

The Vākāṭakas

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
ALAN W. ENTWISTLE



Vāsudeva image Mondasvāmin? , Mandhal

The Vākāṭakas

An Essay in Hindu Iconology

by

Hans T. Bakker

EGBERT FORSTEN · GRONINGEN

1997

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Preface

In the autumn of 1986 a tour through holy places connected with the worship of Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Rāma led me to Ramtek (Rāmagiri) c.45 km north-east of Nagpur. A thirteenth-century stone inscription of the time of the Yādava king Rāmacandra found in the Lakṣmaṇa Temple on the spur of this hill eulogized the Rāmagiri as a holy mountain, hallowed by a visit of Rāma and his wife Sītā, and this echoed Kālidāsa's description in the *Meghadūta*, where he said that its slopes were marked by Raghupati's footprints. Were it not that the separation from his beloved spoiled his sojourn, the Yakṣa of the *Meghadūta* would have enjoyed his place of exile, since his master could hardly have banished him to a more beautiful spot. Since that first visit my research has circled around this hill. For a cult of Rāma in Kālidāsa's days I could find little proof, but my investigations brought me into contact with the one-time masters of the hill, the Vākāṭaka kings of Nandivardhana. Fascinated by the monuments and the richness of the archaeological material that they had left behind, my attention began focusing itself on the history of this dynasty. I reported on my findings in several articles and for some time I had the idea of collecting these writings in one volume. However, their preliminary nature was obvious, and a comparison of the earlier publications with the later ones revealed many deficiencies and inconsistencies. I felt the need of an integral and comprehensive treatise and from this need the present book has ensued.

During my fieldwork I not only discovered the beauties of Vākāṭaka art but also the friendliness and hospitality of the people of Maharashtra. Dr S.M. Ayachit was the first friend I made. He accompanied me on my first visit to the Rāmagiri and brought me into contact with the archaeologists and historians of the University of Nagpur: Prof. Dr V.B. Kolte, the éminence grise, who ranks among the most illustrious scholars that Vidarbha has brought forth; Prof. Dr Ajay Mitra Shastri, who is the greatest living expert in Vākāṭaka history; and Dr Chandrashekhara Gupta, who with his vast knowledge of the field and unfailing assistance has greatly contributed to this book. They all became personal friends and made Nagpur for me an important and familiar city. Professor Shastri unselfishly shared with me his knowledge of the history of the Vākāṭakas, and allowed me kindly to photograph and publish the superb collection of sculptures

which he had found in his excavation of Mandhal. The staff of the Nagpur Central Museum has also been most helpful; to them, Mr V. R. Verulkar, and in particular to Dr A. P. Jamkhedkar, Director of the Archaeological Survey and Museums of Maharashtra, I am much obliged for allowing me to study and photograph the Museum's collection of Vākātaka art. I thank the Faculty of Divinity and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen and the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) for the financial support which made this fieldwork possible.

The turn my research had taken brought me to the field of ancient Indian art. In the middle of this field I found Dr James C. Harle. It is no exaggeration to say that this book owes its existence to him more than to anyone. From the very start he has been involved in the assessment and interpretation of the visual material that I collected in the course of my travels in Maharashtra. During my yearly visits to Oxford I found in him a counsellor and warm friend. Many happy days we spent together arranging and studying the photographs that were spread all over the dining-room table. He was always willing to read and to comment upon the various drafts which have preceded the text now presented, and to go through its final version. I consider it a great privilege to have been given the opportunity to profit from his scholarship, knowledge and deep insights into the history of ancient Indian art. Hawkswell Farm became my home in Oxford, and the hearty hospitality and friendship extended to me by James and Betty Harle shall always be very dear to me.

In many other ways Oxford has been important for me and for the completion of this study. The Bodleian Library, the ever friendly, helpful and professional staff of the Indian Institute, the facilities and learned serenity of this library with its wonderful view which transposes one into the fifteenth century, all these things meant that I was always looking forward to cross the Channel. In 1996 I was privileged to work in Oxford for half a year as a Spalding Visiting Fellow. I enjoyed the hospitality and scholarly ambiance of Wolfson College. The Fellowship allowed me to write a substantial part of this book and offered me the opportunity to profit from the indological knowledge which one meets there at every step. My thanks are in particular due to Prof. Dr Richard and Sanjukta Gombrich and to Prof. Alexis Sanderson, whose series of extraordinary lectures during Hilary Term 1996 on the *Levels of Initiation and Practice in the Śaivism of Abhinavagupta* was one of the high points of my stay. In Bridgestreet I found a veritable Ashram of young and brilliant indological colleagues. Drs Harunaga Isaacson and Dominic D. S. Goodall were ever available for help, discussion and criticism. The latter read the book in its final stage as its English editor. I am not only deeply obliged to him for correcting my English, but I am just as, or even more grateful to Dominic and Harunaga for their innumerable suggestions for

improving the text and reconsidering the interpretation of Sanskrit passages, as well as for pointing out dubious conclusions and for referring me to other sources.

My stay in Oxford was overshadowed by the illness and death on March 28 1996 of my dearest friend Alan W. Entwistle. Alan not only introduced me to the living traditions of India; he turned my academic interest in that country into one of love. I look back on the years he lived with us in Groningen as the happiest ones of my life. His death is a deeply felt personal loss and a great loss for Indology. This book is dedicated to his memory.

The Institute of Indian Studies of the University of Groningen has gone through difficult times during the period I was working on the *Vākātakas*. I am grateful to the Department of Religious Studies – especially to my colleagues Prof. Dr Jan N. Bremmer and Dr Lourens P. van den Bosch – for safeguarding the Institute's existence. Of the small group of devoted indologists and students who make up this Institute I should like to mention in particular Yūko Yokochi, from whose research into the history of Goddess worship I have profited, and also Rob Adriaansen, who not only was my mainstay and support in the production process of this book, but whose knowledge of the Sanskrit sources has protected me from many mistakes. Egbert Forsten proved to be much more than my appreciated publisher. His friendship is dear to me and his sympathetic involvement in my work has been a great encouragement.

A small institute like ours cannot do without the support of the colleagues of sister universities. In this respect I should like to thank in particular Prof. Dr Henk W. Bodewitz of the Kern Institute of the University of Leiden who stood by me through thick and thin. Dr Ellen M. Raven of the same Institute has been so kind to go through the iconographic parts of this book; I am grateful for her many valuable suggestions. I also thank Frans H. P. M. Janssen, who has kept me up-to-date with developments in the world of Indian archaeology and who has informed me about new discoveries in the field.

All those who in one way or another have helped me in writing this book but go unnamed here may be assured of my gratitude. One real friend, however, should be mentioned: my sweet wife Aafke, the cornerstone of my existence.

Groningen, 19 March 1997

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