



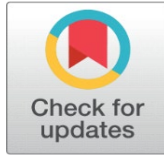
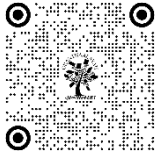


PALLAVA ELEMENTS IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART – VISUAL APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

It is a known fact that contact between the Tamil country and Southeast Asia, including Śrī Laṅkā and China was a long-established tradition. References to the yavanas in Tamil Caṅkam literature and the notes supplied by Greek, Roman, and Egyptian classical authors would establish the fact that commercial intercourse between the east and west was an immemorial process ¹, datable to at least a few centuries earlier than the Christian era ². However, it was under the Pallavas and Cōḷas that the arts of the country made a daring intrusion into the distant lands ³. In this process of sharing artistic idioms from the subcontinent, the Āndhras of the Amarāvati School, the Guptas, and the Pālas of Beṅgal played a vital role. The Pallava link with the Malaya peninsula was blood-based because a collateral branch of the family is said to have ruled the distant land under Hiranyavarman whose son Nandivarman Pallavamalla (731-96 CE) became the ruler of Kāñci when there was no direct male heir to occupy the throne after the premature death of Parameśvaravarman II ([Minakshi \(1941\)](#), [Subramaniam \(1967\) 80-94](#)).

Keywords: Southeast Asian Art, Iconographical Specimens, Egyptian Classical Authors

¹ *Yavanas* denotes aliens; originally, they came from Ionia and meant the Greeks. It later came to denote the Romans, Egyptians and Arabs. They brought fine wine to the Tamil country and took spices and teak-wood from coastal Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They had a settlement in the port-metropolis of the Caṅkam Cōḷas at Pukār. They spoke a rough foreign language. *Vide*, [Akanāṅṅūru](#) 149; [Puṛaṅāṅṅūru](#) 56; [Cilappatikāram](#) 5. 10, 14.67 ([Subrahmanian \(1990\) 716](#), [Rajarajan \(2016\) 101-102](#)).

The Greek and Roman accounts are discerned from the writings of Megasthenes (also *Indica* of Arrian), Strabo, Pliny, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Ptolemy and the *Peutingerian Tables*, all datable down to the 3rd century CE, excepting Megasthenes who is dated in the 4th century BCE ([Subrahmanian \(1966/1980\) 19-20](#)).

² I am told by archaeologists that in recent times Indian teak, datable to 1000 B.C. has been found in the ruins of Egypt.

³ We may note here that ideas from ancient Tamiḷakam not only migrated eastward, but ideas came from the north of India and western Hellenic world to the Tamil country. [Gopalachari \(1976\), 10](#) speaks of the gem-workers of Magadha, the goldsmiths of Marāṭha, the blacksmiths of Avanti and the *yavana* sculptors: *Makata viṅaiṅṅarum marāṭṭak kammaruṅ/Avantik kollarum yavaṅṅat taccarum/taṅ Tamil viṅaiṅṅarum kūṭi* ([Kalidos \(1999\) 152n](#)).

The cited Caṅkam poem would reveal the fact that the Tamil art-makers collaborated, *kūṭi*, with those from Magadha, Maratha, Avanti and the *Yavanas*.

1. INTRODUCTION

This small article throws light on some of the Pallava elements that are present in the art of Ilaṅkai (Laṅkā), Thailand, and Vietnam (erstwhile Champa or Annam). At the outset, I categorically declare that I have not visited these countries and my impressions are based on the photographs, published by Museum Bulletins and earlier scholars in the field. Right or wrong, an Indian student is not affluent enough to visit these countries for the sake of writing a paper. When the time comes, I shall make it a point to examine these images as they are found in the museums or in situ. Even if research is photo-based, what is wrong in expressing ideas for sake of interpretation on certain enigmatic issues?

The iconographical specimens taken for examination follow a simple methodology. That is to say, the earlier Indian counterparts are taken into account for explaining the outgoing or incoming ideas for the portrayal of iconographical typologies. The themes examined are the following:

- 1) Seated male image with the head of a horse behind in the Isurumuniya (Tisāvāva) bas relief in Anurādhapuram, Śrī Laṅka.
- 2) Umāmaheśvara collected from Vietnam by the Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena, California.
- 3) Broken male divinity of Viṣṇu in the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand ⁴, and so on.

2. THE MĀMALLAPURAM-ISURUMUNIYA ARTISTIC LINK

Indian contact with Ilaṅkai gets back at least to the time of Aśoka Maurya (c. 273-232 BCE) who after the Third Buddhist Council at Pāṭaliputra (c. 250 BCE – [Thapar \(1966/1972\), 73](#)) is said to have sent his daughter and son to the island kingdom for the propagation of the Buddhist dhamma. The Ilaṅkai contact during the Pallava period led to a long-lasting exchange of idioms typical of the Indian Hindu tradition. During the time of Nṛsiṃhavarman I (c. 630-68 CE), a prince of the Ilaṅkai or Tamil Īlam ⁵ ruling family, Māṇavarman (Siṃhala: Māṇavamma), sought political asylum and alliance with the Pallava Emperor to get himself reestablished in his ancestral throne, having been ousted by a rival claimant ([Kalidos \(1976\), 89](#), citing [Mahalingam \(1968\)](#)) ⁶. He had to stay in Kāñcīpuram for a pretty long time; maybe the emperor (who sent him with Parañcōti) was busy with his Calukyan rival, Polakeśi ⁷, in a war with Badāmī (around 642 CE) or was getting ready a naval power to embark on his Ilaṅkai project. It is even said that Māṇavarman led the army against the Calukyas of Badāmī ([Rabe \(2001\), 22-23](#)), based on the Siṃhala chronicle, Mahāvamśa. Nṛsiṃha and Māṇavarman were good friends and when the time came, the Pallava navy completed its mission and Māṇavarman was reinstated on the Ilaṅkai throne. When Māṇavarman stayed in Kāñci, he is likely to have visited Māmallapuram and observed the kind of rock-cut work going on there, initiated during the previous reign of Mahēndravaraman I (c. 610-30 CE). With the result, Māṇavarman back at home is likely to have undertaken a project on the model of the Great Penance [Rabe \(2001\)](#). Maybe some artists also went with him as it so

⁴ Thanks to Prof. Raju Kalidos (The Tamil University, Thanjavur) who brought this image to the attention. He has visited Bangkok once and the studied the museum collections therein. He was in Śrī Laṅka twice but could not visit Anurādhapuram due to the political turmoil at that time. He was once in Malaysia but could not make it a study tour, having been held up in conference halls.

⁵ This note is based on the Caṅkam tradition during which time the island was known as Īlam. *Vide*, [Akanānūru 88](#), [Kuruntokai 343](#), [Narriṇai 88](#), 366 ([Subrahmaniyan \(1990\), 127](#)).

⁶ Elaborated in minute details in the *Mahāvamśa* ([Dohanian \(1983\)](#)).

⁷ Prof. Raju Kalidos has discovered an image of Polakeśi ([Rajarajan & Ganeshran \(2010\): Essay I, fig. BW 25](#))

happened in the case of the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakkal under Vikramāditya I (c. 654/655-681 CE) ⁸. The result is likely to have been the bas relief of Isurumuniya at Anurādhapuram. Scholars have already written about these carvings in detailed studies (Leeuw (1971), 116-17, Dohanian (1983), 6-21, Rabe (2001), 20-32). Several others, beginning with A.K. Coomaraswamy, have pointed out the Pallava hand in Isurumuniya (Longhurst (1937), 16-19, Parnavitana (1953), 174, Rowland (1967), 370, Vogel (1936/1977), 174). The concern here is the identification of a seated royal personage with the head of a horse behind him in the Isurumuniya bas relief (Figure 1). The authorities cited above have presented their impressions as follows:

- 1) Parnavitana (1953), 174 considers the image of a Man and Horse.
- 2) Leeuw (1971), 116-17 identified the image with Aiyaṅār, a popular village god of Tamilnadu.
- 3) Dohanian (1983), 11 reiterates what Leeuw says.
- 4) Rabe (2001), fig. 38 identifies the images with a seated horseman (cf. Parnavitana (1953)).

Figure 1



Figure 1 Divinity and Horse, Isurumuniya, Anurādhapuram

I do not fall in line with the above views. The image may have to be linked with the head of a horse, appearing close to him, and not in isolation, leave alone the frolicking elephants that are found around in the Great Penance at Māmallapuram and the Isurumuniya bas relief, which is a clear pointer of the Pallava element in the art of Ilaṅkai. To understand the horse-head, one will have to travel from Anurādhapuram to Nāmakkal. The Atikaimāṅ cave temple for Nṛsimha among its iconographical themes includes one of Trivikrama (Figure 2) in the upper part of which a horse-head of the same mode appears (Dehejia (1969), Pls. 5-6, Rajan (1999), Figure 4). Linking these two (Figure 1, Figure 2), one might suggest the seated royal person in the Isurumuniya relief is the model of Mahābali with the head of a sacrificial horse (aśvamedayāga) appearing behind him as it is found in the Nāmakkal cave.

⁸ The Calukyan Emperor's Queens, Lokamahādevī and Trailokyamahādevī, are said to have built the Virūpākṣa temple on the bank of the river, Malaprabhā, following the model of the Kailāsa of Kāñci. Scholars also opine some *śilpis* were taken to Paṭṭadakkal from Kāñci.

Certain questions will have to be answered at this point, the most important among them being the dates of the two reliefs under consideration. Māṇavarmaṅ is likely to have undertaken the Isurumnuniya excavation after stabilizing his position on the Ilaṅkai throne. So, it might be dated toward the end of the 7th century CE. The Nāmakkal caves are assigned to the first half of the 8th century. An Atikaimāṅ chief Guṇaśīla is said to be its founder whose inscription in the Raṅganātha cave calls it Atiyendra-Viṣṇu-gṛham (Srinivasan (1972), 59)⁹. There is no poignant deviation in the chronological framework as the end of the 7th and early half of the 8th could have been around 700 CE. This is to suggest that the two rock-cut works are near contemporary. We need not discuss the issue of whether the idea went from Nāmakkal to Isurumuniya or vice versa in the process that took place. The vital issue is the identification of the motifs under consideration.

Figure 2



Figure 2 Trivikrama and Horse Head, Cave for Nṛsiṃha, Nāmakkal

Coming to the question of whether the seated image could be that of Aiyaṅār, it may be added that Cāttāṅ is noted in pre-Pallava literature and not Aiyaṅār. The question is whether Aiyaṅār and Cāttāṅ (or Sātavāhana) were considered the same then¹⁰. In making this point felt, one may keep in mind that the Sanskrit Skanda and Tamil Kantaṅ were found to be analogous at one point in time around the 4th century CE and not earlier. Therefore, the Cāttāṅ of Caṅkam literature may not be Aiyaṅār. Aiyaṅār and Cāttāṅ came to be treated as the same God in later times when the cult got mixed up with the Ārya-Sāsta. However, the question is open for discussion.

Another literary consideration is that Buddhist and Hindu mythologies are analogous in patterns of thought and presentation in art (Dehejia (1998), 80-106). The Buddha himself came to be accommodated in the Hindu pantheon as one among

⁹ We may note here there are two rock-cut caves in the huge granite block of hill at Nāmakkal. One on the eastern slopes is dedicated to Raṅganātha and the western slopes accommodate the Nṛsiṃha cave.

¹⁰ The God later called Aiyaṅār is missing in pre-Pallava literature. Aiyar is there, meaning a "leader" (Akanānūru (2006)) root ai, celestial sages (Tirumurukāṛruppaṭai, 107) and they later came to denote the brāhmaṇas (Subrahmaniyan (1990), 177).

Cāttāṅ was a God who had his temple outside Pukār (Cilappatikāram 9. 23). The Cilappatikāram 9. 15 notes a God called Pācaṅṭa Cāttāṅ. We may note the Cilappatikāram is a post-Caṅkam work, dated in the 5th century CE (450 CE, Zvelebil (1974), 132). Besides, Cāttāṅ was a popular personal name of poets and kings.

the daśavatāras of Viṣṇu as noted in a Māmallapuram inscription.¹¹ The Kūrma Purāṇa at one place says: “This Lord Śiva becomes the god of Time...He is Viṣṇu bearing the discus, Indra wielding the thunderbolt...and in our present fourth age, he is the Buddha” (Davis (n.d.), 643). Therefore, if Mahābali with his yūpāsva appears in the Isurumuniya relief, it is no wonder. In arriving at this generalization, we keep track of the norm-setting iconographical model in the Nāmakkal cave.

3. UMĀMAHEŚVARA IN VIETNAM

Figure 3



Figure 3 Umāmaheśvara, Champa, Vietnam, @ Norton Simon Museum

An image of Umāmaheśvara in the collection of the Norton Simon Foundation finds Śiva and Umā seated on the bull vāhana.¹² The bull is zoomorphic. In the background behind the Liṅga appears. All are set on a bhadrāpītha, the images of the divinities circumscribed within a semicircular line that is marked on the Liṅga. Śiva is seated in sukhāsana with the right leg pendant and left resting on the pedestal. Umā is seated close to the Lord in an undefinable posture as Indian women sit during their domestic avocations, the left leg laid flat and the right knee up. Both are decorated with beautiful makuṭas. The most interesting feature of the figural representation is that Śiva and Umā with their Nandi-vāhana appear within a phallus, the Liṅga. The image is dated to the 11th-12th century, the waning phase of Cōḷa art, and suggests later Cōḷa impact. In this representation, the theme is more important than the style. The type of thematic representation was popular in India since the Gupta period, dating around the 5th century CE.¹³ These Gupta and post-Gupta images of Caturmukha- or Pañcamukha- Liṅgas show the four or five faces of Śiva in the cardinal directions. These five integral members of the Sadāśiva group are called Tatpuruṣa, Aghora, Satyojāta, Vāmadeva (the left-God, a feminine), and

¹¹ *Matsyah kūrmo varāhascha narasiṅhascha vāmana[h] Rāmo rāmascha rāmascha Buddha[h] kalkicha te daśa.*

This record is found in the Dharmarāja-ratha (Srinivasan (1964), 173). Vide, ARE Annual Epigraphical Reports, (1922), no. 663; SII, XII, no. 116.

¹² The Śrītattvanidhi (3.1-2), citing the Śivapañcākṣarī, talks of a form called Maheśvara united with Gaurī; Gaurī-Maheśvara and Umā-Maheśvara are synonymous (Rajarajan (2019), 286).

¹³ For a profusely illustrated documentation see Kreisel (1981), especially figs. 11, 54 a & b, 89.

Īsāna (up-looking).¹⁴ Vāma means left and the left half of Śiva is feminine in Ardhanārīśvara (Kalidos (1993), figs. 3, 4, 8, 10; Goldberg (2002): figs. 1.12-16, Rajarajan (2006), 131 & Rajarajan (2022)). Another good example in the present context is a Mukhaliṅga reported by Goetz (1965), 275-79 from Kāshmir. The mukha of Śiva in this image appears on one side, and on the other, the Lord with his Devī is shown. Though the date of the image is uncertain, on certain iconographical considerations it is said to display Gāndhāran influence and assigned to the 10th century CE.

Therefore, for the Vietnamese representation of Umāmaheśvara within the Liṅga, the idea has gone from either Central India of the Gupta period or Kāshmir. It is a blend of the traditions typical north India and Cōḷa, which need not be a surprise because of the political interaction that the Imperial Cōḷas had with the north, e.g., Rājendra I (1012-44 CE) called Gaṅgaikoṅṭāṇ (Rajarajan (2012) & 62-72, Rajarajan (2016a), 9-18 & Rajarajan (2017), 46-62).

4. STHĀNAKA-VIṢṆU

Figure 4

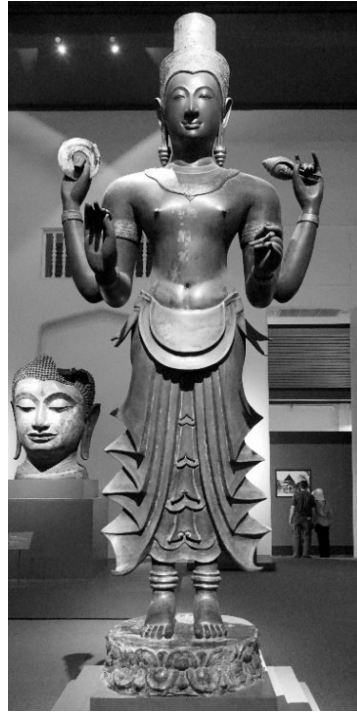


Figure 4 Sthānaka-Viṣṇu, Sukhothai, @ National Museum, Bangkok

The Lord's standing mode is known as sthānaka-Viṣṇu. A good number of images are found in the National Museum, Bangkok. The image is samapāda, fitted with a kirīṭamakuṭa and pītāmbara. The face and anatomical features are typically Indian and show unmistakable traces of Pallava influence. A large number of such images may be found in the Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ temple at Kāñci and the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakkal (Kalidos (2006), I, cf. Pls. lxxv, lxxii. 1, lxxii.1-2). Based on the stylistic consideration, the image may say to show traces of Pallava influence.

¹⁴ We may note here that three of the Sadāśiva-mūrtis are housed in the pradakṣiṇapāṭha of Rājarājeśvaram at Tañcāvūr. In this group Vāmadeva is feminine (Kalidos (1984), 205-11).

Though the present study has concerned itself with three samples, there are several more that scholars have taken into consideration to show the Indian (Gupta, Āndhra, Pallava, Cōḷa, Pāla, and so on) on Southeast Asian and Śrī Laṅkan art. In the present panel, there are three more articles. These would show there is more scope for examining the stylistic and ideological input of Indian thought on Far Eastern and Southeast Asian art.¹⁵ An enormous literature exists on the subject but the Tamil quota of thought in this sculptural art has not been properly examined. It is high time that scholars think along these lines and try to examine Tamil literary ideas as they may be found embedded in Southeast Asian art.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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¹⁵ For cross-cultural transformation of literature and art between South Asia, Southeast Asia and Far East, see Gail (2016-2017), 107-115, Gail (2016), 421-431, Gail (2016), 7-28, Dhar (2020), 97-110, Dhar (2018), 57-64, Dhar (2016), 30-50, Rajarajan (2022), 78-93, Rajarajan (2022a), 1-11, Rajarajan (2021), 135-157, Rajarajan (2020), 194-201, Rajarajan (2020a), 54-94.

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