

## Riddles of the Rock-Carved Hindu and Jaina Sculptures and Inscriptions at Rakhetrā

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The archaeological site of Rakhetrā,<sup>1</sup> featuring a striking medieval rock-cut sculpture of Ādinātha, and epigraphic evidence of an unidentified Jaina monastic lineage, has not yet received the attention it deserves.<sup>2</sup> (Figures 1 and 2) The colossal Ādinātha image has been strategically placed at the sunset point next to an old Hindu cave shrine, and a collapsed cave temple, overlooking the fields alongside the river Orr (Urvaśī) near the village of Gadhelna (Gaderna). Located next to it is a rock-carved shrine displaying foot images (*pada-cihna*) in memory of the Jaina monk Viśālarāja, as indicated by an inscription above. A second Jaina inscription (Figure 3), carved on the cushion on which the Ādinātha is seated, was likely added some time after the creation of the sculpture, since it records the visit of a pilgrim in VS 1675 Āṣāḍha Kṛṣṇa 8 “Śanivāra” (CE 15.7.1618), and contains references to Canderī and the village of Bithālā two kilometres to the north on the opposite side of the river. M. B. Garde (1925: 15f., 27, 33f.), the chief investigator of “Rakhetarā,” visited the site in 1924. He published a brief description, one photograph of the rare triptych of rock-carved sculptures of the Hindu gods Brahmā-Naṭeśa-Varāha, and summaries of three inscriptions, two of them Jaina, which he recorded under the labels “Rakhetra or Gadhelna” and “Rakhetra (Bhiyadant),” assuming that Rakhetarā (\*Rakṣetrā), most likely a designation for the cliffs overlooking a strip of agricultural land near the river Orr, was another name for the village of Gadhelna. His report remained the only published record of this Government owned site to date.<sup>3</sup>

Google Maps mistakenly uses the tag “Jain caves” to identify the site, which in 2010 Digambara Jains had branded “Digambara Jaina Atiśaya Kṣetra Bhiyādāṃṭa.”<sup>4</sup> The archaeological record shows that the valley of the Urvaśī river was a thriving hub of Digambara Jaina religiosity in the 10th and 11th centuries, particularly the areas around Būrhī Canderī and Thūbana, which is still

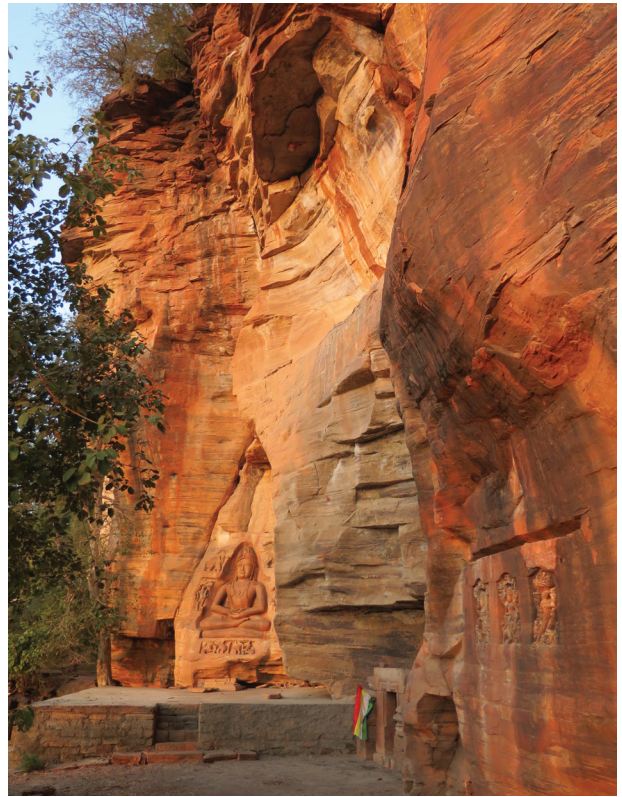


Figure 1. Rock-carved Ādinātha sculpture, cave temple and Hindu triptych at Rakhetrā.

an active pilgrimage site today. Yet, before the creation of the Jaina images, and today, the caves of Rakhetrā were and are primarily associated with Hinduism, as the locally used name Bhiyāṃdānta or Bhīmasena as a designation for the “monumental” Ādinātha sculpture still seems to claim.<sup>5</sup> The Jaina rock-carved images are not located in caves, nor is there any evidence of previously existing Jaina “cave temples.” The only remaining, entirely featureless, cave at Rakhetrā is today marked out as a Hindu religious site, a claim that is underlined by eight older, historically and aesthetically significant rock-carved sculptures of Hindu deities north and south of the centrally located area of the cave and the Jaina images. Only a photograph of one of these images, the well-preserved triptych, has previously been published.<sup>6</sup> The Hindu sculptures were placed by Garde in the same period as an important, hitherto unpublished<sup>7</sup> set of inscriptions to the north of the Ādinātha image, recording waterworks organised by the Pratihāra king Vināyakapāladeva II,<sup>8</sup> VS 999 Āṣvina Vadi 30 [3?] (CE 1.10.942), VS 1000

5 As a personal name “Bhīma” is also evident in the Jaina records. But I am not aware of any Jina image being addressed in this way by Jains.

6 Garde 1925 Plate V (b) & Garde, in Blakiston 1927 Plate XLIII (e). Cf. Bruhn 1977 part II.

7 Images of all three inscriptions at Rakhetrā are now published in SIDDHAM under the Google-friendly keyword “Rakhetra” The historical information contained in the two Jaina inscriptions has been recorded in the JAINA PROSPOGRAPHY database.

8 Bhandarkar 1929: 2110, Puri 1957: 96, Bruhn 1969: 62, Willis 1996:

1 24°46'14" N 78°1'55" E.

2 The article is based by a chance visit to Rakhetrā (Ashoknagar District, Madhya Pradesh) on 28 December 2018, on recommendation of a local police officer stationed at the Digambara temples of Thūbonajī. A visit to the Jaina sites of the Canderī region was recommended by Michael Willis. They were explored with the help of Muzaffar Ansari, locally known as Kallebhāi.

3 While Day 1965: 439, Willis 1996: 42, 50 and Singh 2015: 44f., 180 summarize Garde's findings, Bruhn 1969, K. C. Jain 2010, G. Fussman, Sharma et al. 1999 I: 20, 2003 I: 68ff. (who abandoned the plan to conduct research on the local Jaina culture), and Sears 2015: 51, 60f. do not mention the site of Rakhetrā, though describing the ruins of the nearby 9th- to 11th-century Digambara Jaina temples of Devagarh (Deogarh), Būrhī (“Old”) Canderī (old Candrapura) and Thūbana (Thūbonajī).

4 Manjrekar (2016) documented the meanwhile removed dedication (*lokārpaṇa*) indicating that the path (*mārga*) leading up to the “temple” (*mandira*) and the platform (*cabūtarā*) in front of the Ādinātha image were constructed VS 2067 Caitra Badi 9 = CE 7.5.2010 by Gopālasīnha Cauhān, former legislator (*vidhāyaka*) from Canderī, and by Gendālāla Sarāfa, former chairman (*adhyaṅga*) of the Caubīsī Digambara shrine of Thūbonajī.



Figure 2. Ādinātha

Bhādrapada Sudi 3 (CE 7.8.943) and VS 1000 Kārttika (CE October 943). (Figure 6) Garde's (1927: 166f.) final report describes the site in the following way:

Within the limits of the village Rakhetra about two miles south-east of Bithla carved in the western face of a hill overlooking the Orr river is a series of rock-cut sculptures. The biggest sculpture in the group is a seated image of the Jaina Tirthankara Adinatha distinguished as such by a miniature figure of a bull carved on the seat and popularly known as Bhiyadant or Bhimasena. The height of the image is 10' 6" and the width at the base 7' 6". The head-dress is somewhat uncommon for a Jaina sculpture inasmuch as it resembles the *jaṭā* or matted hair of Siva. The head is flanked on either side by an unfinished figure of an elephant and we notice on the right side of the Tirthankara an image of the goddess Padmavati and on the left that of the goddess Chakresvari. On the seat is an

inscription dated in V. S. 1675 and on the pedestal, a *dharmachakra* or the wheel of the law between two scenes of elephants fighting with lions.<sup>9</sup>

At the point where this sculpture is carved, the face of the hill is chiselled into a right angle. The sculpture of Adinatha described above is carved on the arm of the right angle which faces the south. On the other arm which faces the West is carved a small niche crowned with a spire and enclosing a pair of foot-prints of Sri Visalaraja as is recorded in an inscription dated in V. S. 1555. The back wall of the niche is decorated with lotuses carved in relief while a swastika is carved in the floor on either side of the foot-prints.

Sculptured on the façade of this same hill on both sides of the Jaina group are a number of niches sheltering images or groups of images of Brahmanical deities, mostly Saivite. The latter include figures of Ganesa, four-armed Parvati

<sup>9</sup> The *gaja-śārdūla* motif.

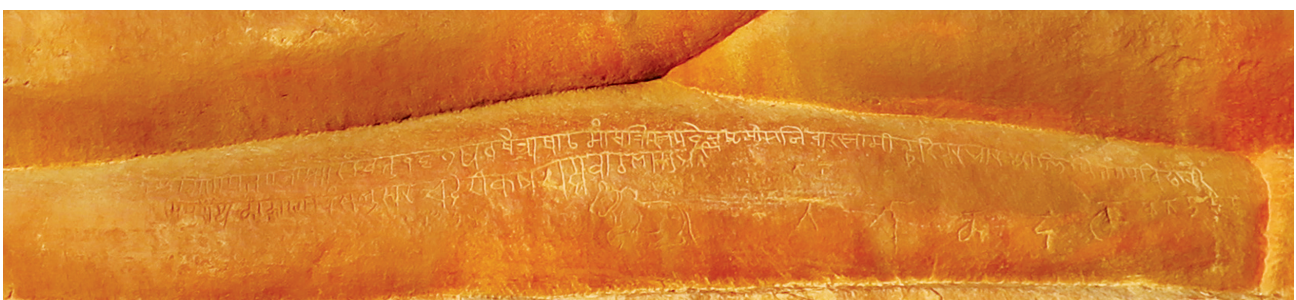


Figure 3. Inscription of VS 1675 under the Ādinātha sculpture, with the cognizance of Ādinātha.

seated on a crouching lion, groups of Hara-Gauri seated on their respective vehicles, Siva dancing (*tandava*) and a group, better finished than the rest, of the twelve-armed Siva dancing in the midst of his attendants and flanked on the right in a separate niche by Brahma and by Vishnu in the boar incarnation on the left (Plate XLIII (e)). These Brahmanical sculptures though smaller in dimensions are better works of art than their Jaina neighbours and some five centuries earlier in date as shown by the accompanying inscriptions which date from the middle of the 10th century A. D.

Garde (1925: 16) dated the Jaina images “more than five centuries later” than the Brahmanical images, primarily with reference to the accompanying inscriptions, though, stylistically, the Ādinātha image may be much older than its inscription and the *lāñchana* underneath. Likely, Garde also considered the similarities to the monumental 15th-century rock-carved Jina sculptures at Gvāliyar and Khandāragiri/Canderī, which may have served as prototypes, although smaller Jaina rock-cut sculptures are evident in the Gopakṣetra region already from the 13th century.

The fact that the recently renovated Jina image represents the Jaina *tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha (Rṣabha), and not Śiva or Bhīmasena, is iconographically unambiguously indicated by the combination of the *padmāsana* posture, the elongated ears, the protruding matted hair, and the accompanying Jaina *yakṣiṇīs* Ambikā (not: Padmāvati), with a child and branch of mango-tree, to his right and Cakreśvarī to his left, with the four hand-attributes disc

(*cakra*), conch (*śāṃkha*), gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya-mudrā*), and lotus (*padma*).<sup>10</sup> Because of their distinctive hairstyle, images of Ādinātha are sometimes mistaken to be representations of Śiva. Unsurprisingly, the statue of Ādinātha is locally associated with Hinduism (no Jains seem to live in the nearby villages), if not specifically with Śiva, and referred to as Bhiyāmdānta or Bhīmasena. Yet, Bruhn has shown that a similar “reduced-” or “smooth *jaṭā*” hairstyle, with lateral strands, is not uncommon for representations of Rṣabha, and evident in medieval Jina representations at Gvāliyar Fort and Devagarh.<sup>11</sup>

The artificially extended cave is likely to have been used for centuries by Hindu ascetics as places of refuge, and by Jaina monks as sites for the performance of *sallekhanā*. This much can be deduced from the existence of an inscription placed above the niche carved into the sandstone rock, featuring foot images (*pādukā*) of the Jaina monk Upādhyāya Viśālarāja, who must have starved himself to death at this location, although this is not explicitly mentioned. (Figure 4) The rock-cut niche is framed by the outlines of an unfinished rock-cut shrine ornamented with a spire, three lotuses, a *svastika*, and two one-word long inscriptions (Figure 5), one of which, reading “*munirāja*,” contains a spelling mistake and could be interpreted differently (e.g. as Mu[ñ]jirāja).<sup>12</sup> The second one is unreadable. More or less legible are the following characters of the longer inscription on top

10 Cf. Shah 1987: 232 for a similar sculpture in Khajurao.

11 Bruhn 1969: 220, 116ff., 133 Fn. 1, 478-89, Figs. 105, 131, 354, cf. 323-41)

12 On the poet Muñjarāja, and other influential Śvetāmbara householders at Māṇḍū, the capital of the sultanate of Mālvā, see K. C. Jain et al. 2010: 928-39.



Figure 4. *Carana-pādukās* of Upādhyāya Viśālarāja with inscription.

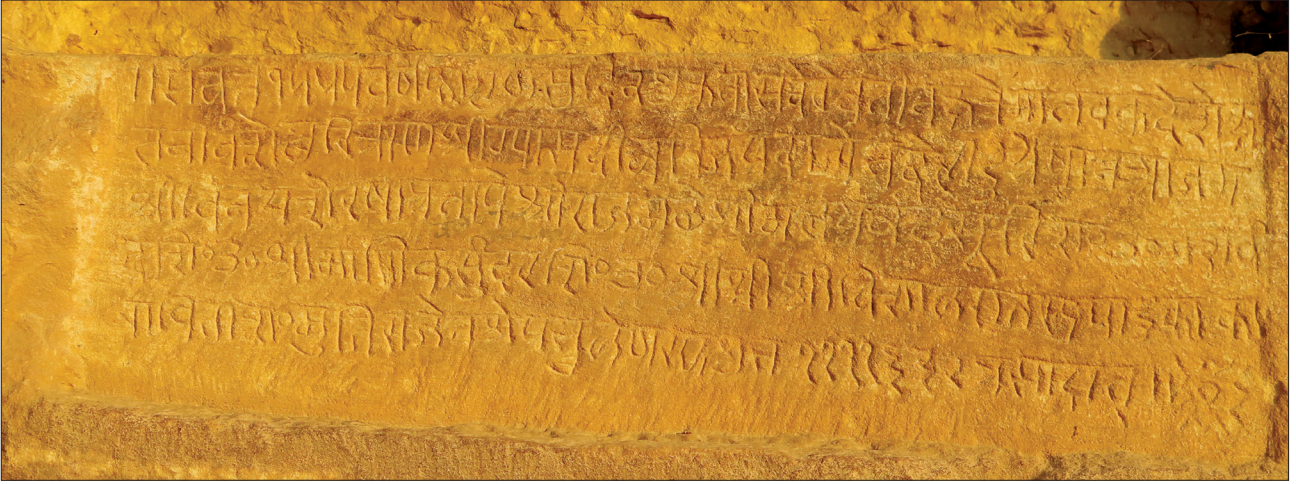


Figure 5. Munirāja inscription dated VS 1555

of the rock-cut niche presenting a date and six names:

- [1] saṃvat 1555 varṣe phāguṇa-sudī 2 śukra-vāsare  
revatī-nakṣatre mālavakadeśe kṣa-  
[2] lac[ī]<sup>13</sup> -vaṃṣe suritrāṇa śrī gyāsud[d]īna<sup>14</sup>  
vijayarāj[ye] ...  
[3] śrī vinaya<sup>15</sup>... pratāpe śrī rājamaṇe śrī  
malayacaṃdasūri-ś[ī]<sup>o</sup> u<sup>o</sup>... rva-  
[4] ... -śi<sup>o</sup> u<sup>o</sup> śrī māṇikasūmdara-ś[ī]<sup>o</sup> u<sup>o</sup> śrī  
viśālarājasya pādūkā kā-  
[5] ... ś[ī]<sup>o</sup> munirājena śreyas tu ... sā[kṣ]āt ||

If Garde's (1925: 33) summary reading of five names and of the abbreviated titles ś<sup>o</sup> and u<sup>o</sup> is accepted, and further imaginative guesswork is applied, the only partially legible text, written in corrupted Sanskrit in irregular script, can be tentatively reconstructed:

- [1] saṃvat 1555 varṣe phāguṇa-sudī 2 śukra-vāsare  
revatī-nakṣatre mālavaka-deśe kṣa-  
[2] laj[ī]-vaṃṣe suritrāṇa śrī gyāsud[d]īna-vijaya-rāj[ye]  
...  
[3] śrī vinaya [?śeraśā]-pratāpe śrī rājamaṇe śrī  
malayacaṃdasūri-ś[īṣya]<sup>o</sup> u[pādhyāya]<sup>o</sup> [ke]śarva-  
[4] [ddha]-śi[ṣya]<sup>o</sup> u[pādhyāya]<sup>o</sup> śrī māṇikasūmdara-  
ś[īṣya]<sup>o</sup> u[pādhyāya]<sup>o</sup> śrī viśālarājasya pādūkā kā-  
[5] ravitā-śi[ṣya]<sup>o</sup> munirājena śreyas tu[leṇa] ra[ṇaśvata]  
1111 ii ra | sā[kṣ]āt || §

The recorded date VS 1555 Phālguna Śukla 2 corresponds to “Tuesday” 12.2.1499 “U-bhadrapada Nakṣatra,”<sup>16</sup> not to “Friday” (Śukravāsara = Śukravāra) “Revatī Nakṣatra” as the rest of the inscription seems to indicate. However, a revised date VS 1554 Phālguna Śukla 2 Śukravāra Revatī Nakṣatra yields precisely “Friday” 23.2.1498 “Revatī Nakṣatra.”<sup>17</sup>

13 The inscription has not been well executed. The word should read “kṣalajī.”

14 The name Ghīyāth al-Dīn, “alias Gayasuddin” (Jain 2010: 1208) has been written “Gyāsuddīna-” Nasīruddīna-Mahammada Khiljī II by Vairāgyarativijayagaṇi (in Sonī 2016: 17).

15 Maybe “vijaya.”

16 www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~yanom/pancanga/

17 But maybe the PANCANGA calculates weekdays and lunar

As far as the historical substance of the inscription regarding the Jaina tradition is concerned, the main new piece of information that has not yet been published is the existence of a fifth member of the Jaina monastic lineage of Munirāja, who evidently recorded his *guru-śiṣya paramparā* at the time of the benevolent reign of Prince Muhammad (Mahamūda) “Ghiyās al-Din” (r. 3.6.1469-29.3.1501) of the Māṇḍū Mālvā Sultanate of the Khaljī dynasty (1436–1531).<sup>18</sup> It is clear that the person missing in Garde's account, Malayacandasūri's disciple, whose name is illegible, was an *upādhyāya*. Some characters in the middle of the name are readable, but not the rest. Dániel Balogh has read the faint first character of line 4 as “ḍha” or “ddha” and looked for plausible Jain names to make up the rest of the name, particularly the first character that could be interpreted as “ja,” “je,” “te,” “re” or - more imaginatively - “ke.” His reading “Jaśarvaddha” or “Jaśavīddha” as vernacular designations for Jaśavṛddha or Yaśovṛddha seems less plausible than “Keśarvaddha,” a name that is in use in both Digambara and Śvetāmbara traditions, though, for consistency, a Sanskrit name would be expected. Even the character “śa,” also read by Balogh, is not consistently used in the inscription in this form, and hence was left undecided by J. C. Wright, who deciphered most of line 1 and 2, as well as *sākṣāt* at the end of the inscription. Whatever the accurate name may be, fact is that the inscription records the existence of one further *upādhyāya* in the line of disciples between Malayacandasūri and Upādhyāya Mānikasundara, which Garde's report omitted:

Malayacandasūri  
Upādhyāya [Keśarvaddha]  
Upādhyāya Mānikasundara  
Upādhyāya Viśālarāja  
Munirāja

mansions for past years.

18 Day 1965: 220, 243 describes the reign of the regional king “Ghiyath Shah” as “A Period of Peace and Plenty,” during which the Jains, and other religious traditions, received generous patronage, “to restore confidence” and to attract merchants and credit (pp. 423-25). See also K. C. Jain et al. 2010: 928-39, 1207-11 on the mutually beneficial relation between “Gayasuddin Khilji” and the Jains.

The lineage record covers a period of at least 50 years. It is significant, because this lineage is presently not identifiable through other sources, and “remains to be explored” (Patil 1952: 114f.).<sup>19</sup> Possibly, the inscription is the only surviving record.

An interesting question is whether the list represents a Digambara or a Śvetāmbara *guru-śiṣya*-lineage. At first sight, the question seems trivial. The titles *sūri*, *upādhyāya*, and *muni* were commonly used in both Jaina traditions at the time, though a Digambara inscription of the 15th century would probably include the title *bhaṭṭāraka*. Almost all Jaina archaeological relics of the Canderī region pertain to the Digambara tradition, which was dominant in the 9th-11th centuries at Būrhī Canderī, and later also in Canderī, which, after its creation in the 13th-14th century, was in the second half of the 15th century chosen by “Canderī Maṅḍalācārya” Bhaṭṭāraka Devendrakīrti for the (now defunct) *bhaṭṭāraka* seat of the Digambara Mūlasaṅgha Nandi Āmnāya. The holders and their following were almost exclusively recruited from the regionally prevalent Paravāra and Khaṇḍelavāla Jaina castes.<sup>20</sup> In VS 1554 the Canderī Paṭṭa (later: Mālavā Paṭṭa) was occupied either by Devendrakīrti’s successor Tribhuvanakīrti (Vidyānandī Paravāra), who in VS 1522 consecrated the local Caubīsī Mandira, or by one of his successors Sahasrakīrti, Padmanandī or Yaśaḥkīrti (a contemporary of Ghīyāth al-Dīn), who altogether, under the inclusive rule of the Mālavā sultans, were instrumental in the creation of most of the early rock sculptures at nearby Khandāragiri (Khandāgiri),<sup>21</sup> not least the recently reconstructed monumental standing Ādinātha image, carved in the “uncouth” and “uncomely”<sup>22</sup> 15th-century Gvāliyar style.

And yet, names, titles and the style of the *pādukās*, taken together, could suggest a Śvetāmbara affiliation. While the Digambara Paravāra caste was dominant in the Canderī region in the 15th century, the most influential Jains at the Mālavā capital of Māṅḍū further south were migrants of the Śvetāmbara Osavāla and Śrīmāla castes from nearby Gujarat, who were attached to the mendicants of the Tapāgaccha and of the Kharataragaccha

that roamed in the region as well.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Śvetāmbara householders held important offices at the court at Māṅḍū could explain the existence of a small shrine for a Śvetāmbara monk who may have performed *sallekhanā* and died at Rakhetrā. However, the riddle of the history of the Jaina rock-sculptures at Rakhetrā can only be solved, in part, if the lineage of the Jaina monks can be identified through triangulation with an independent source. The iconography of the *pādukās* alone, depicting feet rather than footprints, provides no firm indication of the sectarian affiliation of the lineage of Malayacandasūri. Contrary to the argument accepted by a Privy Council judgement in 1933, that Digambaras accept only footprint-images, but reject representations of body-parts as objects worthy of worship,<sup>24</sup> the evidence shows that Digambara ascetics are also commemorated by means of foot-images.<sup>25</sup>

A general question pertains to the religious significance of the numerous Jaina rock-cut sculptures that in medieval times were mass-produced all over India. Were they created as objects for worship, as ornaments or as means of religious propaganda and demarcation of sacred spaces? Owen (2010: 2f.) rejected the first two options,<sup>26</sup> emphasizing the “power of place” and how “images and their boulders collectively define Jain sacred space.” The *pādukās* created in memory of a named Jaina monk point, however, to the possibility that Rakhetrā was also regarded as a sacred spot, sanctified by a performance of *sallekhanā*.<sup>27</sup> Likely, the peregrinating Upādhyāya Viśālarāja chose to starve himself to death at this site, because of its remote location and the presence of the rock-carved Digambara image of a Jina in meditation.

Another riddle concerns the unfinished nature of most of the Hindu and Jaina rock-carved sculptures at

23 K. C. Jain et al. 2010: 928ff., 1207ff., Bhadrabāhu Vijaya, in Sonī 2016: 21-5. If “vinaya” in line 3 of the inscription reads rather “vijaya” and turns out to be part of the full name of Malayacandasūri, then the lineage would likely be a branch of the Tapāgaccha.

24 “The Svetambaris, who prefer to worship the feet themselves, have evolved another form of charan [...] which shows toe-nails, and must be taken to be a representation of part of the foot. This the Digambaris refuse to worship as being a representation of a detached part of the human body” (AIR 1933 PC 193)

25 See Fig. 3, Carāṇa pādukā of Bhaṭṭāraka Devendrakīrti, Kīrtistambh Nasīyān, Amer, in Detige 2014: 28.

26 See Bruhn 1969: 56 on Jina images as objects for worship and as architectural ornaments, and Owen 2010: 4f., 2012: 3 on the different functions of Jaina rock-cut architecture and sculpture boulder-reliefs.

27 See Flügel 2006.

19 Inquiries amongst colleagues in India and Belgium have not yielded any results.

20 Cf. Willis 1996: 51ff.

21 K. C. Jain 2010: 918f., 1028f.

22 Bruhn 1969: 115ff., 1998: 102.

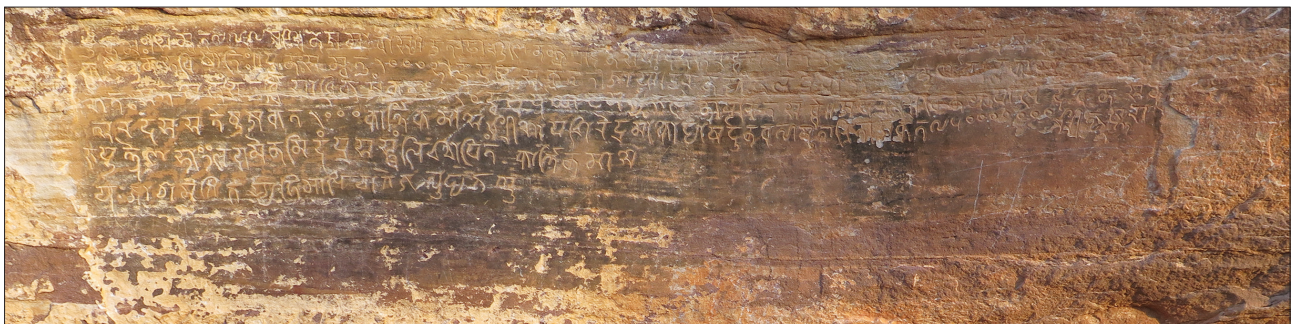


Figure 6. Inscriptions of Vināyakapāladeva II.



Figure 7. Unfinished ensemble of Śiva-Pārvaṭī (Hara-Gaurī) relief sculptures with a standing Viṣṇu in between.

Rakhetrā. An obvious answer would point to the volatile political conditions in the region at times, resulting in the sudden withdrawal of patronage for the commissioned artists; such as the end of Pratihāra rule, as far as the unfinished Hindu sculptures are concerned (Figure 7), and the end of the rule of Ghiyās al-Din in CE 1501, as far as the Jaina sculptures are concerned.<sup>28</sup>

This leaves the conundrum whether the *pādukās*, commemorating a deceased monk, or the Jina image existed first at the site. The question can presently only be answered by way of dating the style of the Ādinātha sculpture, which seems perfectly in tune with 15th-century and older Dīgambara Jaina iconography.<sup>29</sup> The inscription under the Ādinātha sculpture has most certainly been added later.

In reply to the question, why stand-alone images of Jinas and rock-cut sculptures were mass-produced during the medieval period, three answers have been offered to date. Two of them focus on the motives for the creation of duplicate images and the demarcation of Jaina religious geographies, namely merit-making,<sup>30</sup> and the sacralisation of space. It has also been noted that there is an intrinsic Jaina interest in the serialisation and multiplicity of Jina representations as an effect of a doctrinal ideal motivating iconographic typification,<sup>31</sup> and also an expression of the principle of mechanical solidarity one may add.

28 See K. C. Jain et al. 2010: 928-39, 1207-11 on the mutually beneficial relation between “Gayasuddin Khilji” and the Jains: “After Gayas Shah Khilji begins a period of immediate decline both for the Jaina subjects and the Sultan rulers.”

29 On iconographic grounds, Gerd Mevissen (E-mail 9.2.2019) suggested a date between the 11th and 13th centuries for the Ādinātha sculpture ensemble. From the 13th century, Jaina cave shrine sculptures carrying inscriptions existed in the Gopakṣetra region, as shown in Willis 1996: 11ff.

30 Bruhn 1969: 56, 1998: 111: “The great number of images [at Deogarh] is not the result of any concentrated scheme, but due to donations made over the centuries by pious Jainas, some rich and some without adequate means.”

31 Bruhn 1954: 134, Cort 2010: 59, Owen 2012: 44.

The mass-production of religious imagery in medieval India was also related to sectarian competition and competition for patronage. The cumulative effect of this was the demarcation of overlapping sectarian Jaina fields of influence through strategically placed images which, like the Aśoka inscriptions, were placed alongside important travel routes, such as rivers;<sup>32</sup> in the present case the river route connecting Thūbonjī with Gvāliyar and Devagrha, and more distant centres. The preference for the creation of distant sacred sites, transcending concerns of local Jaina communities, has also a totalising function.<sup>33</sup> Whatever their intended effects were, the medieval Jaina religious sculptures at remote sites continue to provide incentives for personal pilgrimages even today, whether they are actively venerated or not, are historical relics or merely serve as symbolic statements signalling the association of a geographical area with a Jaina religious sphere of influence, as (re-)claimed today by Thūbonjī.

All photos are by Peter Flügel, 28.12.2018.

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32 See Sears 2015.

33 Flügel 2006.

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