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South Asian Religions and Visual Forms
in their Archaeological Context

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THE BUDDHA’S RELICS AND THE NĀGAS AN ATTEMPT TO THROW LIGHT ON SOME DEPICTIONS IN THE AMARAVATI SCHOOL

Monika Zin

The literary basis of the sculptures produced in Buddhist Andhra has not been preserved, with the result that several depictions remain unexplained, leaving many questions regarding the beliefs and imagery of the region open (Zin 2004, 2011, 2012b). In addition to the many problems concerning the identification of the scenes is that while several events from the life of the Buddha were repeatedly shown, and in their variations at that, many were not depicted at all. Some episodes were never given visual form (as with all the narratives connected with the childhood of the Bodhisatva); some were represented only at a later point of time. There are also episodes which were depicted only in the earlier period, and neglected after the initial wave of popularity, other themes apparently regarded as being more interesting for reasons not quite comprehensible to us.

With regard to the story revolving around the last days of the Buddha, some old reliefs from Amaravati have survived to provide testimony that in the earliest art (1st century BCE or perhaps even earlier), the narratives were depicted extensively and with more detail than in other parts of India. Part of an old representation of the parinirvāṇa dealing with the war of relics has been preserved. In another relief, also only partially preserved, the war of relics has been represented again. And there is yet a third relief—the most valuable of them all—that shows episodes preceding the death of the Buddha and the parinirvāṇa itself. The episodes are labelled with inscriptions (Ghosh and Sarkar 1964-1965; Schlingloff 1987, 246-248), which give the sequence illustrating the last journey of the Buddha, including the inscriptive reference to the Buddha’s “elephant look” upon the beautiful city of Vaiśālī, thereby providing evidence that the narrative similar to the one we know today from the Mahāparinibbāṇasuttanta (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911, vol. 2, 72-168; Rhys Davids and Foley Rhys Davids 1899-1921, vol. 2, 78-191) or

2. Amaravati, Chennai Government Museum, no.99, lower part of an old (torana?) pillar, 2nd face, ill. e.g.: Burgess 1887, pl. 44.4; Kempers 1932, pl. 7; Sivaramamurti 1942, pl. 17, 1-3; Ray 1983, fig. 40; Ebert 1985, pl. 5, fig. 7, fig. 1b-c (drawing); Rosen Stone 1994, fig. 167; Dehejia 1997, fig. 125.
4. Amaravati, Amaravati Site Archaeological Museum, no.62, lower part of a (torana?) pillar, 3rd face, ill.; Sarkar and Nainar 1972, pl. 3a-b; Ghosh and Sarkar 1964-1965, pl. 39, 40; Davidson 1972, pl. 2.2; Ray 1983, fig. 15; Rao 1984, pl. 263; Ebert 1985, pl. 4, fig. 6, fig. 1a (drawing); Schlingloff 1987, fig. 25, 401 (drawing); Roy 1994, pl. 32 (mirror inverted), pl. 33 (det.); Dehejia 1997, fig. 122 (drawing); Gupta 2008, fig. 15c; Miyaji 2010, pl. II-1.
the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (ed. Waldschmidt 1950, German transl. Weber 1999, 105-271)\(^5\) was current in the region around 100 BCE. This early iconographic tradition was, however, not to continue; there is not even a single representation of the *parinirvāṇa* in the mature and later Amaravati School. One could of course argue that all representations of the *parinirvāṇa* from this period have been lost. However, given the large number of reliefs which have been preserved, and which repeatedly show the same subject matter, the possibility of all reliefs depicting a particular event having got lost is extremely remote.

In just one relief from Amaravati, from ca. 120 CE, bearing the scene, we find that the relics have been divided into eight portions, with their dispatch to the seven cities being depicted (the eighth was probably Kuśinagarī, where the relics were divided) (fig. 1).\(^6\) The representation has its forerunner in three huge slabs at Kanaganahalli (fig. 2)\(^7\) (probably from the very beginning of the Common Era), and was apparently modelled on it—this is evident when we compare the depiction of the dancing scene beneath the almost similarly represented table with eight portions of relics, and the elephants carrying boxes of relics leaving the city gate of Kuśinagarī. On two of the Kanaganahalli slabs representing the said events, the labelling inscriptions have survived. They give titles to both scenes, the celebration of the eight portions of relics and their dispatch, *sariravibhaga*, the “division of the relics”. Kanaganahalli also has the eight portions of relics and seven elephants represented. The same model will be repeated in a later relief at Kanaganahalli\(^8\) from ca. 130 CE (fig. 3).

The division of the relics and their dispatch will not reappear again in the pictorial material known from Andhra today. In the centuries that followed, the *stūpa* would remain the only motif used in narratives to denote the entire story.

What we however time and again encounter in Kanaganahalli, Amaravati and several other sites is that the *stūpa* is being worshipped by the *nāgas*.\(^9\) There are also some representations of *nāgas* venerating a reliquary.\(^10\) We can perhaps presume that the reference here is to the one and the same portion of relics venerated by the *nāgas* both in the reliquary and in the *stūpa*.

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5. For further references to the textual traditions cf. Bareau 1971; Schlingloff 2000, no.8(8), vol. 1, 64; for the narratives concerning relics cf. Strong 2004.

6. The relief was published e.g. in: Burgess 1887, pl. 25.2; Bachhofer 1929, pl. 123.1; Sivaramamurti 1942, pl. 43.1; Rao 1984, pl. 230; Dehejia 1997, fig. 136; Schlingloff 2000, vol. 2, 13 [7] (drawing).

7. The reliefs were published in Aramaki, Dayalan and Nakanishi 2011, 65, 71 and Poonacha 2011, pls. 95-97.

8. The relief was published in Poonacha 2011, pl. 124E.

9. Such representations are not fully unknown in other part of India (cf. for Gandhara: Kurita 2003, vol. 2, fig. 530; for Mathura: *Gandhara, das buddhistische Erbe Pakistans* 2008, 338; Rhie Quantanilla 2007, fig. 255) but large number of representations from Andhra do not leave doubts about a special role of the depictions there. The knots out of snake bodies in depictions in Mathura, so typical for Andhra and known already in the older art, show that the iconography comes from the Amaravati School.

10. Amaravati, British Museum, no.8 (medallion on cross-bar), ill.: Mackenzie drawing from April 1817, British Library, no.WD1061, folio 63; Fergusson 1868, pl. 62, fig. 1; Vogel 1926; pl. 10b; Bachhofer 1929, pl. 117.2; Barrett 1954, no.85, pl. 37; Zimmer 1955, fig. 95a; Stern and Bénisti 1961, pl. 50; Deneck 1970, figs. 65-67; Gangoly 1973, pl. 37; Sivaramamurti 1979, fig. 20; Knox 1992, no.27, 85 (with further references); Roy 1994, pl. 104; Dehejia 1997, fig. 144. Amaravati, drum slab with depiction of a *stūpa*, BM, Mus. no.69, Mackenzie-drawing from March 1817, British Library, no.WD1061, folio 47; Fergusson 1868, pl. 81, fig. 1; Stern and Bénisti 1952, pl. 43; Barrett 1954, no.101; Deneck 1970, figs. 55-57; Knox 1986, fig. 41; Knox 1992, no.68, 130, (ibid. ref. for further publications). Nagarjunakonda, Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Site Museum, no.32 (*āyaka* frieze), 1st register, ill.: Vogel 1933, pl. 4a; Longhurst 1938, pl. 42b.
Kanaganahalli provides us with a label for the stūpa worshipped by the nāgas (or rather: adorned with nāga bodies) (fig. 4): rāmagāmilo āṭhabhāgathubho upari, “Rāmagrāma stūpa of one-eighth (part is depicted) above”.

The relief does not illustrate what the Mahāparinirvānasūtra relates. Rāmagrāma (in Sanskrit version: Rāmagrāmaka) is explicitly mentioned as one of the eight cities which received their share of the śarīra, and as the city of Koliyas (Pali), Krauḍyas (Sanskrit), i.e. the capital of the neighbour kingdom of the Śākyas, lying on another side of the Rohiṇī river. According to Faxian, the distance between Rāmagrāma and Lumbinī is five yojanas.

Falk has recently presented a new explanation for the controversial word aṭhabhāgiye in the Aśokan pillar inscription at Lumbinī, arguing that Aśoka provided Lumbinī with “real” relics, i.e. with a portion from one of the eight parts into which the relics had been divided, thereby making the place an aṣṭabhāgika.

If a fraction of the relics was in fact brought to Lumbinī (and perhaps also somewhere else), it appears possible that Aśoka opened for it the nearby stūpa of the Krauḍyas in Rāmagrāma (cf. below).

Faxian writes that the stūpa in Rāmagrāma was abandoned and worshipped by elephants; perhaps it was neglected because the relics were gone? In any case it must have been common belief that the relics from this stūpa were deposited elsewhere. The Ceylonese tradition says that it was the relics from the Rāmagrāma stūpa that came to the Mahāthūpa in Anuradhapura. Also the later chronicles Thūpavamsa and Dhātuvaṃsa of the 13th and 14th centuries refer to

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11. The relief was published in Aramaki, Dayalan and Nakanishi 2011, 84 and Poonacha 2011, pl. 120; inscription published in Falk 2012, figs. 1-2.

12. The first list of eight places which received the relics given in the Dīghanikāya (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911, vol. 2, 167; Rhys Davids and Foley Rhys Davids 1899-1921, vol. 2, 190) does not mention the nāgas at all. Except of the eight portions the text tells that Doṇa, the person who divided the relics, becomes the vessel in which they were kept and that the Moriyas of Pipphalivana (Mauryas of Pāṭaliputra) become ashes of the funeral pyre. The Sanskrit version (Mahāparinirvānasūtra, cf. Waldschmidt 1950, 446-451; Weber 1999, 266-270) is conformable even when the Mauryas are not named but the “Pippalāyana Māṇavas”.

13. Faxian, transl. in Beal 1884, vol. 1, L: “Going east five yōjanas from the place where Buddha was born, there is a country called Lan-mo (Rāmagrāma)”; for commentary on Faxian and references for further research cf. Deeg 2005, 348-353; Xuanzang writes about 300 li between Lumbinī and Rāmagrāma, cf. Beal 1884, vol. 2, 25.


15. The term athabhāgiye was previously explained with reference to the taxes, or rather their reduction in the place where the future Buddha was born (for an overview of research on this aspect, cf. Falk 2006, 179 and 2012, 205-206). As Falk has pointed out, the term corresponds exactly with athabhāge appearing in the Mahāparinibbānasutta—the eighth parts into which the relics were divided—but also with aṭhabhāga-thabhbo—a stūpa (containing) the eighth part—in the Kanaganahalli inscription; only, the donation of the relics to the site, which Aśoka considered to be exceptionally holy, is more in line with the tenor of the inscription than with the reduction in taxes.

16. Faxian (Beal 1884, LI; cf. Deeg 2005, 351); also in Xuanzang (Beal 1884, vol. 2, 26): “The wild elephants come in herds, gather flowers, and scatter them here. Impelled by a mysterious power, they have continued to offer this service from the first till now”. Both Chinese pilgrims offer, however, information that it was here where Aśoka talked to the nāgas, or was visiting them in their world and did not received the relics.
the Rāmagrāma stūpa being associated with a prediction of the dying Buddha, namely that the relics from this stūpa will be housed in the Mahāthūpa of Ceylon at a later point.\(^{17}\)

Such references to Rāmagrāma were apparently unknown in Andhra if we take the Kanaganahalli inscription rāmagāmilo āṭhabhāgāthubho\(^{18}\) at face value and link up all stūpas worshipped by the nāgas or adorned by the coils of snakes with Rāmagrāma, the stūpa with one-eighth of the holiest relics.

Even the Mahāparinibbānasuttanta along with its Sanskrit counterpart, the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, abandon idea of all eight relic sites being in the human world; they relate that out of the eight stūpas seven are under worship in Jambudvīpa (i.e. in the world of the humans) while the eighth is in Rāmagrāma where it is worshipped by the kings of the nāgas.\(^{19}\) This part of the text, placed at the very end of the sūtra, contradicts the earlier statement and was apparently added later. Buddhaghosa, the commentator of the Mahāparinibbānasuttanta, states even that this interpolation goes back to Ceylonese monks.\(^{20}\) However, this story seems to be the version known in Andhra since Kanaganahalli. One might even ask why there were eight portions of relics but only seven elephants transporting them, as we have seen (figs. 1-3). Perhaps one share was believed to be received by the nāgas.\(^{21}\)

Perhaps it was Rāmagrāma’s association with worshipping elephants that led to the belief that nāgas were protecting it (nāga can also mean “elephant” and misunderstandings are known to have occurred)\(^{22}\)—in Sanchi (Eastern toraṇa) there is a representation of a stūpa worshipped by elephants perhaps alluding to Rāmagrāma. In other words, the origin of the legend may perhaps lie in the relics being removed from the site. The stūpa was abandoned, worshipped only by elephants, which linked up the site with the nāgas, giving birth to the belief that the eighth part was brought to their world.

The eighth portion of the relics worshipped by the nāgas played a role that was different from the other seven. There are several narratives demonstrating this. There is the story of King Ajātaśatru who 20 years after the parinirvāṇa opened seven stūpas and deposited their sacred contents in one place\(^{23}\)—only the stūpa protected by the nāgas was not opened—and there is the

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17. Thūpavamsa, cf. Vacissaratthera and Jayawickrama 1971, 124 and 239; Trainor 1992, 10. The chronicle Dhātuvaṃsa (14th century) gives details describing how the share given to Kolijas was taken by Mahākassapa and handled from monk to monk and from king to king till it was enshrined in Mahāthūpa (Kamburupitiye Nandaratana 1984, 31, Trainor ibid.).

18. Cf. fn. 11.


21. Later even more relics were believed to be in possession of the nāgas, there is even a tradition in Japanese Buddhism telling that they hold more relics as humans, cf. Faure 1999, 174, cf. Strong 2004, 120.

22. This was already noticed by Bareau (1971, 333, Fn. 1) who however understood this the other way around, namely that the original nāgas were changed into elephants by Faxian.

23. Sumanāgalavilāsintegr., cf. Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1931, 611-613; Yang-Gyu An 2003, 219ff; (the tradition is followed by the Thūpavamsa, cf. Vacissaratthera and Jayawickrama 1971, 44-46 and 181-183; Aśoka finds the deposit and distributes the relics into 84,000 stūpas. Strong (2007) refers to two different traditions in the sources, one talking about the sharing of the relics after the cremation—which contravenes the
widely known story of Aśoka who opened the seven stūpas to take out their contents for the 84,000 stūpas he was going to erect. In the Aśokavadāna, Aśoka did not get the portion belonging to the nāgas. The narrative is of course of more recent origin than the historical Aśoka. If Aśoka opened the stūpa in the Rāmagrāma of the Krauḍyas, it might have been forgotten by the time the Aśokavadāna was created.

The fact is that the Aśokavadāna contains the belief which is illustrated in Kanaganahalli (fig. 4): Rāmagrāma is not the capital of the Krauḍyas; rather, it belongs to the nāgas.

One relief from Amaravati, available today only on an old drawing, shows a scene which has been interpreted as Aśoka’s attempt to procure the relics. A similar representation on a slab from Chandavaram (fig. 5), apparently depicting the same event (fig. 6), is further illustrative of this point. Both reliefs, from Amaravati and Chandavaram, can be dated to the 1st century CE.

As a matter of fact, the depictions of men with shovels are not really in tune with the Aśokavadāna, which does not say a word about the opening of the stūpa. The Mahāvaṃsa (5th century) tells the story about how the relics for the Mahāthūpa of Anuradhapura were obtained from the nāgas by the monk Soṇuttara. Shortly before the parinirvāṇa the Buddha predicts that the relics will find their way to the world of the nāgas and from there to the island of Laṅkā. The text explains how the relics came to be possessed by the nāgas. The stūpa at Rāmagrāma, which stood on the bank of the Ganges (which is geographically impossible), was destroyed by the current of the river as a result of which the box with the relics (dhātukaraṇḍaka) was borne away. It was found by the nāga and brought to their nāgarāja, Kālanāga. The story then goes on to relate how the young monk Soṇuttara was sent to acquire Buddha’s own instruction that his relics be enshrined in a stūpa erected at the crossroads—and the other where the instruction was not forgotten.


25. Amaravati, Mackenzie drawing from October 1816, British Library, no.WD1061, folio 29; the drawing was published several times, the upper part in: Fergusson 1868, pl. 98; Burgess 1887, pl. 41.2; Sivaramamurti 1942, text fig. 5, pl. 19; Dehejia 1997, fig. 131; parts of the relief are kept in the Chennai Government Museum nos. 192, 240 and 249.

26. Vogel 1926, 286. The scene does not illustrate the events as they are described in the today known texts, e.g. Faxian (Beal 1884, vol. 1, L-LI; Deeg 2005, 350) writes that when Aśoka came to Rāmagrāma the nāga king took him to his palace, showed him the utensils used for the veneration of the relics and asked if he was able to outshine these. Aśoka knowing that he was not able to do so returned home. Faxian’s narration that the area was overgrown and the stūpa venerated only by the elephants (cf. fn. 16) is not comprehensible. Not different in the story by Hiuentsiang (Beal 1884, vol. 2, 26) in which the nāga takes the shape of a Brahmin to explain Aśoka the special status of the stūpa.


28. Strong 1989, 219: “Then he proceeded to Rāmagrāma. There the nāgas took him down to the nāga palace and told him: ‘We here pay homage to our droṇa stūpa.’ Aśoka, therefore, let them keep their relics intact, and the nāga king himself escorted him back up from the palace. Indeed as it is said: Today in Rāmagrāma the eighth stūpa stands/for in those days the nāga guarded it with devotion./The king did not take the relics from there/but left them alone and, full of faith, withdrew.”

the relics for the Mahāthūpa. The nāgarāja, who of course did not want to give the relics away, decided to show only the empty shrine to the monk and pretend that the relics were no more in his possession. To do so, he gave the box with the relics to his nephew Vāsuladatta who swallowed it and took off to the mountains. There he coiled himself around Sineru and created many thousand hoods and many thousands snakes like himself, who in turn coiled themselves around his body. Gods and nāgas came to witness the fight between the nāga and the monk Soṇuttara. The monk went first to the nāgarāja Kālanāga who showed him the empty caitya and announced that if he saw the relics he could take them. Soṇuttara was an arhat, capable of seeing everything, so he just reached into the mouth of Mahākāla’s nephew and grabbed the box. He dived with it into the earth and emerged in his monk’s cell, where the god Sakka was already awaiting him. The god put the box into a golden casket (caṅgoṭa) which was placed inside another golden casket by the king Duṭṭhagāmani who then carried it on his head and deposited the relics inside the Mahāthūpa on the island of Laṅkā.

This story is entirely different from that in the Aśokāvadāna: in the Mahāvaṃsa the human king is successful; he acquires the relics from the nāgas.

The question is if such stories were an invention of the Ceylonese chronicle or if they were perhaps known in Andhra before. In Nagarjunakonda there is a depiction (fig. 7) which seems to be related to the story from the Mahāvaṃsa. The relief is seen on the stūpa represented on a dome slab and contains four scenes, two on each side of the āyaka pillars. On the right side, two nāgas accompanied by their entourage sit on the ground and put their fingers into their mouth, perhaps indicating the act of swallowing. Further to the right, one nāga is seen flying over the mountains. The first scene on the left side, even if badly preserved, allows one to identify a monk carrying an object on his head, flying in the air between two nāgas. The last scene on the left shows the monk carrying three reliquaries: in both hands and on his head. We encounter this last scene again; we see the monk once carrying two, and once three tiny stūpas (fig. 8). In the last instance he is shown at the entrance to a stūpa, as if he were bringing relics to be preserved therein.

The relief which is some 200 years older than the Mahāvaṃsa does not correspond exactly with the narrative; but it clearly has a similar subject: an arhat acquiring relics from the nāgas.

At Phanigiri, a full-length representation on the architrave (fig. 9) shows a similar story about venerable monks at whose sermon nāgas appear, and about a royal personage visiting the reliquary worshipped by the monks. The story begins on the right hand side, on two parts of the architrave that stand separated today (excav. no.4, and small fragment without number); it shows, on the right, the king in the palace and, on the left, his departure from the city towards the preaching monk. Going by the order of the scenes, the king should be understood as the main personage of the depiction. The scenes, however, seem to form the second part of the narrative. The beginning of the story might be represented on another architrave (fig. 10). Here we find the sanctuary of a nāga, placed between two reliquaries, not far from a stūpa. Further to the left,

30. The relief was published in: Longhurst 1938, pl. 11c; Rao 1956, pl. 8; Rao 1984, pl. 373; Rosen Stone 1994, fig. 148 (mirror inverted), 149 (detail); The Way of the Buddha 1995, 155, fig. 56.
31. Nagarjunakonda, Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Site Museum, depot, no.586, ill.: Vogel 1933, pl. 3a; Longhurst 1938, pl. 24b; Gangoly 1973, pl.
32. The relief was published by Rao (1956, pl. 3) and explained: “Droṇa Dividing the Buddhist Relics”.
33. The relief fragments can be arranged in sequence because of the episodes from the Buddha’s life-story represented on their rear side. no.7 (left side) was published in: Skilling 2008 and 2009, figs. 19-20.
34. Published in: Skilling 2008 and 2009, fig. 21.
monks are shown flying away from the water reservoir, perhaps carrying the relics away from the abode of the nāgas?

The literary tradition of such stories seems to be lost, but it may still find echoes in the Ceylonese chronicles.35

What strikes one is that the stories about monks, nāgas and the relics were represented only in Nagarjunakonda and Phanigiri, i.e. in the 3rd or even 4th century, at a time when not a single representation of the division of the relics or their transportation is known, and when even the motif of stūpas decorated with the coils of snakes went out of vogue. Such depictions were apparently replaced by stories about the monk (or monks) who was (were) successful in acquiring the relics from the nāgas, and about the royal personage who visited the monastery to worship the relics.

In earlier art, it was a king who tried to procure the relics, as illustrated in Amaravati and Chandavaram.36 Considering the relics were, in the narratives of the later period, successfully procured from nāgas, we should perhaps reconsider the meaning of the earlier depictions. In Chandavaram (figs. 5-6) the opening of the stūpa is preceded by the scene showing the relics in the nāga world (fig. 11), and a scene showing a council of nāgas (fig. 12). During the opening of the stūpa (fig. 6), a nāga and a non-nāga, probably a human king, are present. There is another relief in Chandavaram (of which I could not however see the lower part), (fig. 13)37 which also shows a relic casket worshipped by a nāga and a human.38 Could it perhaps mean that the nāgas considered the situation and bequeathed their share to the human king or at least allowed him to worship the relics by their side?

Another question is, if the king shown at opening of the stūpa is indeed Aśoka. He may well be, especially since the story in the Aśokāvadāna is not the only known narrative about the incident, there are also other versions according to which Aśoka did receive the relics from the nāgas.39 Perhaps the narrative in the Ceylonese chronicles about king Duṭṭhagāmani had its forerunner in Andhra, in stories about Aśoka or an Andhra king?

Looking at that one slab from Kanaganahalli (fig. 14),40 in the upper panel, we see a king. We do not know exactly what the lower part showed because its large part is missing; in any case it is a male person of rank. The label of the inscription reads: rājā Siri Chimuko Sādavāhano nāgarāja Sakhadhābho (?). The inscription lets us believe that it is the historical person of Śrī Simuka—founder of the Sātavāhana dynasty—who is depicted here, and that he was portrayed on the slab together with a nāgarāja. The personal name of the nāga is a matter of discussion, but

35. Perhaps not only the literary tradition but also the visual: the imagery about nāgas who coiled themselves around the Sumeru might originate in depictions of stūpas with snakes coiled and knotted around the domes.
36. Cf. supra fn. 26 and fig. 6.
37. The relief was not published before, cf. fn. 27. The description in Indian Archaeology 1972-1973 (1978), 3 may refer to this panel “A number of sculptured panels depicting the worshiping of Bodhi Tree, Dharmachakra and the stupa, the birth of Buddha, the Renunciation and the sharing of the relics of Buddha by the Naga clan were brought to light.”
38. The topic is known from Sanchi I, southern gateway, ill.: e.g. in Marshall and Foucher 1940, vol. 2, pl. 11, where nāgas and humans worship a stūpa; the scene was identified as Aśoka visiting Rāmagrāma.
39. Cf. Strong 1983, 113-14, 302; the most important of the sources is the Saṃyuktāgama (T 99) cf. Lamotte 1958, 264-65; Deeg 2005, 349.
40. The slab was published in: Aramaki, Dayalan and Nakanishi 2011, 90; Poonacha 2011, pl. 108; Zin 2012, figs. 10-11 (drawings).
nāgarāya seems to be certain. Interestingly the part of the inscription with the name of the nāga is executed with smaller letters—was it perhaps added later?

As long as we do not come across more depictions or literary sources, the tradition of the Sātavāhanas claiming their association with the cobra-gods must remain in the realm of speculation. But the relief on figure 14 provides first real support that from certain time this association was a belief at least among the Buddhists responsible for the decoration of the Kanaganahalli stūpa.

We will probably never know the kind of belief that prevailed regarding the association between the Sātavāhanas and the nāgas. We only find nāgas at the entrances to stūpa enclosures in Andhra, as if they were guarding the precious relics; they tempt us to imagine that they are guarding a portion of the eighth share of the relics from Rāmagrāma.

**References**


41. Cf. DeCaroli 2009 for references to links between the nāgas and the Sātavāhana dynasty. DeCaroli understands “Nāgamikā”, the name of the Sātavāhana queen mentioned in the Nanaghat inscription, as having belonged to the mythical nāgas. The author, however, notes that the references do not provide any conclusive proof.


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Fig. 1—Amaravati, coping stone of the railing, Chennai Government Museum, no.160 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).

2a.

2b.
Fig. 2—Kanaganahalli, excav. nos. 4, 16, 17 (drawings by the author after photos of Maiko Nakanishi).

Fig. 3—Kanaganahalli, excav. no. unknown (drawing by author, based on author’s own photo).
Fig. 4—Kanaganahalli, excav. no.46 (drawing by author, based on author’s own photo).
The Buddha’s relics and the Nāgas: an attempt to throw light on some depictions in the Amaravati School.

Fig. 5—Chandavaram, depot, excav. no. 2 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).

Fig. 6—Detail of figure 5 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).
Fig. 7—Nagarjunakonda, Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Site Museum, no. 4 (photo by the author).

Fig. 8—Nagarjunakonda, Nagarjunakonda Archaeological Site Museum, depot, no. 597 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).
the Buddha’s relics and the nāgas an attempt to throw light on some depictions in the Amaravati school.

Fig. 9—Phanigiri, architrave, excav. nos. 4, 7 (photos Wojtek Oczkowski); middle piece without number (photo Peter Skilling).
Fig. 10—Phanigiri, architrave, excav. no. 5 (photo Peter Skilling).

Fig. 11—Detail of Fig. 5 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).
the Buddha’s relics and the nāgas: an attempt to throw light on some depictions in the Amaravati School.

Fig. 12—Detail of figure 5 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).

Fig. 13—Chandavaram, excav. no. not known (photo Wojtek Oczkowski).
Fig. 14a-b—Kanaganahalli, excav. no. 58 (drawings by the author after photos by Maiko Nakanishi).