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Jainism and Jaina Bronzes

HINDUISM, JAINISM and BUDDHISM are the three principal religions of India. Hinduism developed as an offshoot of Brahmanism, which was the most ancient religion of India. When Brahmanism became the religion exclusively of Brahmins, the highest caste, Jainism came into existence as a revolt against this situation and was open to other castes. Finally, Buddhism was founded in the fifth century B.C. There are many theories concerning the relative antiquity of these religions, but discussion of this problem is inappropriate here.

Jainism has always been confined chiefly to India and has scarcely spread outside that country. The notable traits of Jainism are the numerous splendid temples, statues and works of art, the monks, who are dedicated to the pursuit of learning and penance, and the influence of the ascetic community over its lay followers. These characteristics have led to charity and acts of benevolence, mainly in the field of temple-construction, fasting, ceremonial worship, vegetarianism and the consequent uplift of the Jaina lay community.

Although two broad divisions later developed within the faith—the Digambara (sky-clad) and the Shvetambara (white-robed)—the Jainas form a community with a basic religious unity. They worship twenty-four Tirthankaras (also called Jinas), not as celestial beings but as human beings who realized their true selves, attained the highest knowledge and thus were freed from bondage. Such emancipated souls are many, but among these the Tirthankaras, who established and organized the Jaina church, known as Samgha—composed of monks, nuns and laymen (both men and women)—are the “makers of the ford to cross the ocean of misery, bondage and rebirth” and are worshiped in Jaina temples as godheads.

They are not, however, Creators. Freed from attachments or aversions of any sort, they do not favor or frown upon any creature. Theoretically, they are worshiped for their various virtues; in practice, however, Jainas worship them just as followers of other religions worship their god or gods.

The difference between the two main Jaina sects mentioned above is that the former insists on complete removal of all possessions including garments, while the latter allows white robes to be worn. This has been reflected in their image-worship, beginning in the early centuries of the Christian era, and the differences became acute by the end of the fifth century, that is, about a thousand years after the death of the last Tirthankara, Mahavira, in 527 B.C. The images worshiped by the Digambaras show no apparel or ornament, while those of the Shvetambara sect wear a lower garment (dhoti).

Although Buddhist art is better known than Jaina, nevertheless the latter produced innumerable images in brass, copper and stone, and even in precious and semiprecious gems. These are still worshiped in Jaina shrines in almost all of the states of India. A great many have found their way into museums in India, Europe and America, as well as in private collections.

The representations of Tirthankaras are shown either singly or in groups of three, five, twenty-four etc. Since the images of the Tirthankaras resemble one another, they can be identified only by the distinguishing marks shown either below the feet of the Jina or on the pedestal of the figure. In early Jaina art the identifying symbols of Tirthankaras were not shown, but the name of the Jina was given in the inscription on the pedestal. In the absence of either of these practices, identification of the Jina becomes very difficult, as is shown in many

1. Tirthankara figure, Digambara sect.
From Central India, eighth century.



3. Vimalanatha, the thirteenth Tirthankara, dated 1717. Above: front view; opposite page: side and back with inscription.



2. Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara (front and back). From Central India, dated 1316.



figures discussed later. The Jinās have two arms and are either seated on a lotus pedestal in the posture of meditation (*padmasana*),¹ with both hands lying in their laps, or standing in meditation, in *kayotsarga* pose.² All the figures have slender, youthful, beautiful bodies and pleasing countenances.

The seated Tirthankara figures are very similar in postures to those of the Buddha; the only difference is that figures of Buddha have two garments, whereas the Jinās either wear only the lower garment or are nude, depending on which Jaina sect they belong to.

THE MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY has in its collection twelve Jaina bronzes, representing both sects. All the single figures, except two relating to tribal style, will be described first.

A bronze figure of Jaina Tirthankara (Fig. 1) is of the Digambara sect, standing in *kayotsarga* pose on a pedestal.³ Owing to the absence of any emblem or inscription it is difficult to

identify the Tirthankara, but it can be dated to about the eighth century, and it is probably from Central India. It seems to be the earliest Jaina bronze in the collection. The figure is much worn as the result of worship for a long time.

Figure 2, of the same sect, represents the first Jaina Tirthankara Rishabhanatha (also called Adinatha) who can be recognized by the bull shown on top of the pedestal in the center.⁴ The Tirthankara sits in *padmasana* position on a cushion placed upon a throne supported by a lion at each end. This throne, called *simhasana*, is used especially for gods and emperors. Below the bull is a small standing figure which is not entirely clear. Still lower, on the front face of the pedestal supporting the throne, is an inscription beginning at the right and running to the left all around. It indicates that the bronze was installed in the Samvat year 1373 (A.D. 1316) by disciples of Subhakirti deva, of Mula Samgha. The head of the Jina shows no *ushnisha* (a protuberance) on top of the head, as is commonly seen on figures of Tirthankaras and Buddhas. The modeling of the face and body seem to be typical, although figures in this style are not well known and few are published. However, the physiognomy has a certain similarity to a few Jaina sculptures in the Nagpur Museum, on the basis of which one can tentatively assign these to Central India, possibly the Raipur District. This is a rare specimen of the bronze art of the region. The profile of the face shows a long nose and long, wide eyes, such as are more commonly seen in Western India, but the physiognomy is typical of Central India.

The thirteenth Tirthankara, Vimalanatha, is shown in Figure 3.⁵ His symbol is the boar, represented by the sketchy incised figure in the rectangular box in the center of his seat. The figure is made of solid cast bronze. The modeling indicates a fairly late date for this bronze. An inscription around the back and sides of the seat notes that the image was consecrated in Samvat year 1774 (A.D. 1717) by Shri Vijayakshama Suri of Tapagachchha. The low seat supported on short legs and decorated with a vine scroll is unusual. The thick girdle and the name of the monk and his group (mentioned

in the inscription) indicate that the bronze belongs to the Shvetambara sect. The style shows that it was probably made in Gujarat.

Parshvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara (Fig. 4),⁶ is regarded by modern scholars as a historical personage. He lived two hundred years before the death of Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara. Because of his close affinity with the snake, figures of Parshvanatha usually have a seven-headed snake-hood as a canopy above the head, as shown in this simple figure. The Tirthankara sits in *ardhapadm-asana*⁷ posture on a seat with an open-lotus petal design in front; there may have been a lower portion of the pedestal and legs, now lost. The motif of the open-lotus petal suggests a date around A.D. 1200-1225.

Parshvanatha is represented as a main figure with two other Tirthankaras in a group of three Jinas (Fig. 5).⁸ He is seated in padmasana posture on a cushion resting on two lotuses in relief, upon a rectangular pedestal. Behind him rises a cobra with seven hoods enclosed in a circular strip (partly missing) representing a halo. On either side stands a Jina in kayotsarga posture, each having his whole body enclosed in an oblong halo. The figures of these Jinas cannot be identified owing to the absence of accompanying symbols. On the right side of the pedestal is a seated male attendant, Yaksha,⁹ carrying a citron in his right hand and a money bag in his left. He is the Jaina counterpart of the Hindu Kubera. On the left side of the pedestal is a two-armed Yakshi (the female attendant) called Ambika, carrying a child on her left arm.

The Yaksha and Yakshi, the devotees of the Tirthankara and defenders of his religion, usually guard the corners of the pedestal on which he is seated. Jaina texts also assign Yakshas the positions of fly-whisk bearers in the retinue of a Tirthankara image. From the Gupta period (fourth century) onward their figures are invariably appended to the sculptures of the Tirthankaras. The bronze under discussion was cast by the lost wax process, with some parts cast separately and joined on later, as is obvious from a study of the back of the image. The eyes and eyebrows of the figures



4. Parshvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara. Above: front view; below; back view. Date ca. 1200-1225.





5. Parshvanatha with two other Jinas. Left: front view; right; back view. From Western India, dated ca. 1052.



6. Group of five Tirthankaras (front and back views), dated 1126.



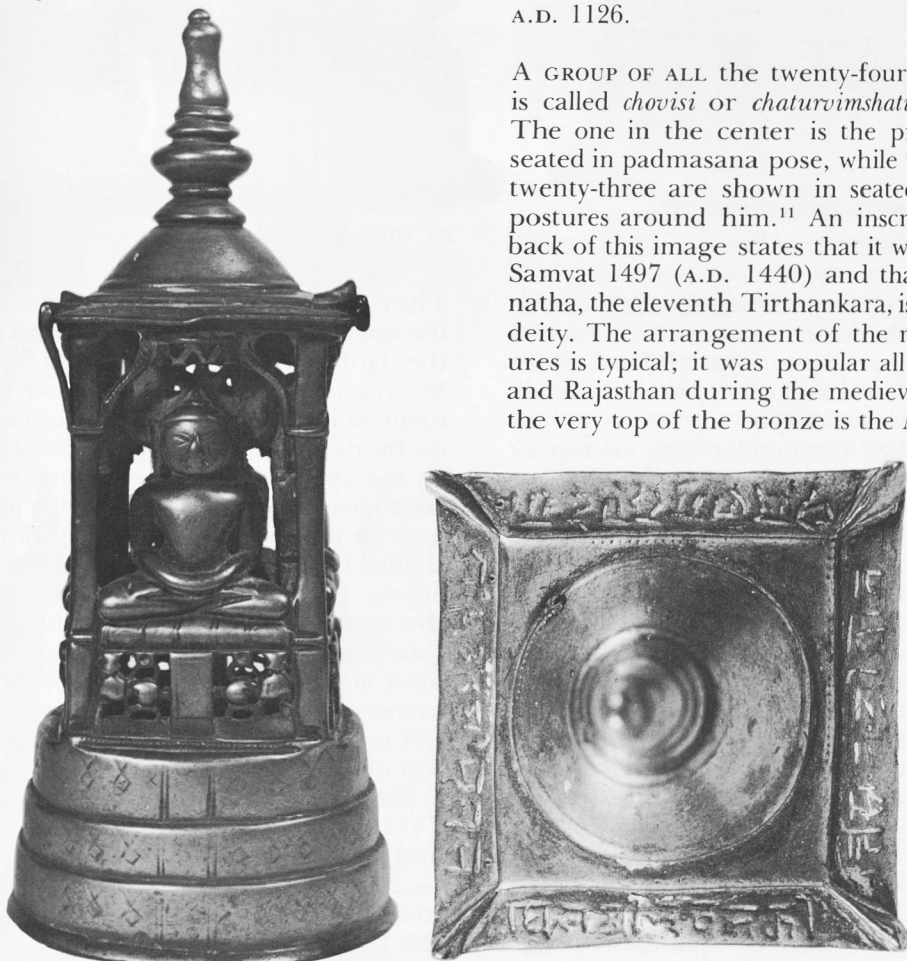
7. Chovisi - all twenty-four Jinas - with Shreyamsanatha as principal deity (front and back views).

are rendered by simple incised lines, probably after casting. The style is typical of Western India (Rajasthan or Gujarat). The arrangement of the figures is derived from an earlier Western Indian tradition known at least as early as the seventh century. Especially noteworthy is the way of representing the lotus at the end of a long stalk, arranged like a scroll. A short, only partly legible inscription on the back gives Samvat 1109 (?) as the year of the image's consecration, equivalent to ca. A.D. 1052.

A group of five Tirthankaras (Fig. 6) has the largest figure in the center, seated in padm-

asana posture on a simhasana.¹⁰ Since this figure wears a snake-hood, he may be either Parshvanatha or Suparshvanatha. On either side the Jina stands in kayotsarga pose in front of pillars supporting a semicircular arch. At the junction of the pillars and the arch are seated two other Tirthankaras in padmasana pose. None of these four Tirthankaras can be definitely identified. The bronze is much defaced and worn through worship, by being bathed, cleaned with a brush and rubbed dry with a cloth. The back of the bronze shows an incomplete inscription giving a date Sam (= Samvat) 1183, corresponding to A.D. 1126.

A GROUP OF ALL the twenty-four Tirthankaras is called *chovisi* or *chaturvimshatipatta* (Fig. 7). The one in the center is the principal deity, seated in padmasana pose, while the remaining twenty-three are shown in seated or standing postures around him.¹¹ An inscription on the back of this image states that it was installed in Samvat 1497 (A.D. 1440) and that Shreyamsanatha, the eleventh Tirthankara, is the principal deity. The arrangement of the remaining figures is typical; it was popular all over Gujarat and Rajasthan during the medieval period. On the very top of the bronze is the *Mangala Kala-*



8. Samavasarana, assembly of gods, of the Digambara sect. From Gujarat. The inscription around the top of the baldachin (right) gives the date as about 1477.



9. Bronze in folk style, dated ca. 1421.

sha (auspicious water pot). On the right of the *simhasana* of the main figure sits his Yaksha Ishvara holding a trident in the left hand, while on his left is his Yakshi Gauri; both are seated in *lalitasana* pose (at ease).

On the raised rectangular base are represented the heads of *navagrahas* (nine planets). This practice of showing nine (or eight) heads of the planets on top of the pedestal is common to a number of bronzes from Western India. On the extreme ends of the elaborate recessed pedestal, male and female worshipers as donors of the image are seated facing each other. It is not known where the bronze was found, but it must have been cast in Gujarat or Rajasthan, as suggested by the recessed pedestal. The triangular top suggests a type of superstructure called *phamsana*¹² in texts dealing with architectural tradition.

*Samavasarana*¹³ (Fig. 8) is an assembly of gods, human beings and animals attending the sermon of a Tirthankara.¹⁴ For this purpose a special structure is erected, square or circular in plan, having three separate fortifications, one inside the other, at specified distances. In the intervening spaces sit different classes of beings.



10. Tirthankara (front and back), date and origin unknown.

The edifice is entered from four directions, and the center is a raised platform or dais on which the Tirthankara sits and delivers the sermon. So that those on all sides can see him, four identical images of the Tirthankara are placed on the dais, each facing in a different direction. In the upper (square) part of this bronze the four identical images are seated in *padmasana* pose on the dais in a pavilion. Their heads are shaded by umbrellas (*chakra*), symbols of sovereignty. The lower (circular) portion represents the assembly with the three fortifications. The four entrances are indicated by double incised lines and the human beings by incised diamond-shaped designs with crossed lines above. On top of the pavilion is a baldachin and on top of this an inscription, now partly defaced, seems to give a date Samvat 1534 (?), about A.D. 1477. This indicates when the bronze was made and consecrated and also shows that it belongs to the Digambara tradition. The style of the image is that of Rajasthan or Gujarat, probably the latter.

Figure 9¹⁵ shows an example of folk style rendered in a peculiar way. The bronze is a rare type, and though late and crude, an interesting



11. Three Tirthankaras (front and back), possibly of the twelfth century.



specimen the like of which has not yet been published. The Tirthankara sits in padmasana pose under a triple umbrella joined by bars to a semicircular arch supported by thin pillars. On the front of the arch, at the bottom, are two tiny elephants; on the fronts of the two pillars are two garland bearers, and below them two yakshas represented as fly-whisk bearers. The simhasana and the pedestal are crudely fashioned. In the center of the pedestal is a small standing figure, somewhat defaced. Usually this place is reserved for a goddess, Shanti devi. On top of the pedestal are nine small heads representing nine planets, four on the right and five on the left. The back bears a partly legible inscription. The date is not quite clear, but seems to read 1478 (?), A.D. 1421 (?). The back of the halo is unusually elaborate.

The Tirthankara with five-headed snakehood¹⁶ (Fig. 10) is of peculiar style. He sits on a semicircular pedestal, along the top of the front of which is a row of stylized lotus petals. The provenance is not known, and no Jain Tirthankara image of this type of tribal style has yet been published. For this reason the figure is important.

The three nude Tirthankaras shown in Figure 11¹⁷ pose under a trefoil arch, the ends of which run straight down to the top of the pedestal. The central figure is somewhat taller than the two at the sides. All three stand under the stylized triple umbrella. The modeling of all the figures is crude. Large, long eyes and straight noses with wide nostrils suggest an early medieval Western Indian tradition. Two attendants, one at each side of the Tirthankaras, carry long objects, very crudely indicated fly-whisks, which these two yakshas carry in all Jain traditions. An inscription on the back (Fig. 11, right) gives the date Samvat 1104 for the installation of the image. This does not seem to be a date in the Vikrama era of 57 B.C., since the script of the inscription is definitely later. If the date is in the Saka era which antedates the Christian era by seventy-eight years, it would be equivalent to A.D. 1182. Even this date appears to be somewhat early for the script, but if it has been read correctly the bronze must date from the end of the twelfth century.



12. Figure probably of the goddess Ambika.

Yakshi Ambika,¹⁸ shown in Figure 12,¹⁹ has already been mentioned in relation to Figure 5. The faces of all the figures were worn down during worship. There is no inscription. The rendering of the tree above the head of the goddess is peculiar; its top portion is mutilated. According to Jaina mythology, however, the tree under which the goddess sits is the mango tree, and the tree in this bronze thus is meant to be a mango tree. The goddess sits in the lalitasana pose, with one foot tucked up. The right foot rests on the back of a lion, her mount. In her right hand she seems to carry an object which looks like a much worn fly-whisk, but usually Ambika carries a mango branch. At each side of the goddess is a worn figure, and a third stands in front of the pedestal, but Ambika usually has only two figures of her two sons (one on her lap, the other standing beside her). Since our identification of the tree is also doubtful,

the identification of this image must remain tentative.

The Jaina bronzes in the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri represent both sects of Jainism, as we have seen. The periods range from the eighth century to the eighteenth. Most of the bronzes represent the Western or Central Indian tradition, but in general a wide variety of types and styles is represented.

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- ¹ Both legs are crossed and locked with soles of the feet upward. In the *ardhapadmasana* one foot is placed as in *padmasana*, while the other is neither crossed nor locked with it, but simply rests below the other, as illustrated in Figure 4.
- ² Standing straight with arms hanging down in an easy way, without stiffness or tension in any limb.
- ³ Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia, Acc. No. 70.170. H. 10.3 cm. Gift of Dr. Samuel Eilenberg.
- ⁴ Acc. No. 66.160. Total H. 14.2 cm. This and all the following bronzes are the gift of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Eilenberg.
- ⁵ Acc. No. 66.164. H. 14 cm.
- ⁶ Acc. No. 63.3.25. H. 7.8 cm.
- ⁷ See note 1.
- ⁸ Acc. No. 65.167. H. 13.9 cm.
- ⁹ U. P. Shah, "Yaksa Worship in Early Jaina Literature," *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 3 (1953) 54-71 ff.; B. C. Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography I* (Lahore 1939) 90 ff.
- ¹⁰ Acc. No. 65.160. H. 11.2 cm.
- ¹¹ Acc. No. 65.166. H. 26.4 cm.
- ¹² A type of stepped pyramidal roof with all the steps diminishing on all sides as they ascend, popular in the medieval period in Gujarat and Rajasthan. A typical example can be seen on the *sabhamandapa* (assembly hall) of the temple built by Vimala Saha at Delvada, Mt. Abu.
- ¹³ U. P. Shah, *Studies in Jaina Art* (Banaras 1955) 85-96.
- ¹⁴ Acc. No. 66.165. H. 17.9 cm.
- ¹⁵ Acc. No. 66.158. H. 19 cm.
- ¹⁶ Acc. No. 63.3.24. H. 14 cm.
- ¹⁷ Acc. No. 65.169. H. 19.8 cm.
- ¹⁸ U. P. Shah, "Iconography of the Jaina Goddess Ambika," *Journal of the University of Bombay* 9 (1940) 147-169.
- ¹⁹ Acc. No. 66.209. H. 8.6 cm.