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Two Origin Legends

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I

THE GREAT PERIODS OF

INDIAN ART

NDIAN ART, besides documenting the history of a majestic civilization, opens a comparatively simple, delightful way into the timeless domain of the Hindu L spirit; for it renders in eloquent visual forms the whole message that India holds in keep for mankind. Its centuries span some five millenniums, 3000 B.C. to the present, but with large gaps in the continuity, since India's artist-craftsmen usually work in perishable materials. Clay figures, readily broken or dissolved by water, have always been the most common objects of popular worship (Text Plate A1b); many are meant for a single brief occasion, few last longer than a few months. The patterns on which these are based are perennial, however, and have influenced the works in metal and stone. Wood is favored for houses, palaces, and temples, and for the sacred images of the altars; all the ancient masterpieces in this medium have vanished. Nevertheless, the spectacular specimens of recent wood carving that survive in the processional cars of the temples of the South afford some notion of what the centuries have destroyed (Text Plate A2). In India everything not fashioned of brick, stone, or metal is ultimately crumbled by the climate or the unremitting labor of white ants.

The earliest Indian monuments known are a series of brick ruins recently unearthed in the Indus Valley, the most extensive sites being at Mohenjo-daro and Harappā (Map I, p. 391). Prominent among the finds of this so-called Indus Valley civilization are a number of steatite seals bearing animal symbols and brief inscriptions that have not yet been deciphered (Plate 2). Three or four such seals discovered in datable ruins in Mesopotamia have made it possible to assign the Indian series to an epoch c. 3000–1500 B.C. Their aesthetic quality is impressive. The clarity of design as well as the plastic value of the forms foreshadow the best periods of the Indian art that was to flourish some two millenniums later,

Pl. A1b

Pl. A2

Pl. 9

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from the last centuries B.C. until the arrival of the image-breaking Muslims, shortly after the opening of the second millennium A.D. Noteworthy also is the appearance among these prehistoric remains of deities and symbols that were to come back in later Hinduism, at first inconspicuously but then with increasing frequency, in association with the household gods of popular belief (Text Plates A8 and B3). Apparently the Indus monuments represent an archaic Dravidian civilization of Northwestern India that flourished before the arrival of the warlike Vedic Āryans from the south Russian steppes in the second millennium B.C. We can readily surmise how the cities perished.

Following their fall there is a long gap in the documentation of Indian art. This coincides with a predominantly literary period in religion and civilization, marked by the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads (c. 1500-500 B.C.), which were the religious works of the Aryan herdsmen who conquered and settled the North Indian plain. Sanskrit, the language of this sacred literature, is akin to the dialects of the Greek, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic peoples who were entering Europe at approximately the same period—the first two millenniums B.C.—and have since been responsible for what is known as European history. The Aryan feudal warriors and chieftains and their priests developed in India a historical structure of prodigious vitality. Their religion, based on the holy revelations preserved in the Vedas, and their social order, expressed in the caste system, supplied the framework for a powerful and unique civilization. The priests (brāhmans) and the chieftains (kṣatriyas) made of themselves a new Indian aristocracy, and in the course of the subsequent centuries their fruitful religious insights and philosophical ideas, coalescing gradually with the complex heritage of the earlier, largely conquered races, molded, through a series of creative transformations, that subtle and multifold, extraordinarily flexible spiritual tradition known as Hinduism.¹ During the earliest centuries of their occupation of the Gangetic plain, however, they seem to have made no contribution whatsoever to Indian art: in any case, they have left no visible signs.

The Indus monuments reveal an influence from ancient Mesopotamia, which was the consequence of a continuous sea-borne commerce from the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates to the western coasts of India, as well as of a contemporaneous overland traffic of some kind. During the first period of the Āryan occupation this flow seems to have been interrupted, and it was not resumed until the second half of the sixth century B.C., when the Persian empire had so developed in power and extent that Mesopotamia had become one of its western, and Northwest India one of its eastern, provinces. Gradually the style of Persian

¹ Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York and London, 1951), pp. 393-463; 560-614.

kingship—its manner of statecraft, its ideals of government, and the art of its courts—became the inspiration not only of Occidental but also of Indian rulers, and a Persian form of despotism modeled on the techniques of the Achaemenid Great Kings superseded the hallowed feudal traditions of the Vedic kṣatriyas and brāhmans.² Following the downfall of the Persian empire under the victorious blows of Alexander the Great (330 B.C.), there rose in Northern India the Maurya dynasty (321–184 B.C.), whose kings were kings in the new style and whose art likewise betrayed the influence of the Persian court (Plate 4). Moreover it was precisely this Persian-influenced imperial art that marked the reappearance in India of durable works; for with the celebrated pillars of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (274–237 B.C.) the continuity of the extant monuments in India is resumed. There is a continuous, and immensely various, documented history from that

Aśoka was not a Hindu, however, but a Buddhist; hence in the religious art of his empire all the traditional motifs of ancient Indian art and architecture were made to accord with the ideology of the new gospel.³ The most striking architectural form surviving to us from that period is the stūpa (Plate 6). This was

² Ib., pp. 94-98.

period to the present.

3 Editor's note: The reader unfamiliar with Indian chronology may require at this point some assistance. The Indus civilization (probably Dravidian) seems to have flourished c. 3000–1500 B.C. and to have been broken by the arrival of the Āryan tribes. These were nomadic cattleherders who entered India by way of the northwestern mountain passes during the second millennium B.C. and gradually made themselves masters of the Gangetic plain. The Vedic hymns (collected in four books: Rg-veda, Yajur-veda, Sāma-veda, and Atharva-veda) constitute the earliest extant remains of these people; they are largely prayers associated with priestly rites of sacrifice and appear to have been fixed in their present forms c. 1500-1000 B.C. Appended to the four collections are prose commentaries known as Brāhmaṇas, which were composed in the centuries immediately following the hymns. The Brāhmaṇas contain detailed discussions of the elements and connotations of Vedic ritual and represent an age of meticulous theological and liturgical analysis.

Meanwhile, somewhat removed from the priestly tradition of the sacrifice and perhaps influenced by a surviving Dravidian style of yogic introversion (cf. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. 281), the so-called Forest Philosophers began composing the Upaniṣads: esoteric philosophical dialogues treating of the realization of the tran-

scendent Self. This philosophical movement, which seems to have become prevalent in the eighth century B.C., culminated in the century of the Buddha (c. 563-483 B.c.), who himself was but one of the numerous Indian teachers then pointing the way to spiritual liberation (moksa), absolute illumination (bodhi), and transcendent repose (nirvāṇa). The Buddha's doctrine, involving a radical rejection of the Vedas, became the foundation of a non-Vedic, anti-Brāhmanical, heterodox tradition, to which King Aśoka (c. 274–237 B.C.) gave a secular impetus by imperial espousal. From Aśoka's century forth, Buddhism spread throughout the Orient; nevertheless, in India proper it was reabsorbed presently (c. 1000-1400 A.D.) by the more deeply rooted, and by then greatly sophisticated, Brāhmanic orthodoxy.

Since the earliest important body of Indian art surviving to us (following that of the prehistoric Indus civilization) stems from the century of Aśoka, it is predominantly Buddhist. During subsequent periods, however, Buddhist and Hindu (Brāhmanical) themes alternate in rich profusion. The two traditions flourished side by side, even sharing colleges and monasteries, for nearly two millenniums, until, about the height of the Muslim conquest (c. 1200 A.D.), Buddhism vanished from the land of its birth. It survives in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, Indonesia, Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan.

Pl. 4

THE ART OF INDIAN ASIA

Pl. 472, 476, 596, 609, B11 6

originally, perhaps, a burial mound.⁴ By Aśoka's time it had become transformed into a shrine, either containing ashes or relics, or else simply standing as a memorial. In the course of the subsequent centuries the stūpa developed variously, particularly following the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia (Plates 472, 476, 596, 609, and Text Plate B11), but in its earliest known examples, at Bhārhut and Sāñcī, the form was that of a moundlike central structure surrounded by a railing with sumptuously carved gates.

Pl. 6-36

The sculptural panels on the Sāñcī and Bhārhut gates and railings (Plates 6–36), which contain the earliest known examples of Buddhist iconography, depict events from the biographical legend of the Buddha and scenes from his earlier existences; the lives, that is to say, that preceded the one in which, as Prince Gautama Śākyamuni, he attained enlightenment (bodhi), which is the goal of life. In this early Buddhist art the Blessed One himself is never depicted. Though his presence constitutes the center of every scene, he is invisible and is represented only symbolically—usually by the imprints of his feet, marked by the Buddhist symbol of the wheel. These early stūpas offer priceless material for the study of the popular religion of the time. Numerous deities are sculptured on the gates and on the pillars of the railings, where they serve as guardians of the sanctuary. Their postures give evidence of their fervent devotion (bhakti) to the world-redeeming doctrine of release and to the Buddha himself, the Enlightened One, the "teacher of gods and men"; nevertheless, in origin these deities are non-Buddhistic.

Pl. 39-58,

Second to the stūpas in importance in the art of this largely Buddhist period are the cave chapels (caityas) and monasteries (vihāras), or rock temples and dwellings of the early Buddhist and Jaina monks (Plates 39–58; 78–85). The best known of these are in the west of India, near the coast, in the vicinity of Bombay; for example, at Kārlī, Bhājā, and Nāsik; but there is also an important group in the east, in Oṛissā. Such sanctuaries have withstood the vicissitudes of Indian history and the inclemencies of the subtropical climate only because they were carved in absolutely solid stone; for they are not works of structural architecture, but spacious chambers sculptured in the living rock, designed to suggest structural buildings. The most typical forms of their entrances and main halls can be traced back to the pattern of the primitive Indian hut, which still is known among the hill tribes (Text Plate A3). The caityas are huge, cathedral-like halls with an apsidal end, having a stūpa as the chief object of worship (Plate 39).

Pl. A3 Pl. 39

> Following the fall of the Persian empire a number of the Greek generals of Alexander the Great established kingdoms for themselves in the Orient, so that

⁴ See, however, infra, p. 257.

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Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia came directly under the influence of the Alexandrian Occident. Hellenistic art spread as far as to the borderlands of India in Bactria and the Indus Valley, and there, during the second and first centuries B.C., contending Hellenistic rulers – Demetrius, Eucratides, and their dynasties – waged a complicated war against both the natives and one another. This turbulent Greek adventure closed when Bactria and the Punjab were overrun, in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., by the Scythians or Sakas, and then by the Mongoloid Yueh-chi or Kuṣānas. Under Kuṣāna patronage the art of the Hellenistic colony came to a late flowering in the so-called Gandhara school, which had its center at Peshawar (Plates 62-70). It is one of the anomalies of our subject that these Greco-Buddhist works did not appear until after the fall of the Greek dynasties. They inaugurated a new epoch in Buddhist iconography partly through their sensational style and partly because they introduced new motifs from the Mediterranean sphere. By manufacturing in great quantity Buddha images of their own distinctive type, the artist-craftsmen of Gandhara made an enduring impression not only on India but on the whole continent of Asia. Their art thus proved to be as inspiring as that of Mesopotamia had been at a much earlier date, and as Persian art in the period of Aśoka.

The robust character of the ruling Mongoloid invaders was being reflected, meanwhile, in portraits of their kings, executed in a manner definitely different from that of the Greeks (Plates 59–61); and simultaneously, in the city of Mathurā, which was also under Kuṣāna protection, a remarkable local tradition burst into bloom (Plates 71–77), where we find a Buddha type radically different from that of Gandhāra—one imbued with a vitality of gesture and a realism quite its own. The new forces of Mathurā, Gandhāra, and the Kuṣānas combined with the complex, partly pre-Āryan tradition represented in the stūpas of Sāñcī and Bhārhut, and in the course of time there emerged from this interaction a harmonious classical style, distinctly Indian.

During the second century A.D., in the reliefs of the stūpa of Amarāvatī, the disparate traditions were still being presented side by side. Compare, for example, the two renditions of the Great Departure shown in Plates 91 and 92b. In the bottom panel of the second, which is executed in a vigorous, bold, and animated manner reminiscent of the art of the Kuṣānas, Gautama Śākyamuni, the youthful prince of the Śākya family, is seen abandoning the royal palace of his kingly father to become a homeless mendicant in search of the highest wisdom. Having mounted his favorite steed, he is departing from the palace by night in secret with his faithful charioteer walking ahead, while the goddess of the town (at the upper left) silently unlocks the gate. Divinities of the earth are supporting the hoofs, lest

Pl. 62-70

Pl. 59-61

Pl. 71-77

Pl or ook

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their clatter should arouse the prince's relatives, or the townsfolk, and these then hinder his departure. A god and goddess watch the solemn, silent exit from midair. The other rendition of the same scene in Plate 91 is strikingly different; for here the earlier tradition, which we have already observed at Sāñcī and at Bhārhut, where the figure of the Buddha is never represented, has been preserved. The work is of a delicate and elegant design. Its nimble figures, as though in a scene from some lovely Oriental dance, give us an idea of what Indian art could achieve when proceeding along its old and native, traditional lines. The horse, without a rider, moves at a lively pace, and the parasol of kingly majesty is carried at its side above the invisible Buddha. The coexistence during the first centuries A.D. of these two traditions, diametrically different, and the gradual development then of the classical Indian iconography of the visible Buddha, can be documented from countless images and presents one of the really interesting problems of Buddhist theology and art.

It was in the Gupta period, during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., when the greater part of Northern India, following the downfall of the Kuṣānas, had been unified under a native dynasty, that Indian sculpture, both Hindu and Buddhist, came to its classical perfection. The image of Plate 102 shows how the animated though sometimes crude realism of the Mathurā and Kuṣāna styles was refined in this period and the Hellenistic elements of Gandhāra were absorbed by a basically Indian principle. In this harmonious work the balanced spirituality of mature Buddhism, as realized in the Mahāyāna, has pervaded the very substance of the stone. The unearthly character of the Enlightened One, the Buddha, the savior above gods and men, shines forth with the radiance of a genuine inward experience, transforming the solid matter into a luminous subtle essence suffused

⁵ Editor's note: Two great traditions of Buddhist thinking are distinguished. The first was dedicated to the ideal of individual salvation and represented the way to this end as monastic self-discipline. This was the Buddhism taught by the missionaries sent forth by Aśoka, c. 274-237 B.C. (cf. supra, p. 5, Editor's note); during the first three centuries B.C. it was disseminated as far southward as to the island of Ceylon. The second tradition of Buddhist thought, which seems to have matured in northern India during and following the first and second centuries A.D. (that is to say, during the Kuṣāna period, c. 70-480 A.D., and the Gupta, c. 320-650 A.D.), proposed the ideal of salvation for all and developed disciplines of popular devotion and universal secular service. The earlier way is known as the Hīnayāna, "the lesser or little (hīna) boat or vehicle (yāna)," while the second is the Mahāyāna,

"the great (mahat) boat or vehicle," i.e., the boat in which all can ride. Hīnayāna Buddhism is supported by an extensive body of scripture that was set down c. 80 B.C., in Pāli (an Indo-Āryan dialect of the Buddha's time), by the monks of Ceylon (the so-called Pāli canon). While the Mahāyāna gave recognition to this canon, it produced, in addition, a body of scripture of its own in Sanskrit (the traditional sacred and scholarly language of Vedic India, which has been preserved with little change to the present day). Among the chief of these latter writings are the so-called Prajñāpāramitā texts, the books of the "Transcendental Wisdom (prajñā) of the Far Shore (pāramitā)." The Mahāyanā spread northward into Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan; the Hīnayāna survives chiefly in Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand. Cf. Zimmer, Philosophies of India, pp. 488-559.

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by the inner light of wisdom and perfection. Such inspired and inspiring achievements became the models of all Buddhist art throughout the Indian mainland, and they maintained this position to the end of the first millennium A.D., when Buddhism itself vanished from India proper. Moreover, the same Gupta models furnished the basic patterns for Buddhist art in Ceylon, Siam, Burma, Cambodia, and Java, as well as in the Far East, where the tradition survives with some vigor to the present day. Little is left to us, on the other hand, of the rare jewels of art that must have adorned the cities of India in that golden age: indeed, little remains from the periods preceding; for a succession of invasions by the White Huns (both earlier than and contemporaneous with those of Attila into Europe) converted the whole of North India into a plain of ruins and ashes. The terrible domination lasted nearly a century (c. 480–550 A.D.)—and this in itself suffices to account for the scarcity, already noted, of remains from the early epochs of North Indian life and art.

Both Middle and South India had meanwhile been reached, however, by the Aryanized civilization of the North, so that after the second century A.D., which we have seen represented at Amaravati, an increasing number of monuments command our interest in those zones. Partly sheltered there by the Vindhya Mountains, which separate the northern plains of the Indus, Jumna, and Ganges valleys from the remainder of the Indian peninsula and consequently serve as a bulwark, Hindu civilization survived the Hunnic catastrophe-just as, five centuries later, when the scimitars of Islam began cutting into North India, c. 1000-1400 A.D., and in the end carved out the empire of the Moghuls (1526-1857), in the protected South the Aryanized Dravidian culture-forms survived. A series of powerful Dravidian dynasties is reflected in the temples they left behind: notably those of the Cāļukyas (c. 550-750) at Aihole, Bādāmī, and Pattadakal; the Rāṣṭrakūṭas (c. 750–975) at Elūrā and Elephanta; the Pallavas (c. 600–850) at Māmallapuram; the Colas (c. 850-1150) at Tanjore; the Hoysalas (c. 1100-1310) at Belūr and Halebīd; and the Pāṇḍyas (c. 1100-1350) at Cidambaram and Tiruvannāmalai. The last great centers of the South Indian temple style were the cities of Vijayanagar (c. 1350-1565) and Madura (post 1565).

Map I shows where the chief Indian monuments are located: the Indus Valley ruins at Mohenjo-daro, Chanhu-daro, and Harappā; the early stūpas at Sāñcī and Bhārhut; the Buddhist cave temples of the Western Hills at Bhājā, Beḍsā, Nadsūr, Mānmoda, Nāsik, Kārlī, and Kaṇherī; Gandhāra, in the borderland, beyond the Indus; and Mathurā in the Indian interior. Near the Bay of Bengal, in Oṛissā, are the caves of Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri. Far to the south is Amarāvatī. These are the earlier, mainly Buddhist, sites. The works of the following period, which is

a

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10

Pl. 141

Pl. 204-226

largely Hindu, are centered in Middle India (the Deccan), at Bādāmī, Ajaṇṭā, and Elūrā, and in the deep South, at Māmallapuram, Tanjore, Halebīd, Cidambaram, Tiruvannāmalai, Hampi (Vijayanagar), and Madura.

Hindu temple architecture, like Buddhist, is represented on the one hand by structural buildings and on the other by cathedrals carved into the living rock. The structural series opens with comparatively simple designs, such as that of the seventh-century Cāļukya temple near Bādāmī (Plate 141), which consists of a porch, main room, inner sanctuary containing the principle image of the god, and surmounting tower. Many of the earliest examples of the sculptured series, on the other hand, are incredibly complex. The Śiva temple at Elūrā (Plates 204–226), which was fashioned for the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in the second half of the eighth century A.D., is a magnificent, though not quite completed, compound of elaborate edifices sculptured from the flank of a mountain, with towers, upper and lower stories, terraces, pillarlike flagstaffs, and richly ornamented walls.

The principal works of the elegant and gracious Pallava period center about a cluster of comparatively small monolithic chapels that were carved from boulders, in the seventh century A.D., at the ocean shore near Māmallapuram (Plate 266). This little group is surprisingly various in design and, though it was abandoned before completion, is a veritable museum of Indian temple types. It supplies a key, moreover, to one of the main problems of Hindu temple design; for it reveals the meaning of those spectacular towers so prominent in the later cities of both the South and the North. In Tiruvannāmalai we find, for example, a system of four gates built of innumerable stories, and these are of almost no practical use (Plates 402-405). They are crowned by vast, tubelike, horizontal roofs, called vimāna, which have their forebears in the Pallava chapels and derive ultimately-like the Buddhist caitya design-from the archetype of the primitive hut (Text Plate A3). Comparably, at Bhuvaneśvara, in the North, in Orissa, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, prodigious towers surmount the innermost sanctuaries of the temples (Plate 328). These so-called śikharas differ in outline and design from the storied gate towers of the South (their forms being derived from the vegetable realm: they resemble colossal ears of corn); nevertheless, the two types of structure have identical meanings. Both are symbols of the tangible presence of a divine essence. For, as we shall see, although Indian temples are based on a number of traditional patterns, all announce this common theme. Some, like the soaring gates of Tiruvannāmalai, symbolize the central mountain of the universe, which carries on its summit the realms of the celestials; others, like Bhuvaneśvara, inspired by the idea of the Universal Tree, suggest a holy fruit containing the essence of the god; still others, such as the Sun Temple of Koṇārak (Plates 354-355), are the

Pl. 402–405

Pl. A3

Pl. 328

Pl. 354-355

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divine chariot of the Lord of the World. All can be traced from comparatively humble origins, and at Māmallapuram we shall find many clues to their symbolic inspiration.

Through both the general structure and the sculptured details of such monuments Hindu cosmology and mythology are unfolded before the devotees who come on pilgrimage to the holy places. The ornamentation of the façades and interiors is a pictorial encyclopedia of mythology and religion. On the outside of the Śiva temple of Elūrā, for example, is a relief of the deity himself as an archer, in a chariot drawn through the air by divine prancing steeds (Plate 226). The god's left hand elevates the bow; his right, having drawn the string to the lobe of his right ear and to the full extent of the shaft, has just released the arrow. His four-headed charioteer is the god Brahmā, the creator of the world, and his white bull, Nandi, is before them. The legend illustrated is that of Śiva Tripurāntaka—Śiva "The Destroyer (antaka) of the Three Towns (tripura)"; that is to say, of the threefold universe: (1) the earth, (2) the middle space or atmosphere, and (3) the firmament.

For it is related in a celebrated legend that Siva once annihilated and simultaneously redeemed the universe with a single shaft. The demons, titans, or antigods (asuras), who are the half-brothers and eternal rivals of the gods, had contrived to gather to themselves the reins of cosmic government. They had been led in this enterprise by an austere and crafty tyrant named Maya,6 who, when he had driven the deities from their seats, constructed three strongholds, one in the firmament, one on earth, and a third in the atmosphere between. All were invincible; and by a feat of magic he then amalgamated them into one prodigious center of demon chaos and tyrannical world rule. A prophecy made it known that if this incredibly powerful keep were pierced by a single arrow the rule of the antigod would end. But who among the gods could deliver such a blow? Not Indra, the rain and thunder king; not Agni, the deity of fire; not Vāyu, the deity of wind. These were efficient, decent, heavenly specialists, but no match for such a cosmic assignment. Indeed, none of the radiant refugees from Mount Sumeru, the central mountain of the universe (the Indian counterpart of the Greek Olympus), who had been driven from their paradise into the bitter void of exile, could muster the power to rive Maya's defenses. Therefore they all turned in hopeful prayer to Siva, the god beyond gods, and he, with his bow, flying in his chariot, performed the deed with ease.7

⁶ Not to be confused with the term $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$; cf. infra, pp. 105-107.

⁷ Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization (New York and London, 1946), pp. 185-188.

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Vigorous and dynamic, though without the weight and compactness of an earthly warrior, the beautiful apparition dashes from the background of the relief with the lightness and irresistible power of a lightning flash, in a swift triumphant gesture devoid of static substantiality. Energy is suggested in the backward inclination of the shoulders and in the tension of the outlining curve. The volume of the great chest denotes power. The entire work, indeed, is a display of triumphant strength; for the sculptured figures, in their movement and direction, even unite compositionally the two walls of a corner, which are at an angle of ninety degrees. The relief does not seem to adhere to either surface, but leaps forth from its mother stone, obliterating the distinction between relief and sculpture in the round by the boldness of its plastic style and the almost careless skill of a completely competent craft.

Hindu sculpture is one of the most magnificent chapters in the whole history both of the world's art and of the world's religion—for in Indian civilization there was never a division or fundamental contradiction between art and religion, or between art, religion, and philosophic thought. Inherited revelation, the scholastic traditions of the priesthoods, and the popular beliefs worked upon each other by ever renewed processes of influence and were pervaded meanwhile by philosophical ideas originating in ascetic experiences, yogic exercises, and introverted intuition. The luxuriant display of religious sculpture so characteristic of the great temples of pilgrimage is therefore a readily legible pictorial script that conveys, through an elaborate yet generally understood symbolism, not only the legends of popular cult, but simultaneously the profoundest teachings of Indian metaphysics.

Pl. 286

For example: the deity recumbent on the serpent in Plate 286 is Viṣṇu, the second of the great gods of the orthodox Hindu trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Brahmā is known as the Creator, Viṣṇu mainly as the Preserver and Supporter of the universe, and Śiva as its Destroyer; yet each may appear in any or in all of the roles, since in substance these three supreme personalities are identical.⁸ Here Viṣṇu is seen as the source, the transcendent lord, of the created worlds and of their manifold creatures. The waters of life, which feed creation, are his elementary material aspect: they are the first tangible emanation of his divine essence, which, though beyond form, yet evolves and comprehends all forms. Here they are symbolized in the coils of the huge serpent whose dwelling is the cosmic abyss and whose name is "Endless" (ananta). Upon this immeasurable body the god reclines. Ananta, it is said, supports on his expanded hoods the whole weight of

⁸ For a full discussion, cf. Zimmer, op. cit.; see and London, 1948), Part II; and see infra, pp. 145-also, Zimmer, The King and the Corpse (New York 146.

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both the earth and the celestial spheres; for he is the ever-living cosmic ocean out of which the world and the forms of its beings—both terrestrial and divine—evolve as temporal existences. Known also as "The Remainder, The Rest" (śeṣa), he is the abyssal water that has not become transformed into creatures but remains at the bottom of the universe as its primary life-force, energy, and substance, feeding all. Ultimately, Ananta is identical with Viṣṇu himself, who in human form is seen recumbent on his coils. The animal and the human aspects, that is to say, are dual manifestations of a single divine presence, which, by and in itself, is beyond the forms it assumes at will when bringing the world-process into play. The anthropomorphic apparition through which it is made manifest to human devotees is in essence identical with the reptile, and this, in turn, with the timeless element of the cosmic sea.

The Hindu standing before this relief in one of the shrines at Māmallapuram is reminded that the divine essence, transcending all limitations, comprises both the light and the sinister sides of life; that the demonic as well as the godly aspects of the cosmic process (whether in the individual or in the world) originate equally in Visnu as balanced qualifications of his transcendent, crystal-pure, and infinite essence. This idea is indicated by the two giant figures standing at the right, one of whom is regarding the god in an attitude of challenge. The Hindu devotee is immediately reminded of a well-known myth telling how, at the dawn of time, two tremendous demons crept from Visnu's ears, and hoping to prevent the unfoldment of the universe, threatened to annihilate Brahmā, the first-born emanation of the recumbent world-dreamer, who was already superintending the processes of cosmic evolution. The little figure kneeling at the right in the present rendition is the goddess Lotus, Padmā-Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu's spouse, who is the personification of the universe itself. She is imploring Viṣṇu, the Supreme Being, to save her. The demons were embodiments of the principles of ignorance and violence, combining stupidity and spiritual inertia with sheer animality, sensual desire, the lust for life, ambition, and a will for power; Brahma, on the other hand, is pristine spirituality and wisdom. Visnu rescued Brahma, and therewith the goddess, simply by reabsorbing the demons into the substance of his own body-not, however, extinguishing them utterly, for they were destined to reappear in a later age. In fact, during the endless round of the cycling eons they would emerge again and again to subvert the ordered processes of the world. They are no less a part of Viṣṇu's all-comprehending nature than is Brahmā, since violence and ignorance are ingredients no less indispensable to the life of the universe than pure spirituality and holy endeavor. The recurrent interferences of the two demons with the benevolent forces of the Creator insure the occurrence of those dramatic conflicts

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and agonizing periodical disasters that are of the essence of geological as well as of human history. Moreover, the transcendent Great God himself destroys the universe in periodic gestures of annihilation, reabsorbing all of its substance into his dreaming body—just as a dreamer takes back a dream when he enters the deeper quietude of dreamless sleep. For the universe, according to the mythology of the worshipers of Viṣṇu, is the cosmic dream of the god here seen recumbent on the back of the serpent whose elevated heads uphold the world; and we are all figures in Viṣṇu's dream: particles of his vital substance, mysteriously animate, like dream beings, within him. This the pilgrim knows who stands in reverence before this eloquent relief. The ambivalence and aloofness of the infinite God is the reality to be realized when viewing this work of art and hearing the corresponding myth. It is a myth familiar to the Hindu from childhood; and it is again recited to him by the priests in attendance at the holy shrine.

A splendid chapter in the history of Hindu sculpture is that of the bronze images of the Cola period and later, chiefly from the South. Whereas images in stone are part of the temple structures, those in bronze, being less heavy, are carried in processions at festivals and in the various temple rites. Most relate to the favorite deity of the later Hinduism of the South, Siva, and represent either Siva himself and those gods and goddesses who figure prominently in his mythology, or else certain South Indian saints celebrated as the great god's model devotees. A good example is the graceful figure of a youth in Plate 410, representing Siva, the lord of demons, ghosts, and specters, in one of his benevolent, auspicious manifestations (dakṣiṇa-mūrti). He is "holding a lute" (vīṇā-dhara), in the role of teacher of initiations (the lute, which the two forward hands once supported, is missing), but we are reminded by the uplifted hand exhibiting a deer that although in his present aspect he is the divine teacher—of "music" (sangīta), of the holy scriptures ($s\bar{a}stra$), of "divine wisdom" ($j\bar{n}\bar{a}na$), and of the asceticism that leads to union with the god $(y \circ g a)$ – Siva is also the lord of the wilderness, the divine huntsman, the "Lord of the Beasts" (paśupati). And the two roles are linked; for both are roles of destruction (strange as this may seem to us of the West), since the arts, as well as yoga, wisdom, and the scriptures, lift the heart to union with the transcendent principle and so break the bonds that bind it to the world. This gentle Siva, therefore, is none other than the brilliant, terrible Siva of the bow: and thus again, in this little bronze, apparently so innocent, the devotee feels the impact of the double message that is the essence of all the great works of Hindu art.

The art of Jainism, on the other hand, is comparatively uncomplicated and constitutes in the history of Indian imagery a separate chapter. It follows to some

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extent the general evolution of India's sculptural styles; nevertheless, when rendering its own most characteristic and prominent subjects—the rigid forms of its perfected saviors—it adheres conscientiously to a stiff archaic ideal. The monumental figures shown in Plate 395, for example, carved in the living rock of a fortress hill at Gwāliar, North India, date from as late as the fifteenth century A.D. The magnificent evolution that led to the spiritualization of the image of the Buddha in the Gupta period (Plate 102) and the phantasmagoric manifestation of Śiva at Elūrā (Plate 226), as well as the transcendent serenity and aloofness of the recumbent Viṣṇu at Māmallapuram (Plate 286), have not transformed or even touched the archaic attitude of this intentional primitivity. These saviors, the so-called "Victors" (jinas) or "Makers of the River Crossing" (tīrthankaras), lead the way across the whirling life-torrent of the unending cycle of rebirths. The most celebrated, Mahāvīra, was a contemporary of the Buddha in the fifth century B.C., but the earlier Tīrthankaras anteceded that period by centuries and some may date back even to pre-Āryan times."

Jaina sculpture is the only art in India in which absolutely unclothed figures are found (Plate 245), such nakedness having been a monastic rule of the Jaina ascetics until the fifth century B.C. The nakedness of the statues, like that of the monks of the archaic period, represents a condition of absolute detachment from the world, from the social order, and from the common values of earthly life. For the Jaina gospel of release from the bondage of life and rebirth was unremitting in its disciplines of renunciation: through a sustained process of ascetic cleansing, the monk's career was to culminate, ideally, in self-starvation. Hence an arctic, really frozen atmosphere hovers around the images of these Jinas, who, through incredible mortifications of the body, conquered the powers of the cycle of life. They stand in striking contrast both to the sublime gentleness and serene grace of the Buddhas (who are likewise Victors, but of a more spiritual, psychological, less downrightly physical kind) and to the divine strength and lavish, somewhat ambiguous charm that radiate from the Hindu gods, who personify those very forces of cosmic life which both the Buddhas and the Jinas transcend when they pass to nirvana from the wheel of rebirth.

In this introductory chapter I shall not enumerate all the schools of Hindu art that carried forward and transformed the heritage of the Gupta period, but shall indicate only two more outstanding styles and close with a glimpse of Indian influence abroad. One of the most remarkable inflections of the Gupta tradition was in Bengal under the Pāla and Sena dynasties (c. 730–1250 A.D.), where a style developed of a peculiarly rich, sweet flavor. The works were important

9 Cf. Zimmer, Philosophies of India, pp. 181-227.

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Pl. 102

Pl. 226 Pl. 286

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historically because of Bengal's geographical position between Nepal and Tibet in the north, and Java, with its famous centers of Buddhist learning, in the southeast. Bengal inspired to a remarkable degree both the arts and the philosophies of these two realms.

These smooth black-slate Pāla images are of high technical accomplishment and elegant design, yet suggest metalwork in their clear-cut outlines. The ideals of ivory carving and of manuscript painting seem to have prevailed in them over sculptural vigor; there is no truly plastic modeling, harmony, or repose, nor any sense of a dynamic surge from within. An incrustating sweetness has begun to freeze the life and grandeur of the earlier period, and the manner of glamorous decoration marks the beginning of a long, slow decline. Nevertheless, the workmanship has a beauty of its own that is not inappropriate to the image of a god (Plates 383–385).

Pl. 383-385

Pl. 388

Plate 388 shows another very late style: an image from Mysore, c. 1200 A.D., of Visnu surrounded by the symbols of his power. Among the convolutions of the ornate arch framing the crowned head appear the god's ten chief legendary avatārs or incarnations: at his lifted right hand is the Fish (matsya); above that, the Tortoise $(k\bar{u}rma)$; then the Boar $(var\bar{a}ha)$, the Man-Lion (narasimha), and the Dwarf (vāmana); while on the opposite side appear Rāma of the Ax (Paraśurāma) - the violent son of a violent Brāhman, who was made manifest for the destruction of the kṣatriya caste; 10 Rāma of the Rāmāyaṇa; Kṛṣṇa, the teacher of the Bhagavad Gītā; the Buddha (who, in this late, syncretistic period, was regarded by the devotees of Visnu as an incarnation of their own all-embracing deity); and finally Kalki, the form in which Viṣṇu is to appear at the conclusion of the present eon. The two goddesses at either side are the deity's goddess queens. They are Lakṣmī, whom we have just seen praying at his feet-she is the bestower of prosperity; and Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, music, and fluent speech. Viṣṇu himself is in the manifestation known as Viṣnu Trivikrama, "of the Three Strides": by simply setting his feet down he created, with his first stride, the earth, with his second, space, and with his third, the firmament; hence the heaven of rapture beyond the visible sky is termed "Visnu's Footprint" (viṣṇu-pada). The deity can be identified by his apparel, emblems, and weapons. In his hands (two of which are missing) he holds, normally, a lotus, a war club, a keen-edged discus, and the conch that is blown as a trumpet when he goes to war.

Pl. 147–160, 168–175 As for painting in India, there is little left. The caves of Ajaṇṭā still preserve an astounding series of frescoes (Plates 147–160 and 168–175) and, since in ancient

10 Mahābhārata 3. 116-117; see also H. H. Wilson, The Vishnu Purana (London, 1840), pp. 401-404.

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Hindu literature one reads much of painting and painted walls, it is certain that this bold, simple, and superb style derives from a long and masterly tradition. However, we possess scarcely any further visible evidence. These priceless remains from the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. are practically all that we know of an Indian craft which—as can be deduced from other indications—was one of the dominant sources of the Buddhist art of the entire Far East.

No review of Indian art would be complete if the branches of the tradition that opened southward to Ceylon and Indonesia and northward into Nepal, Tibet, and Chinese Turkistan were omitted; for, as we have seen, the monuments of the Indian mainland are largely ruins. The more we find and reconstruct, interpret and understand, the more do we realize how much has been lost. The additional fragments preserved in colonial territories help to fill in a few of the gaps, and they add, moreover, fresh evidence of the flexibility of the Indian heritage. For the Indic civilizations, both Buddhist and Hindu, of Ceylon, Cambodia, Siam, 11 and Java possessed superb art geniuses of their own. What they achieved in developing the models and ideas from the motherland was far from a mere repetition or imitation. In many of their realizations one perceives that an original, though kindred, genius - by transforming what it received - discovered fresh solutions of ancient problems, drove to the very heart of Indian wisdom, and sometimes almost surpassed what the Hindu masters had achieved, or were simultaneously achieving, in the same direction. We shall devote, therefore, a number of chapters to the chief documents and periods of the colonial styles.

> ¹¹ Editor's note: the older name for present-day Thailand is more often used in Dr. Zimmer's text, having been current when he wrote.

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