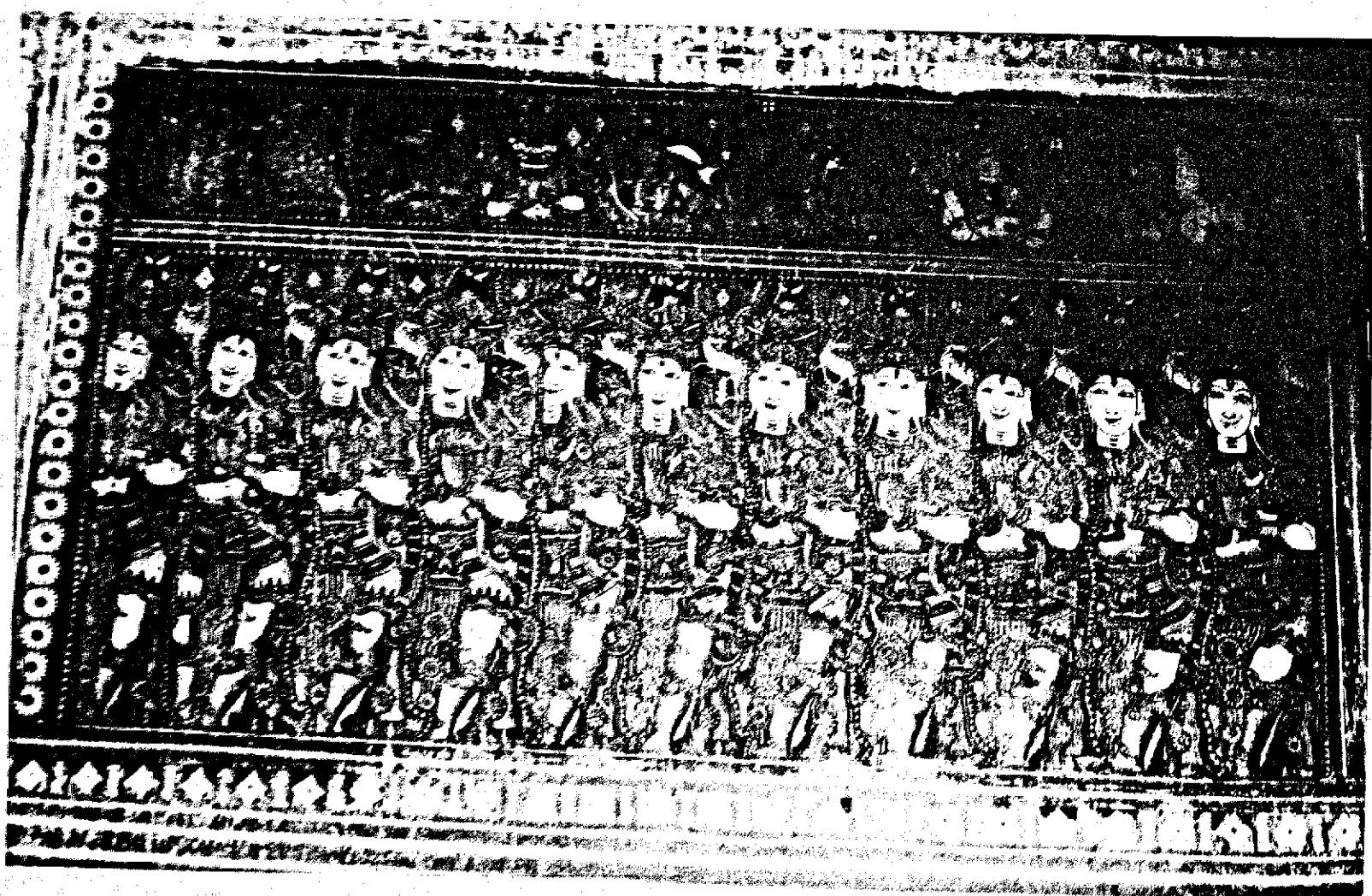
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other paintings in this chamber and even in other palaces and temples of Kerala. In any case, there are features about this room—such as its placement in the uppermost storey of the tallest building at the site, its relative inaccessibility, and the 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 devotions.

NOTES

1. R.V. Poduval, in Poduval, S. Kramrisch and J.H. Cousins, *The Arts and Crafts of Kerala* (Cochin: 1971), pp. 165-66, suggests they are sixteenth century, while S. Kramrisch, in the same text, places them in the eighteenth (pp. 187-90).
2. Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Painting* (New Delhi: 1968), p. 150, dates them to the eighteenth century.
3. R.M. Bernier, *Temple Arts of Kerala* (New Delhi: 1982), pp. 44-45, dates them as both "sixteenth century and after," and "largely seventeenth and eighteenth century."
4. S.L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* (New York and Tokyo: 1982), p. 614, notes that they are generally attributed to the eighteenth century, while J. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (Middlesex and New York: 1986), pp. 351-53, indicates that they are seventeenth/eighteenth century.
5. R.V. Poduval, "Travancore's Ancient Capital: Padmanabhapuram" in *D.R. Bhandarkar Volume*, edited by B.C. Law (Calcutta: 1940), p. 319 and other sources mention this move. See, for example, *Annual Report on Archaeological Researches, Travancore-Cochin State, 1952-53* (Trivandrum: 1954), p. 2.
6. T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (I, New York: 1968), pp. 90-91.
7. Gopinatha Rao, *ibid.*, pp. 316-17, describes this form of Surya, though his example is a standing form.
8. J. and M. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: 1950), p. 617, and *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department, Travancore State, 1111 M.E. (1935/36)* (Madras: 1937), p. 6.
9. S. Padmanabhan, *Temples of South India* (Nagercoil: 1977), pp. 134-35.
10. T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *op. cit.* (I), p. 114.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Government of Kerala, *Report of the High Level Committee for Unification of Laws relating to Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments* (Trivandrum: 1964), p. 244.
13. The Ays claimed ancestry from the Vrishni-kula, and claimed the Trivandrum deity as their tutelary deity. See H. Sarkar, *Architectural Survey of Temples of Kerala* (New Delhi: 1978), p. 19. One of the early Venadu rulers, Kodai Keralavarman (1125-1155), rebuilt the Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum (Sarkar, p. 35).
14. For example, the temple figures in the songs of the Tamil saint Nammalvar—see R. Champakalakshmi, *Vaishnava Iconography in the Tamil Country* (New Delhi: 1988), pp. 34, 38, 50, and Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 107, 133, 141. The *Dasavatara-charitram* of Aditya Varma Sarvanagatha of the fourteenth century includes ten verses on the Trivandrum deity, as does the *Avantaranandasakam* of the same king (*Travancore Archaeological Series* [vol. VII, part II, 1930], pp. 132-34 and pp. 123-25). There is another fourteenth-century poem, this one in Malayalam, depicting the greatness of Anantapura or Trivandrum—the *Anantapura-varnanam*; see *South Indian Temple Inscriptions* (vol. III, part II, Madras Government Oriental Series, no. CLVII), p. 9 and *Travancore University Language Publications*, no. 81.

14. Saiva figures on north (right) wall.



12. *Annual Report on Archaeological Researches, Travancore State 1111 M.E. (1942)*, p. 3.
13. See N. Aiya, *Travancore State Manual* (I, Trivandrum: 1906), pp. 335, 360-61, who mentions the creation of a new image. According to Sarkar (*op. cit.*, p. 233), the Padmanabhaswami temple underwent major renovation in the first half of the eighteenth century, beginning in 1729, that is, soon after Marthanda Varma's ascent to the throne. Others suggest that an engraved inscription in Sanskrit with Malayalam characters on the base of the *mandapa* indicates it underwent a complete rebuilding in 1729 A.D. (R.V. Poduval, J.H. Cousins, S. Kramrisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-2). Also see *Travancore Archaeological Series* (vol. I, part IX), pp. 171-73.
14. S. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore* (London: 1883), pp. 130-31; Nagam Aiya, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-61.
15. Mateer, *op. cit.* and Nagam Aiya, *op. cit.*
16. Mateer, *op. cit.*
17. Mateer, *op. cit.* and Nagam Aiya, *op. cit.*
18. Fra Paulino da San Bartolomeo, *A Voyage to the East Indies*, translated by William Johnson (London: 1800), pp. 112-114, 117.
19. The edict is dated 22 Kumbham 810 M.E. (Malayalam Era), that is, 1635 A.D., and begins, "Whereas it has been represented to us at our residence at Kalkulam . . ." indicating that this was the proper name then. Nagam Aiya, *op. cit.*, p. 302. John Nieuhoff was Chief Director of the Dutch Company at Quilon; he refers to "Kalkolam" as "the chief residence of the king," and describes the site. See *Voyages and Travels to the East Indies* (from *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. III, London: 1745), pp. 216-217. Regarding Marthanda Varma's ascent to the throne see Rajaraja Varma, "Some Travancore Dynastic Records, Third Series" in *Kerala Society Papers* (Series 6, 1930), p. 335.
20. Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 614.

(Note: I would like to thank the Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala, for permission to photograph the Padmanabhapuram murals. This research was carried out during 1981 while I was a Junior Fellow with the American Institute of Indian Studies.)

FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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