

Nagarjunakonda: Monasteries and Their School Affiliations

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Abstract: Narrative representations have not been found in all Buddhist monasteries. In some areas, for instance in the region of modern Sannati in ancient Āndhradeśa, only one *stūpa*, known today as Kanaganahalli, was decorated with opulent narrative reliefs, while the others display none at all. It appears that some Buddhist schools were interested in narrative representations while others were not. The area now known as Nagarjunakonda – the historical Vijayapurī of the Ikṣvāku dynasty in the 3rd century CE – offers the best opportunity to investigate which monasteries the narrative reliefs came from. Among the approximately 40 Buddhist complexes that have been excavated, some of which actually name the schools the resident monks belonged to, and which were built following different layouts, all narrative reliefs were discovered in only a few of the complexes. All of these complexes show a very similar layout with a *stūpa* outside the monks' cells, which are positioned in a U-shape, and two apsidal temples facing each other. One of these complexes gives the name of the related school as Aparamahāvinaśaīla. It seems that this school was one of those interested in narrative representations, while all the others mentioned in inscriptions at Nagarjunakonda (Theravādins, Mahīśāsakas, and Bahuśrutīyas) were not.

Keywords: Buddhism, school affiliations, Āndhradeśa, Nagarjunakonda, Mahāvinaśaīla

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The following considerations¹ grew out of my project aiming at a new publication and explanation of the narrative reliefs from the so-called 'Andhra school of sculptures' – a term typically used in order to refer to the reliefs from Amaravati and other sites including Kanaganahalli, Ghantasala,

¹ This paper is only a slightly revised presentation read by the author at the conference 'Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Interchange', in Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in February 2009.

Nagarjunakonda or Goli, i.e. reliefs from Buddhist sites in ancient Āndhradeśa datable to between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE.

As I stated previously (see, for example, ZIN 2004, 2016, 2018a, 2018b), the reliefs from the Andhra should rather be related to the textual sources preserved today in ‘northern’ Buddhism than to the Pali tradition, since they contain many scenes which illustrate texts such as the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins and find no counterpart in Pali literature. Establishing the literary sources of the reliefs is often a problem, not only because the relevant texts, unlike their Pali counterparts, have not yet been translated into English but are often only available either in the original Sanskrit or in their translations into Chinese and Tibetan. What constitutes even more of a problem is the fact that a lot of reliefs cannot be explained at all. Given the large number of narrative scenes which must be labelled as ‘unidentified’, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Andhra reliefs were based on a now lost Buddhist narrative tradition. In other words, we are bound to assume that the literature of the once flourishing Buddhist culture of Andhra has only survived in the reliefs that illustrate it.² In fact, this assumption should not be surprising to Buddhologists, as it is commonly known that not even a single text has been preserved from Andhra Buddhism.

Hundreds of narrative reliefs are extant in Andhra. In many cases we also possess information where reliefs exactly originate from. Interesting, not to say perplexing, is the phenomenon that while the *stūpas* in some monasteries are excessively decorated with illustrations of narrative material, other monasteries, despite being located in the immediate vicinity, contain no such decoration at all. Sometimes archaeology exposes what the monasteries from which the reliefs were excavated might have looked like. In some cases, epigraphy reveals which Buddhist schools those monasteries belonged to. This essay is an attempt to establish the school affiliations of the reliefs by combining the above-mentioned pieces of information. The attempt will concern one of the most important find spots of the region, Nagarjunakonda, the ancient Vijayapurī of the Ikṣvāku in the 3rd century CE.

Nagarjunakonda was discovered in the 1920s and excavated some years later (LONGHURST 1938; RAMACANDRAN 1953). The most extensive excavations were made in the 1950s before the dam was built and the entire valley – which subsequently became known as Nagarjunasagar – was submerged by the waters of the river Krishna, covering the archaeological sites forever. Today

² In the scenes of *Māravijaya* in Andhra, four daughters of Māra are depicted; among the literary sources extant today, this tradition is only found in an ancient version of the *Lalitavistara*, preserved today only in a Chinese translation, Taisho no. 186, cf. ZIN 2018a: 551–552.

the reliefs from those excavations are held in the ASI museum on Nagarjuna Island as well as in different museums in India and other parts of the world, e.g. Paris and New York. As for the archaeological sites, some of them were dismantled and reconstructed in higher places (**Fig. 1** and **Fig. 2**), half-size models were made from several others, but in the case of the majority of them, only diminutive models exist, presented in the garden of the Archaeological Site Museum on the Island (*vide infra* Fig. 14).



Fig. 1. Nagarjunakonda, apsidal *caitya* temple enshrining a *stūpa*, reconstruction of the Archaeological site Museum on the island, photograph © Wojtek Oczkowski.

It is certainly true that the damming of the Krishna River saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Andhra Pradesh, but the fact is that it *did* destroy one of the most interesting archaeological areas in India with 129 sites, among them 39 Buddhist ones (*vide infra* Fig. 3).

Inscriptions provide information about four Ikṣvāku kings who were ruling over the valley between approximately the year 210 and the end of the 3rd century (SARKAR 1985), or, according to another chronology (STONE 1994: 7), approx. 20 years later. The town of Vijayapurī was founded earlier by the Sātavāhanas whose subordinates the Ikṣvāku were at that time.³ At a later point in time the by then independent local dynasty of Ikṣvāku tried to imitate the model of the great Sātavāhanas from Dharaṇikoṭa, a site approx. 125 km

³ That can be derived from an inscription of the Sātavāhana King Vijaya Sātakaṃi, cf. SARKAR 1965–1966: 273–275; cf. also: SARKAR 1985: 30.



Fig. 2. Nagarkundla, apsidal *caitya* temple enshrining a statue of the Buddha, reconstruction of the Archaeological site Museum on the island, photograph © Wojtek Oczkowski.

downstream, in the vicinity of which stands the ‘great *stūpa*’ known today as Amaravati (see e.g. SHIMADA and WILLIS 2016). Like the Sātavāhanas, the Ikṣvāku were not Buddhists themselves, but their wives, sisters and many of their subjects were (S. DUTT 1962: 126–137; STONE 1980). Buddhism must have been very important and must have had the support of the rulers, since there were nearly forty Buddhist sites – including *stūpas*, temples and monasteries for a large number of monks – in the immediate vicinity of the capital Vijayapurī.

The results of the archaeological campaigns from the 1950s, particularly *Volume II, The Historical Period*, were published only in 2006 (SOUNDARARAJAN 2006). An analysis of the monasteries was undertaken as early as 1966 by Haribishnu Sarkar, who dedicated a chapter of his *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India* to Nagarkundla.⁴ His investigations shaped subsequent research on Nagarkundla and its possible influence on the Buddhist world.⁵

⁴ SARKAR 1966: 78: ‘It is apparent [...] that the sects did not have identical types of establishments and that ideological differences manifested themselves in monastic architecture.’

⁵ Cf. the important book about the Pyu of Burma by Janice STARGARDT 1990: 311–336.

Sarkar investigated the archaeological findings in Nagarjunakonda primarily to demonstrate changes in Buddhist ideology, mainly the transition between traditional Buddhism and Mahāyāna. His key evidence for the transition was the occurrence of the Buddha image, which he equated with the turn towards Mahāyāna. The premise that the shrines for the Buddha images constitute the latest development of the architecture in Nagarjunakonda caused Sarkar to assign a late date to them, although this is difficult to support based on the available material. Sarkar went even further in his hypotheses and claimed that the Buddhist school was split whenever it was impossible for him to explain the archaeological findings in another way, for example when the inscriptions ascribe two sites to one particular school, one of which contained Buddha images while the other one did not.⁶

The current state of knowledge does no longer allow us to take the presence of Buddha images as an indicator for the Mahāyāna character of a site. It must also be stated that there are other observations in Sarkar's pioneering work which should be treated as open to discussion rather than taken for granted, as has been the case so far. To give just one example, it is always possible that some monastic units were not rebuilt as a result of economic factors and not necessarily due to the conservative attitudes of its monks.

Sarkar in his investigations failed to take one important factor into account, namely the possibility that part of the buildings could have been made of perishable materials. Furthermore, one should not forget that archaeology may provide us with good materials for a relative chronology of each site but it fails to provide an uncontested piece of information on for example which apsidal *caitya* temple (compare Figs. 1 and 2) was built first, since it does not necessarily have to be the one which bears the inscription.

The inscriptions are available on no more than three *caityas* among two dozen excavated ones. Out of almost 40 Buddhist sites excavated in Nagarjunakonda (**Fig. 3**) only six (1, 5, 7/8, 9, 38 and 43) bear inscriptions mentioning Buddhist schools. Of these, site 1 and site 9 belonged to the same school; the same also holds true for sites 38 and 43, as they also belonged to one school. Therefore, only four Buddhist schools are named at all.

Nearly 40 Buddhist sites in Nagarjunakonda came into being during a period of approximately 100 years. It is self-evident that all those monasteries existed side by side, each displaying different architectural forms. The

⁶ SARKAR 1966: 77: 'The original sect living in Site 1 thus did not accept the idea of image-worship till the end. On the other hand, the Buddha-image did find place in the other monastery, Site 9. Thus, it may safely be concluded that the Aparā-mahāvīna-seliyas of Nagarjunakonda become divided into two sub-sects.' The conclusions of Sarkar have been accepted and perpetuated by subsequent research.

Nagarjunakonda is unique. If we bear in mind that in the valley, to the east of the residential area and south of the hill (the hill is today the island, with the Archaeological Site Museum), such a large number of Buddhist establishments was built on a territory of approx. 12 km² (see Fig. 3), it is worthwhile making an attempt to re-evaluate the available data – even if well aware that they are not complete, if only for the reason that the excavations certainly did not meet today's standards and were carried out under enormous time pressure. One thing is certain at the outset: it is futile to expect any new material to come to light.

It was to Sarkar's merit to see the Buddhist establishments in the valley as units and not as separate *stūpas* and cloisters (which is how they were treated by archaeologists excavating the sites). We have thus 39 Buddhist units. Several of them were surrounded by stone enclosures, separating them from each other. In such cases or in the cases where architectural devices comprise a group, it is certain that they form a single monastery. However, things are not always that easy; as already discussed, some structures, including fences, may have been built of perishable materials like wood or clay, e.g. the site no. 21⁹ or 30,¹⁰ in which the distance between the monastery and the *stūpa* reaches almost a hundred meters. Either there were buildings standing in the places where today there are none, which disappeared without leaving any traces, or we are dealing with two units and the preserved *vihāras* and *stūpas* originally did not belong together. In most cases, however, the assignment of the structures to a monastic unit is clear.

What I present below should by no means be taken as established knowledge. On the contrary, I do hope it will instigate a scholarly discussion on the subject.¹¹ I am fully aware that there might be some errors in my argumentation, since the available materials are only incidental findings. My attempt will be to combine the archaeological data, hoping that it will be possible to establish the school affiliations of the monasteries in which narrative reliefs have been unearthed. The most difficult matter is to establish the criteria on which the identification of similarities and dissimilarities in the monasteries' plans – and thus their classification – is based. Improper classification can lead

⁹ *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 24 (called 'Site VIII'), pl. 39b (relics); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 178, 180 and fig. 48 (plan), pl. 60a–b.

¹⁰ *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 25 (called 'Site XXV'); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 188 and fig. 53 (plan of the *stūpa*), in SARKAR 1966 pl. 11a (photo of the *stūpa* with visible urn burials), pl. 13 (plan); STARGARDT 1990, fig. 19a.

¹¹ I am extremely grateful to Dr. René van Oosterwijk (University of Leiden) and further participants of the advanced seminar at the Institute for Indology and Tibetology of the University of Munich for our discussions on the subject.

to erroneous conclusions. Some monasteries, for example, are three-winged, i.e. U-shape arrangements of monk cells around the pillared assembly hall, one side of the square being left open. Other units have monk cells on all four sides. Should such factors be considered as indicative of the character of the school (open or close for the laity?) or rather as a signal that the school had many monks and erecting an additional row of cells was merely a practical necessity? It is possible that the criteria have not been recognised or are lost to us. Furthermore, the architecture of the sites, for instance, may have something to do with the sacred content of the *stūpa*; but relic deposits have only been discovered by chance.

Determining any possible meaning of the inner structure of the *stūpas* appears to be another difficult task. Some of the *stūpas* are filled with rubble, while others have an interior structure resembling a wheel with spokes. Sarkar has demonstrated that the number of spokes inside the *stūpas* depends on the size of the monument,¹² which suggests that the spokes may have had a function in the engineering of the monument. The carefully set up and tidily executed room dividers inside the tumuli (which were not seen from the outside after the *stūpa* was completed) apparently had some importance for their erectors. Perhaps the construction was somehow related to the pre-Buddhist methods of building sepulchral monuments. Vedic sources describe the tombs (*śmaśāna* or *loṣṭa-citti*) as holding ashes from cremations and should be built using bricks (even giving the exact number of bricks required) and filling material (see *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* XIII.8.1–3). Those *stūpas* in Nagarjunakonda in which relics were found were all constructed with ‘spokes’. In the valley, relics of the Buddha or important persons were found in the *stūpas* of sites 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 21, deposited in reliquary caskets with added golden objects etc. Furthermore, in the *stūpas* of sites 4, 5, 9, 21 and 30 monastic urn burials were discovered: these were simple pots covered with bowls but without any grave goods. Similar pots were also found standing in the cells of the monasteries, which were probably kept there until a sepulchral monument was constructed or the existing one was opened (LONGHURST 1938: 20). Interestingly, not only human remains have been discovered. There were also bones of ox, deer and hare inside the *stūpa* at site 9, bones of hare and field-rats at site 4 and bones of peafowl inside the *mahācaitya*, i.e. site no. 1 (*vide infra*).

If the construction inside the *stūpas* was related to a school, it is almost impossible to establish its affiliation; *stūpas* without this construction and

¹² SARKAR 1966: 86, Table IV; the *stūpas* up to approx. 9 m of diameter have 4–6 spokes, from approx. 9 to 18 m – 8 spokes. Three *stūpas* of 12–15 m of diameter can have either 10 spokes or a complicate system of spokes in an inner and outer circle. The *mahācaitya* with almost 28 m of diameter displays this system as well.

without the *āyaka* projections may, however, possibly be connected with the Theravādins. Two units with such *stūpas* bear inscriptions.

The monastery known as site no. 38 (**Fig. 4**) is unusual.¹³ It is a four-winged establishment (with 20 cells) with *stūpa* and *caityagr̥ha* as well as small votive *stūpas* inside the compound. The brick *stūpa* was filled inside, i.e. it had no structure, only rubble, and it stood on a square brick base. Since the apsidal temple, the *caityagr̥ha*, contained no *stūpa* it is quite possible that it once contained a Buddha figure, although it has never been found. Near the entrance to the *stūpa* enclosure, a *buddha-pada* slab was placed which bore an inscription connecting the monastery with the school of the **Mahāvihāravāsins**,¹⁴ a school of the **Theravāda-Vibhajjavāda** from Sri Lanka.¹⁵

¹³ ‘Dhāriṇī vihāra’ cf. *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 23–24 (called ‘Site V–6’) and pl. 39c (the *buddhapada*); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 192 and fig. 54 (plan), in SARKAR 1966, pl. 9a–b, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2, 28.

The site should not be confused with site no. 106 in its vicinity, which was also referred to as ‘Dhāriṇī Vihāra’ by the excavators, cf. SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, pl. 67b.

¹⁴ The first translation of the reading of the inscription was made shortly after its excavation in *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 23–24: ‘[O]ne of the inscriptions gave the name of the Buddhist sect *Mahāvihāravasin* of Theravāda-Vibhajjavāda which constituted the third division of Theravāda of Ceylon at Nagarjunakonda [...]. One of the slabs found near the entrance into the *stupa* was carved with a pair of *Buddha-pada* [...]. There was an inscription on it, ascribable to the middle of third century, recording that the sacred feet were of the Buddha and were designed and consecrated by or for the *Mahāvihāravāsins* of the Theravāda-Vibhajjavāda school of Ceylon in a *vihāra* described as *Dharana-vihāra* situated on the Praveni. The *Mahāvihāravāsins* are described as adepts in reading the marks on the human body and fixing horoscopes which constitute the eight *sasana* (*abbhuto*) of the *navanga* promulgated by Buddha.’ The photography of the inscription, transcription and translation (with different interpretation) can be found in: SIRCAR and LAHIRI 1960: 250:

1 Siddham āchariyaṇaṃ Theriyānaṃ Vibhajja-vādānaṃ Kasmira-Gaṃdhāra-Yavana-Vanavāsa-Tambapaṇṇidipa-pasādakanam 2 Mahāvihāra-vāsinaṃ nava[m]ga-Sathu-sasana-atha-vyajana-vinichhaya-visaradanam ariyava[m]sa-paveni-dharanam 3 vihāre Bhagavato pāda-saṃghāḍā nipatīṭhapito sava-satānaṃ hita-sukh-athanāya ti.
Translation: ‘Let there be success! The pair of feet of the Lord (i.e. the Buddha) has been installed, with the prayer for welfare and happiness of all beings, in the monastery of the teachers who are Theriyas (i.e. Thera-vādins) (*and*) Vibhajja-vādas (i.e. Vibhajja-vādins); who caused delight to (i.e. converted the Buddhist doctrine) (*the people of*) Kāsmīra, Gandhāra, Yavana, Vanavāsa and Tāmrapaṇṇī-dvīpa; who are residents of the Great Monastery; who are experts in the determination of the meaning and implication of the nine-fold teachings of the Śāstrī (i.e. the Buddha); (*and*) who know the tradition of the (*four*) classes of (*Buddhist*) recluses by heart.’

Sircar and Lahiri understand the Mahāvihāravāsins not as the name of a Buddhist school but of the inhabitants of the monastery of this name in the valley (SIRCAR and LAHIRI 1960: 249). For a different interpretation and the affiliations of the Vibhajjavādins cf. N. DUTT 1970: 223ff., first of all 223–237.

¹⁵ For the School of the Theravādin of the Mahāvihāra cf. BAREAU 1955: 205–240 (with references); Nandasena Mudiyanse in: *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 6: 508–511 (with references); literary references from the Pali literature also in: MALALASEKERA 1937–1938, vol. 2: 557–560. For the Vibhajjavādin cf. BAREAU 1955: 167–180, 168: ‘Les Theravādin singhalais du Mahāvihāra se désignent plusieurs fois eux-mêmes sous le nom de Vibhajjavādī’ (with references).

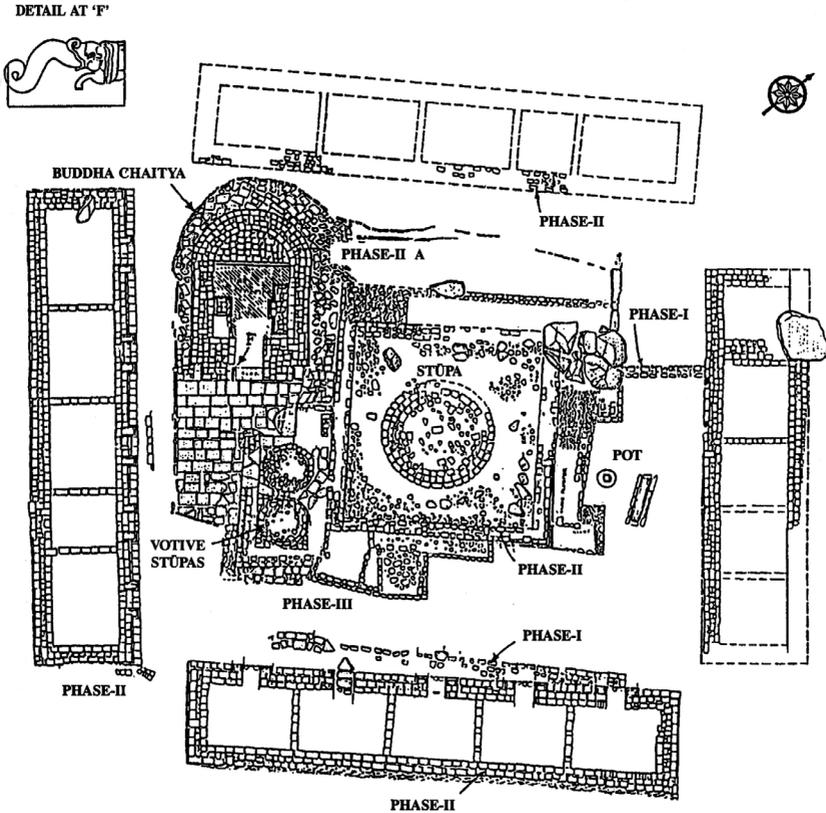


Fig. 4. Nagarjunakonda, site 38, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 54.

It seems plausible that, as Sarkar postulated, the fact that a *stūpa* lacks the *āyaka*-projections is a criterion to identify a Theravāda monastery. Such a *stūpa* belongs to another monastery complex, known as site no. 43,¹⁶ which is described in the inscription as built for the monks (*theriya*) of Sri Lanka (*taṃbapaṃṇa*).¹⁷ Both inscriptions, in sites 38 and 43, bear similarities (for

¹⁶ LONGHURST's 'Monastery 1 and Temple 2', 'Cula-dhammagiri vihāra' cf. LONGHURST 1938: 9–10 and pl. 5a (photo) and 5b (plan of the monastery); SARKAR and MISRA 1966 (1972, 1980), pl. 6 (photo showing *chaitya* shrine); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); = STONE 1994, fig. 2, 29; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 164.

¹⁷ Inscription from year 14 of Vīrapuruṣadatta, see VOGEL 1929–1930, F, transl. on p. 23: 'Success! Adoration to the Lord Buddha [...]. In the fourteenth – 14th – (year) of King Mātharīputa, in the sixth – 6th – fortnight of winter, on the thirteenth – 13th – day. For the benefit of the masters and of the fraternities (of monks) of Taṃbapaṃṇa (Ceylon) [transcript on p. 22: *Taṃbapaṃṇi-dīpa-pas[ā]dakānaṃ theriyānaṃ Taṃbapa[m]ṇakānaṃ*] who have converted

example, a listing of the countries converted by the monks), so it was probably the same school that inhabited both sites. The cloister of site 43 also has four wings (19 cells), but the *stūpa* and the *caitya*, which here contains a *stūpa*, are situated outside of it. In the monastery, one small Buddha image has been unearthed.

There are no further inscribed monasteries in Nagarjunakonda with *stūpas* lacking *āyaka* projections. Taking such *stūpas* as a criterion, it is possible to find more in the valley (for example, the tiny monastery no. 86,¹⁸ with only two monk cells), which can possibly be connected with Theravāda Buddhism. Site no. 108¹⁹ is the only known counterpart to no. 38 (Fig. 4). Both form a complex with a *stūpa*, a votive *stūpa* and an apsidal temple within the monastery (the monastery in this case merely consists of two wings). Also, the *caityagrha* in this case did not contain a *stūpa*, so probably a sculpture of the Buddha was once placed inside. One remarkable difference between sites 38 and 108 is that the *stūpa* in the latter site has an interior structure consisting of four spokes, which form a *svastika* in the centre.

If we consider the absence of the *āyakas* to be an important criterion, the monastery known as site no. 15²⁰ can be treated as a similar one: the *stūpa* was built from rubble, placed on a quadrangular platform. There were also two votive *stūpas*, but no apsidal *caitya* temple. With only three wings (12 cells), the monastery was small. A number of broken Buddha images has been discovered. The monastery known as site no. 23²¹ also had a *stūpa* without any inner structure and *āyakas*. It was accompanied by four votive *stūpas*. The

Kashmir, Gandhāra, Chīna, Chilāta (=Skt. Kirāta), Tosali, Avaramta (=Skt. Aparānta), Vaṅga, Vanavāsi, Yavana(?), Damila (?), Palura (?) and the Isle of Tambapamṇi (Ceylon). At Siripavata (=Skt. Śrīparvata) on the east side of Vijayapurī at the Convent on the Lesser Dhammagiri a *chaitya*-hall with flooring of slabs, with a *chaitya* and provided with all the necessities, was caused to be made by the female lay-member Bodhisiri (Skt. Bōdhisīri) for the sake of [...]. In addition, other donations are listed: '[...] And even thuswise a *chaitya*-hall at the Kulaha-vihāra, a shrine for the Bodhi-tree at the Sīhala-vihāra one – 1 – cell at the Great Dhammagiri, a *maṇḍava*-pillar at the Mahāvihāra, a hall for religious practices at the Devagiri, a tank, verandah and *maṇḍava* at Puvaseḷa (=Skt. Pūrvaśaila), a stone *maṇḍava* at the eastern gate of the Great Chaitya at Kaṇṭakasela (=Skt. Kaṇṭakaśaila), three – 3 – cells at Hirumūṭhava, seven – 7 – cells at Papilā, a stone *maṇḍava* at Puphagiri (= Skt. Pushpagiri),..... a stone *maṇḍava* at the vihāra.' Cf. LAMOTTE 1958: 581: 'Sinhalese Theras' *Tambapa[m]naka*.

¹⁸ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 196.

¹⁹ SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 199 and fig. 62 (plan).

²⁰ *Indian Archaeology 1954–55*: 22 (called 'Site VI'); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 174 and fig. 46 (plan).

²¹ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 180 and fig. 50 (plan) = *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 24 (called 'Site XI'): '[...] a three-winged "U"-shaped monastery, consisting of eight cells on each side, complete with an apsidal *stupa*-*chaitya* and a pillared hall. Of great interest was an inscribed frieze of limestone with an inscription reading (*Bha*)*gavato mulache(ti)ya(ve) patithapita* [...].'

monastery, which has been rebuilt three times, is large and consists of 24 cells in three wings. The *caitya* temple, containing a *stūpa*, was placed inside the monastery (like in no. 38, our Fig. 4).

It is interesting to observe that the inhabitants of the monasteries connected with the Theravāda tradition (or who at least adhere to a conservative building style for their *stūpas* which do not display projections) obviously do not object to the worship of statues of the Buddha (in nos. 38 and 108, the Buddha icon was probably the object of veneration inside the apsidal hall). This resembles the situation known from Sri Lanka, where statues of the Buddha are frequently preserved – unlike narrative reliefs.

If the absence of the *āyakas* is accepted as a criterion indicative of monasteries with a Theravādin connection, it may be argued that they were quite frequently represented in the valley.

As we have seen, the *stūpas* without *āyaka* projections may indicate an affiliation with the Theravāda order, since both inscriptions from such sites name them. However, introducing the projection does not have to denote a change in the doctrine of the monks inhabiting the monastery; it rather reflects some kind of change in the ritual. The projections must have been used for putting lamps or flowers on them. Cases of projections being added to an already existing building are therefore of particular interest. The rubble *stūpa* of site no. 20²² was originally built without *āyaka* platforms, though they were added in the course of a later rebuilding. The *stūpa* in this case stood in a square brick enclosure on one side of the two-winged monastery. No Buddha statues or narrative reliefs were found here, only slabs with the representations of ‘vases of plenty’, *pūrṇa-ghaṭa*, and lions. The small *stūpa* in the two-winged (five cells?) monastery site no. 27²³ originally also had no *āyakas*; they were added later, but only on two sides. As opposed to the *stūpas* described before, this one contained a brick structure inside, which was made of four spokes forming a cross. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted additionally that there are rubble or brick *stūpas* without an inner structure but with *āyakas* (sites 22²⁴, 32²⁵ and 59²⁶; the last one with stones set inside the *stūpa* in the

²² SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 178 and fig. 60a (photo); SARKAR (1966, pl. 12a) gives a picture of a *svastika* of stones from this site, which is, however, not visible in Soundararajan.

²³ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 184, 188 and fig. 52 (plan of an early period, without *āyakas*), SARKAR 1966, pl. 10a.

²⁴ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan of the *stūpa*); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 180 and fig. 49 (plan of the *stūpa*).

²⁵ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan).

²⁶ *Indian Archaeology 1958–59*: 6, pl. 4b; SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 192 and fig. 56 (plan).

shape of a *svastika*). The *stūpa* of site no. 32 (a two-winged monastery and an apsidal temple with a *stūpa* inside) also had only two *āyakas* (about rubble *stūpas* with *āyakas* in sites 7 and 26 *vide infra*).

All other *stūpas* in Nagarjunakonda are provided with *āyaka* projections and have a structure with spokes inside; in other words, most of the *stūpas* with an inner structure have *āyakas*.

The sites designated as nos. 7 & 8²⁷ form an interesting case (**Fig. 5**); these two sites are actually only one facility, but rebuilt on nearly the same place. The *stūpa* in site no. 7 was built from rubble; site no. 8 had a structure with spokes. Both had *āyaka* projections. Both the former and the latter complex consisted of a monastery and a *stūpa*. Neither had an apsidal *caitya* temple. The former monastery must have been built using perishable materials, since only the surrounding rubble wall remained. The latter was a four-winged cloister with 20 cells and a pillared hall in the middle. An inscription²⁸ on one of the pillars states that the monastery was donated for the benefit of the *ācharyas* of the **Mahīśāsaka** school.²⁹ In the *stūpa* built with an eight-spoked internal structure, an elaborate reliquary has been found. The reliquary consists of five containers, one inside the other: a stone casket, one of terracotta, one of copper, one of silver, and the innermost of gold containing a bone relic and other artefacts. Although no inscription accompanies this reliquary, it is obvious that the relics must have belonged to an important personage. No reliefs or images of the Buddha have been found in the site.

The site no. 7 & 8 are too unusual to attribute other monasteries to the Mahīśāsakas solely on the basis of similarities of their building scheme. The complex that was most similar was no. 21 (see fn. 9) where, however,

²⁷ LONGHURST 1938: 22, pl. 17; SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2, 25; SOUNДАРARAJAN 2006: 170 and fig. 43 (plan).

²⁸ VOGEL 1929–1930: 24–25: ‘Success! Adoration to the Lord, the Supreme Buddha. In the 11th year of (*the reign of*) Mahārāja Vāseṭhīputa Siri-Ehuvula-[Chāta]mūla of (*the house of*) the Ikhākus, the 1st (*fortnight of*. ?), the 7th day. Mahādevi [Ko]da[ba]lisiri, (*who is*) the granddaughter of Mahārāja Vāseṭhīputa, Siri-Chātamūla of (*the house of*) the Ikhākus, etc. [...] has erected this pillar and monastery for the benefit of the Masters of the Mahi[sā]saka sect [ed. on p. 24: *khaniyaṃ vihāro cha achariyānaṃ Mahi[sā]sakānaṃ*], on behalf of the community of the Four Quarters, and for the sake of the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings. (*It has been*) carried out by the Master, the great preacher of the Law, the *thera* Dhamma[gho]sa.’

²⁹ BAREAU 1955: 181–189, 181: ‘Toutes nos sources s’accordent pour considérer les Mahīśāsaka comme la principale des sectes issues du tronc des Sthavira après les schismes successifs des Haimavata, des Vātsīputriya et des Sarvāstivādin. Si, d’accord en cela avec la tradition des Sammatīya et des Mahāsaṅghika citées par Bhavya et aussi, semble-t-il, avec la tradition singhalaise, on désigne sous le nom de Vibhāyavādin les Sthavira qui refusèrent d’accepter la doctrine des Sarvāstivādin, les Mahīśāsaka constituent la plus importante secte de ce groupe’; for the doctrine cf. N. DUTT 1970: 129–134; M. KARALUVINNA in: *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 6. 4: 556–558 (with references).

the *vihāra* only consisted of three wings. Inside the eight-spoked *stūpa*, apart from two small relic caskets with bones, pearls and gold, ‘pot offerings’, i.e. monastic burials, were also found. Without attempting to assign them to the Mahiśāsaka school, another group of monasteries consisting of a *vihāra* and a spoked *stūpa* can be listed here, i.e. sites 14,³⁰ 54³¹ and 105³². The monasteries had four or three wings, all *stūpas* had four-spoked internal structures (in no. 14 the *stūpa* was rebuilt) and a circular hub, not filled with bricks. None of the monasteries contained reliefs. However, at site 105, inside the three-winged monastery, in the space usually taken by the pillared central hall, a shrine chamber with the Buddha image was added during the process of rebuilding.

The next monastic community known from the inscription³³ is the **Bahuśrutīyas**.³⁴ The monastery dedicated to them is site no. 5 (Fig. 6).³⁵ The monastic unit is relatively large. The monastery consists of 28 cells in four wings surrounding a pillared hall. The big *stūpa* with its complicated internal structure consisting of a hub with eight spokes in the inner ring and twelve in the outer one had four *āyaka* projections each with five *āyaka* pillars. The *stūpa* contained the remains of six monks whose ashes were buried in simple pots covered with bowls, without grave goods (LONGHURST 1938: 21). Around the *stūpa*, supplementary *maṇḍapas* were placed. The most characteristic

³⁰ *Indian Archaeology 1954–55*: 23 (called ‘Site V’), pl. 44a; SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 172, 174 and pl. 58b.

³¹ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 192 and fig. 55 (plan), pl. 65a.

³² SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 196 and fig. 60 (plan) = *Indian Archaeology 1958–59*: 8.

³³ VOGEL 1929–1930: 24: ‘Success! [...] Mahādevī Bhaṭṭidevā (*who is*) the daughter-in-law of Mahārāja Vāsethīputa Siri-Chātamūla, of (*the house of*) the Ikhākus, etc. [...]; (*who is*) the wife of Mahārāja Mādharīputa Siri-Vīrapurisadata of the house of the Ikhākus; (*and who is*) the mother of Mahārāja Siri-Ehuvuḷa (?)–Chātamūla has erected..... this monastery provided with all essentials (?) for the **Masters of the Bahusutīya** sect. (ed.: 24: [...] *vihāro sava-jāta-niyuto achariy[ā]naṃ Bahusutīyānaṃ patit[hā]pito*).’

³⁴ BAREAU 1955: 81–83: 81: ‘Ils seraient nés d’un schisme survenu à la fin du II^e s. E. N. selon les traditions du Nord-Ouest, directement au sein des Mahāsāṅghika selon celles-ci, ou parmi les Gokulika selon les traditions des Theravādin et des Sammatīya. [...] Selon Paramārtha et K’ouei-Ki, leur secte aurait été fondée par l’Arhant ou Aśaiksa Yājñavalkya qui, s’étant retiré dans l’Himālaya du vivant du Buddha, serait resté en *samādhi* pendant près de deux centres ans. S’étant éveillé à la fin de ce temps et ayant quitté ses montagnes, il se serait alors rendu compte que les Mahāsāṅghika ne développaient que le sens superficiel du *Tripitāka* et non le sens profond. Il aurait donc énoncé le sens profond avec le sens superficiel, et créé une école nouvelle portant le nom de Bahuśrutīya. D’après Paramārtha, le sens profond du *Tripitāka* serait la doctrine du Mahāyāna, et le *Satyasiddhiśāstra* de Harivarman appartiendrait à cette secte. Le *Satyasiddhiśāstra*, dont il existe une traduction chinoise due à Kumārajīva (T. S. 1646), semble bien appartenir à cette école. Son auteur, Harivarman, serait originaire de l’Inde centrale et aurait vécu au III^e s. P. C.’ (with references); Engl. in: *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2: 501–502; cf. also N. DUTT 1970: 125–126.

³⁵ LONGHURST 1938: 10–11, 20–21, pl. 8a, pl. 15c–d; SARKAR 1966, pl. 9b, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2, 26; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 166 and fig. 40, pl. 55b.

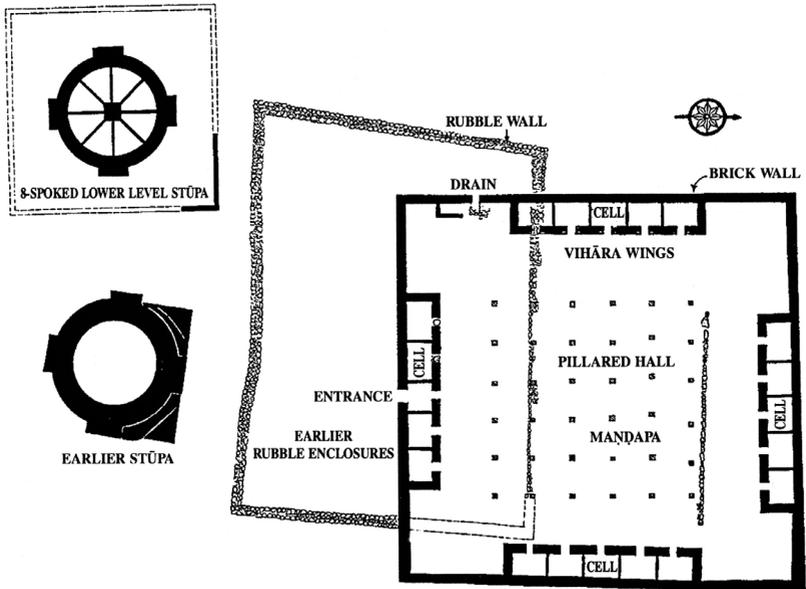


Fig. 5. Nagarcjunakonda, site 7/8, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 43.

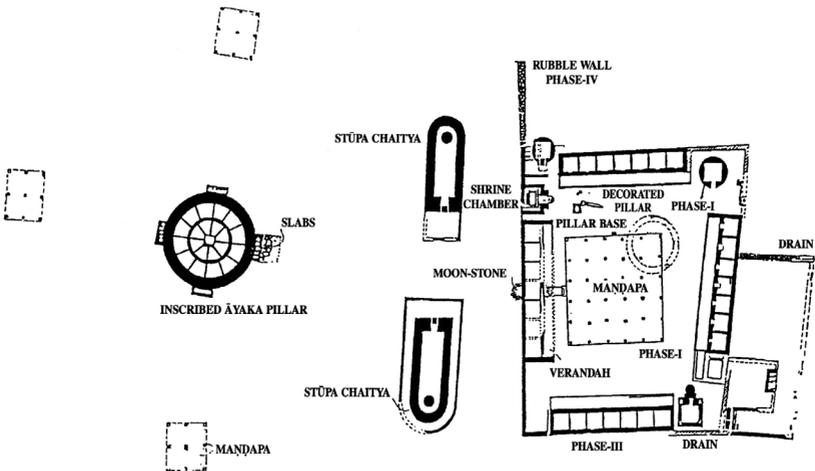


Fig. 6. Nagarcjunakonda, site 5, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 40.

feature of the monastery of the Bahuśrutīyas were two apsidal temples, facing each other, placed between the *stūpa* and the *vihāra*, both of which enshrined a *stūpa*. In the complex, no reliefs or Buddha images were found, but in one of the corners of the *vihāra* there was a shrine chamber with an increased pedestal on which Buddha sculptures might have been standing.

Two apsidal temples, facing each other and both containing *stūpas*, are also part of one other monastic unit in Nagarjunakonda, i.e. site no. 26.³⁶ This site got this final shape only after being thoroughly rebuilt (there are remains of an older *stūpa* underneath one of the apsidal *caitya* temples). The monastery consists of three wings and a *stūpa*, with *āyakas* (but no *āyaka* pillars) and without a spoked structure inside. It is unlike site 5 (which had *āyaka* pillars), but the two *caityagrhas* with *stūpas* inside are so characteristic that the monastery could probably be assigned to the same school of the Bahuśrutīyas; particularly since in site 26, too, no reliefs came to light.

What is also characteristic of these two monasteries, site 5 and site 26, is that in both some interesting additional structures have been excavated. They are round on the outside and square on the inside. As far as I am aware, there is no convincing explanation for such buildings.³⁷ They might have served as libraries, i.e., repositories for manuscripts; they may have been square inside in order to fit the shelving into place easily. If this assumption proves right, the ‘Bahuśrutīyas’ could really be treated as knowledgeable (their name literally means: ‘those who heard a lot’).

Another complex with two identical apsidal temples is site no. 4 (**Fig. 7**).³⁸ The big difference is, however, that neither of these temples contained a *stūpa*.³⁹

³⁶ *Indian Archaeology 1955–56*: 25 (called ‘Site XV’), pl. 37; SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 183–184 and pl. 63a.

³⁷ RAMACHANDRAN 1953: pl. 31a: ‘Guard room or Strong Room’; SARKAR and MISRA 1980: 34: ‘These chambers were probably meant for the dignitaries of the monastery, who preferred separate cells of their own.’

³⁸ LONGHURST 1938: 9–10, 20 and pl. 5c–d (plan), 6–7; SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2, 21, fig. 20 (photo of the model); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 164, 166 and pl. 55a (photo).

³⁹ There is considerable confusion about this site. It is clearly stated by LONGHURST 1938: 9: ‘In one of those we found two broken statues of the Buddha [...] but nothing in the other’, and it is also depicted on the plan (LONGHURST 1938: pl. 5d) and the old photo (LONGHURST 1938: pl. 5c). The monastery is shown here from the front (apparently from the *stūpa* hill), in the left *caitya* there are two white pieces of stones, probably two fragments of Buddha statues (cf. LONGHURST 1938: pl. 6a), there is no *stūpa* in the right one. The *stūpa* is also not represented in any of the apsidal buildings in the picture of the model of the site in STONE (1994, fig. 20). SARKAR 1966: 81 groups the site with the units containing a *stūpa* in one of the *caityas*. It is in the model today, where in one apsidal temple stands a prominent white *stūpa*. The *stūpa* was apparently ‘reconstructed’ in the monastery rebuilt to receive the ‘ideal model’ of the Nagarjunakonda establishment. The reconstruction of the site includes the *stūpa*.

In one of them, two broken Buddha statues were discovered; another contained no finds. The monastery consisted of three wings with flanking extensions, one of which most likely served as a refectory. The six-spoked *stūpa* contained the mortal remains of twelve monks (ashes in water-pots covered with inverted food-bowls) and a silver casket contained a tiny golden *stūpa*-shaped relic box.

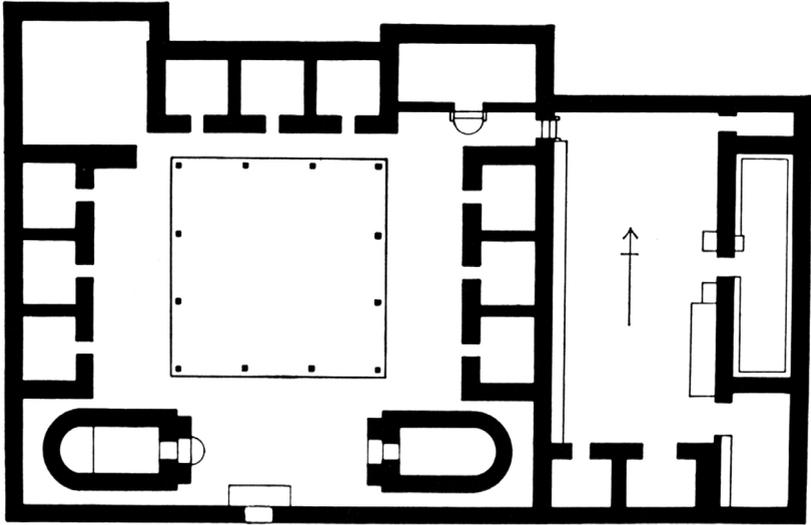


Fig. 7. Nagarjunakonda, site 4, only monastery, from LONGHURST 1938, pl. 5d.

In many ways, the monastery complex labelled site 85⁴⁰ is similar to the above-mentioned compounds, too. The main difference, however, is that here one of the Buddha-*chaityas* is apsidal and the other is square. There are no inscriptions mentioning a particular Buddhist school as being related to any of those monasteries that contain only Buddha shrines.

The next group of monastic units comprises sites with a *stūpa*, a *vihāra* and two apsidal temples, one of which contains a *stūpa* and the other a Buddha statue. To this category belongs site no. 9 (Fig. 8),⁴¹ whose donation inscriptions

The reconstructed site 4 (labelled 'site 3' is published in SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, pl. 53b, cf. the photo of site 3 in pl. 53a). Accidentally, the reconstructed site is labelled for the tourists 'the Simhala Vihara for the Ceylonese monks'.

⁴⁰ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 196 and fig. 59 (plan), pl. 65b, 66a, 76a.

⁴¹ LONGHURST 1938: 23–24 and pl. 7, pl. 18; *Indian Archaeology 1957–58*: 6, pl. 4a; SARKAR and MISRA 1966, pl. 7; = SARKAR 1966; pl. 8a, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2, fig. 19; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 172 and fig. 44 (plan), pl. 56b, 57a–b.

on two pillars⁴² connect it with the school of the **Aparamahāvīnaśāilās**.⁴³ The complex, which is surrounded by a rubble wall, consists of a large *stūpa*, votive *stūpas*, two *caityas* (the northern one with a *stūpa* inside; the southern one with a Buddha statue) and a three-winged monastery. In its interior, the large *stūpa* contains a complicated structure consisting of a square hub, eight spokes in the inner ring and sixteen in the outer ring. The *āyaka* projections were decorated with narrative reliefs (**Fig. 9a–b**);⁴⁴ five *āyaka* pillars were standing on each side. Inside the *stūpa*, no reliquaries were discovered but two water-pots covered with food-bowls, i.e. probably monastic urn burials, as well as the burned bones of ox, deer and hare.

In contrast to all sites discussed above, the *stūpa* in site 9 was decorated with narrative reliefs.

Interestingly, two other monastic units built according to the same scheme also contained reliefs – the best artistic production of Nagarjunakonda – placed on the *āyakas* and also covering the domes. Those units were sites no. 2 and

⁴² SIRCAR 1963–1964: 9–10: *Siddha / mahārājasa asameddha-yājisa a[ne]ka-hirana-ko[tt]i i-padāyisa siri-Cha[m]ta[mulasa p[u]tasa mahārājasa siri-[V]ra[pu]risadattasa putasa raño Vāsethī-putasa Ikhā[ku]na siri-[E]havu[la]-Chantamūlasa sava[chha]ra āthama gimha-pakha chavuthā dīvasa padarasa Siripavate Vijayapure Aparamahāvīnas[e]liyāna[m] ma[havina]seliyāna[m] mahā-nigāye Sethivara-vadhamāne kasa Ariya-saghasa sela-[maḍavavathavana] therana sālā nivaṇaya [na]tha[.]. Iti [Buddha]-Dhama... ..magala-nagaravara-girivara-naigama[vara]-bahu-deya... .. karako upāsako Chadasiri cha Nāgasiriko raño āyu-vadhanika kata a[pano] mātā-pituno pūja [na]puta bhariyako ni[m]itta sa ma-bhāgam puram dātā apa gama[ne] sukh-athanaya; in the inscription of the same Chadasiri on another pillar found in the same monastery (cf. SIRCAR 1963–1964: 8–9) Aparamahāvīnaseliyas are not named but the *aryasaṃgha* as in this inscription; thus the inscription apparently refers to the same school.*

⁴³ BAREAU 1955: 104–105 (with references): 104: ‘Cette secte [Aparaśāila] est ignorée de la tradition sammatīya citée par Bhavya, et les *Chroniques* singhalaises ne la rangent pas dans le tableau de filiation des sectes mais dans un groupe des six écoles apparues tardivement. Vasumitra la range à côté des Caitīya et des Uttaraśāila parmi les écoles les plus tardives des Mahāsāṅghika, du moins dans les versions les plus récentes, car celle de Paramārtha l’ignore. La liste mahāsāṅghika citée par Bhavya et Vinītadeva la rangent parmi les Mahāsāṅghika à côté des Pūrvaśāila. Buddhaghosa en fait l’une des quatre sectes andhaka [...]. *Ibid.*: 105: ‘Vasumitra signale que la plupart des thèses des Aparaśāila, comme celles des Uttaraśāila et des Caitīya dont il ne distingue pas, étaient semblables à celles de Mahāsāṅghika’ (with references); cf. also MALALASEKERA 1937–1938, vol. 1: 118 (with references); cf. D. T. DEVENDRA in: *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2: 12 (Aparamahāvīnaseliya), 13–14 (Aparaśāila) (with references); cf. also N. DUTT 1970: 123–125.

The name *apara-mahāvīna-seliya* (*śāila*) is not explained and it will be (obviously rightly) accepted that the name corresponds exactly to *apara-seliya* (‘from the Western mountain’). As a rather unlikely hypothesis it can be added that the *mahāvīna* could perhaps mean ‘great monks’; *avina* is known in the *Uṇadisūtra* (2.47) as sacrificing priest (Opferpriester) cf. *Petersburger Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, column 500. Prof. Oskar von Hintüber (private communication 2.08.2017) is of the opinion that the word should be understood as *mahāvāna*. To that it should only be noted that this form does not appear in any inscription.

⁴⁴ Frieses from the *stūpa* in site 9 are illustrated e.g. in STONE 1994, figs. 64–66, 79–81, 83, 86, 88–91.

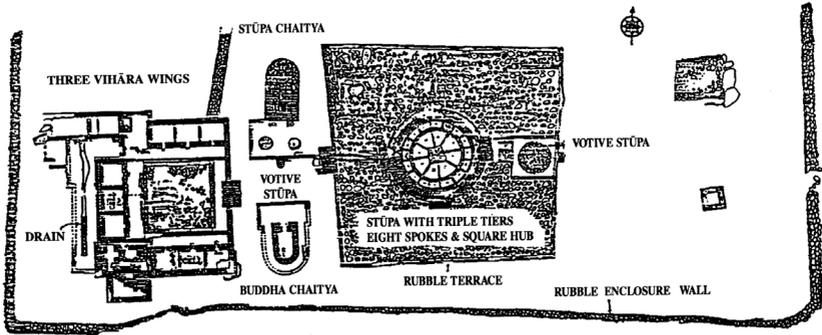


Fig. 8. Nagarjunakonda, site 9, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 44.



Fig. 9a. Nagarjunakonda, site 9, fragment of a Campaka narrative on an *āyaka* frieze, Archaeological site Museum, no. 17, photograph © Wojtek Oczkowski.



Fig. 9b. Nagarjunakonda, site 9, subjugation of the elephant Dhānapala on an *āyaka* frieze, Archaeological site Museum, no. 599 (depot), photograph © Wojtek Oczkowski.

3. Site 2 (Fig. 10)⁴⁵ consists of a three-winged *vihāra* (15 cells), two *caityas* facing each other (here the northern one contained the Buddha statue and the southern one the *stūpa*) and an eight-spoked *stūpa* that was covered with narrative reliefs.

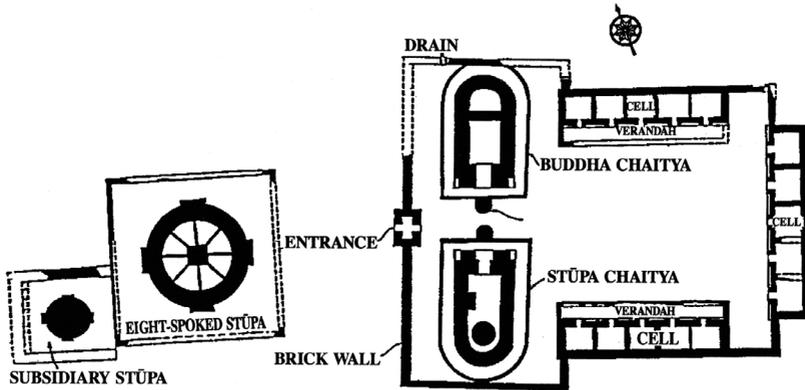


Fig. 10. Nagarjunakonda, site 2, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 38.

Site 3⁴⁶ forms the largest monastic unit in the entire valley (Fig. 11). Its several adjoining buildings led researchers to presume it was a refectory (RAMACHANDRAN 1953: 19) or the inner rooms of a nunnery (S. DUTT 1962: 134). But the layout of the unit is the same as that of site 9 (Fig. 8) and consists of a three-winged cloister (15 cells), two *caityas* (the northern one with the Buddha statue, a southern one with the *stūpa*), as well as the eight-spoked *stūpa* covered with undoubtedly the best narrative reliefs of the entire valley. Inside the *stūpa*, relic caskets with bone deposit were unearthed.

Hence, it becomes clear that all three sites, i.e. no. 2 (Fig. 10), no. 3 (Fig. 11) and no. 9 (Fig. 8), with identical arrangement of the monastic units, belonged to a Buddhist school which was fond of narrative depictions. This school was apparently the Aparamahāvīnaśāila, known from the inscription at site 9 (fn. 42).

⁴⁵ LONGHURST 1938: 19–20; RAMACHANDRAN 1953: 21–25 (called ‘Site no. 5’) and fig. 3 (plan of the *stūpa*), pl. 31 (photo showing the inner structure of the *stūpa*); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 164 and fig. 38 (plan), fig. 39 (plan of the *stūpa*).

⁴⁶ LONGHURST 1938: 15, 19–20 and pl. 15a–b, pl. 16a (relics); RAMACHANDRAN 1953: 8–20 (called ‘Site no. 6’) and fig. 3 (plan of the *stūpa*), pl. 2–3a (photos ‘general view’), pl. 3b (photo showing the inside structure of the *stūpa*), pl. 12a–b (photos showing the *caityas*), pls. 19–20, 23, 25, 29 (photos showing parts of the monastery); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); = STONE 1994, fig. 2; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 166, 170 and fig. 41 (plan), fig. 42 (detail of the plan), pl. 53a.

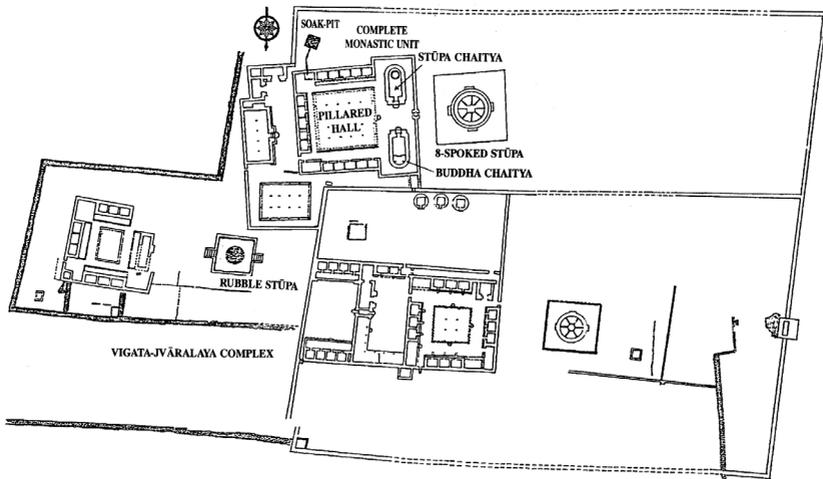


Fig. 11. Nagarjunakonda, sites 3, 32a, 32b, from SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, fig. 41.

The interrelation between the design and the occurrence of reliefs is evident in site 3 (Fig. 11). Two monastic complexes in its close vicinity, i.e. no. 32a and no. 32b,⁴⁷ have different schemes (for example, they have no *caityagrhas*). Even though all three sites seem to belong together – the three are sometimes referred to as ‘hospital’⁴⁸ or ‘university area’ (S. DUTT 1962: 134) – narrative reliefs have been found only in site no. 3.

Let us take a closer look at some other sites at Nagarjunakonda, where narrative reliefs also came to light. There are three such sites: nos. 6, 23 and 106.

According to STONE 1994: 30, in site 23 (see fn. 21) a frieze has been found (she does not give further details). The published relief (STONE 1994: fig. 47) must have been brought in from Amaravati. The lower border decorated with running animals and the tiny scene inside the medallion have no counterpart in Nagarjunakonda but are typical for Amaravati (compare e.g. ZIN 2016: 54–56); furthermore, the lengthened limbs of the depicted individuals leave no doubt about the origin of the relief. Therefore, site no. 23 does not have to concern us since it is not containing any locally produced reliefs.

⁴⁷ SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 2; S. DUTT 1962, pl. 5 (photo of sites 3 and 32a); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: fig. 41 (plan).

⁴⁸ On one wall, the inscription *mukhiya jvarälaya* was discovered, according to S. DUTT 1962: 134: ‘Main Room for sufferers from fever’.

Another monastery where a narrative representation was unearthed is no. 106.⁴⁹ This unit differs from all other units in Nagarjunakonda. The *vihāra* (in the south) was four-winged (20 cells); the *stūpa* (in the north) has an inner structure with eight spokes. Each corner of the square enclosure of the *stūpa* contained a votive *stūpa*; another four *stūpas* flanked one side. An apsidal temple stood near the votive *stūpas*; it housed a Buddha figure, which, however, has not survived. In this monastery, again only one narrative relief was found, however not (as usually) near the *stūpa*, but lying diagonally on the floor inside the apsidal temple. As only this one narrative relief was found in the monastery, it seems reasonable to assume that it was deposited there only by chance.

Contrary to those two sites with only a single relief in each, a lot of narrative reliefs have been found on the *stūpa* of site 6 (**Fig. 12a**).⁵⁰ Inside the *stūpa*, a gold reliquary with a tiny bone deposit as well as two gold medallions were discovered. The *stūpa*, behind which were placed some votive *stūpas*, stands far away from the *vihāra*, which in this case only consisted of a single row of Buddhist cells. However, it seems quite evident that some architectural devices of this monastic unit were made of perishable materials. The stone entrance to the monastery was excavated, behind which, at a distance, only the back row of cells stands; any side wings must have been built in wood or clay. Furthermore, the place where usually the apsidal temples would be erected, is just an empty space at this site. At least one building stood there once, since on the left traces of a building were discovered – not walls but just the outline of a building, apparently made of perishable materials – which is clearly visible in a photo of the excavation (SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, pl. 56a). The space vis-à-vis, where another building could be expected, had not been touched when the photo was taken; maybe it was never excavated. The location of the three-winged *vihāra* and the fact that space for two apsidal chapels was available, allows us to conclude that site 6 (**Fig. 12b**) did not differ from site 9 (**Fig. 8**) that is assigned to the Aparamahāvīnaśāilās. This seems to prove that all the sites from which narrative reliefs originate (i.e. sites 2, 3, 6, and 9), followed a rather similar building plan. The sites are very alike indeed and the similarities increase if we turn the ground plans (**Fig. 13**). It seems that the cardinal directions did not play a crucial role in the process of planning; it did not matter if the *stūpa* was placed in the West or the East; it rather seems that in Nagarjunakonda only the *stūpas* of those sites were adorned with reliefs where the passage from the

⁴⁹ *Indian Archaeology 1956–57*: 37 and pl. 65b; SARKAR and MISRA 1966 (1972, 1980), pl. 8 (wrongly labelled ‘Site 24’); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); = STONE 1994, fig. 2, fig. 126 (photo); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 199 and fig. 61 (plan), pl. 67b, 68a–b.

⁵⁰ LONGHURST 1938: 21–22 and pl. 15b (*stūpa*), pl. 16c–d (relics and gold medallions); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); = STONE 1994, fig. 2; SOUNDARARAJAN 2006, pl. 56a.

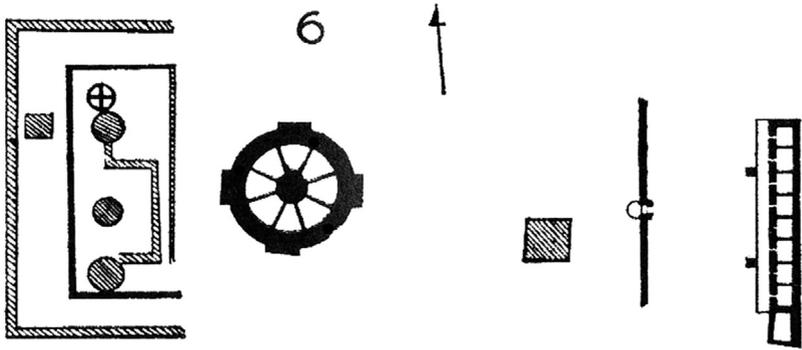


Fig. 12a. Nagarjunakonda, site 6, from SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (detail).

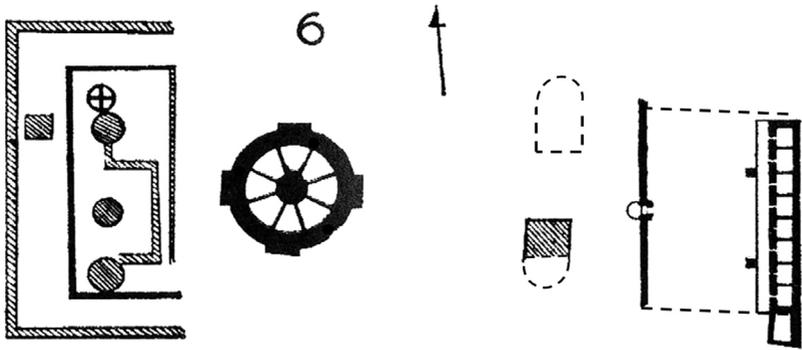


Fig. 12b. Nagarjunakonda, possible reconstruction of site 6.

stūpa towards the monastery was flanked by a temple with a Buddha image on the left side and another temple with a *stūpa* on the right (Fig. 14).

Only site no. 9 bears an inscription (fn. 42), but – bearing in mind how different all other monasteries were – it seems extremely possible that all the four sites belonged to the same school, the Aparamahāvinaśailas, which must have favoured narrative depictions.⁵¹ The last monastic site which has not yet been discussed in this paper is the most important site in the Nagarjunakonda valley – site no. 1,⁵² the *mahācaitya* (Fig. 15). The inscriptions on the *stūpa*

⁵¹ As for site 4, the plan of which, according to Sarkar (SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan) = STONE 1994, fig. 21), corresponds to that of sites 2, 3, 6 and 9, see fn. 39.

⁵² LONGHURST 1938: 16–19 and pl. 12a–b (plan of the *stūpa*), pl. 13 a–d (excavations and relics); RAMACHANDRAN 1953: 26–27 (called ‘Site no. 2’) and fig. 4 (plan of the monastery); SARKAR and MISRA 1966 (1972, 1980), pl. 5 (photo of the *stūpa*); SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (plan); = STONE

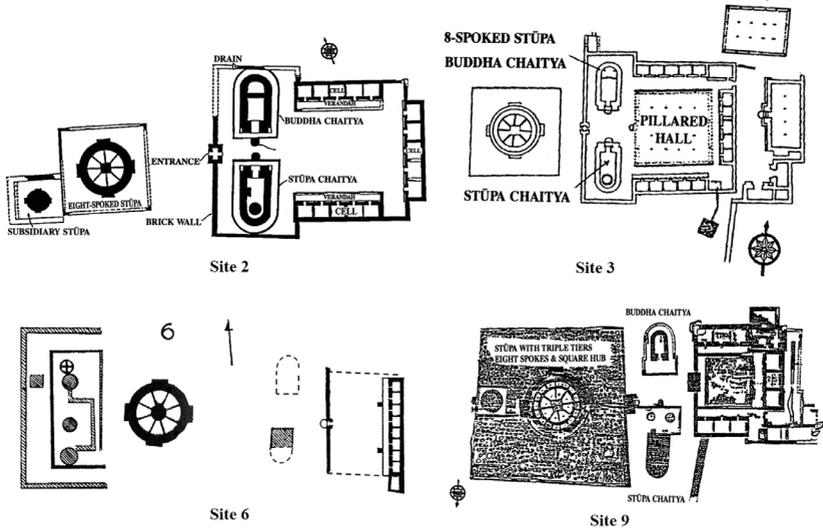


Fig. 13. Nagarjunakonda, buildings structures in which narrative reliefs were found (compare Figs. 10, 11, 12b, 8).



Fig. 14. Nagarjunakonda, site 3, miniature model in the garden of the Archaeological site Museum on the island.

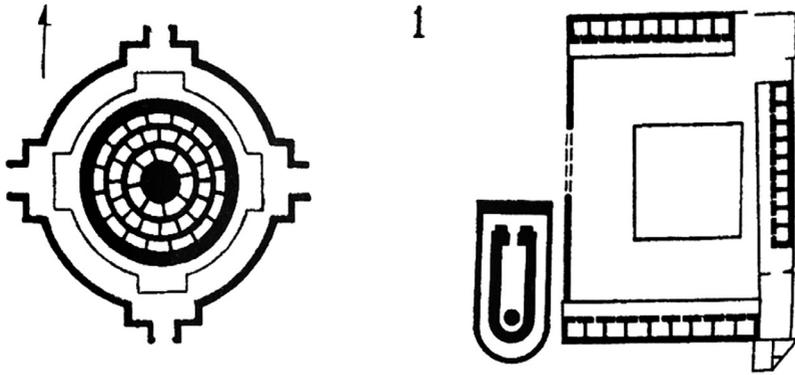


Fig. 15. Nagarjunakonda, site 1, from SARKAR 1966, pl. 13 (detail).

itself and in the *caityagrha* refer to the *ācāryas* of the **Apāramahāvinaśaila** school,⁵³ i.e. the same school recorded in the inscription of site 9 (fn. 42), which was obviously responsible for the narrative reliefs in the valley. The renovation of the *stūpa* was executed under the supervision of the learned monk Ānanda (cf. fn. 53); the monastery (*catusāla*) as well as the *caitya* hall⁵⁴ were sponsored by the same school.

Parts of the monastic unit in site 1 (Fig. 15) were bigger than those of other units, but the basic design of the unit corresponds with sites no. 2, 3 and 9 (Fig. 13). The three-winged monastery comprised 28 cells. The *stūpa* measured

1994, fig. 2, 18, fig. 17 (photo of the *stūpa*); SOUNDARARAJAN 2006: 160, 164 and fig. 37 (plan of the monastery), pl. 52.

⁵³ VOGEL 1929–1930: 17 (inscription C 1): ‘For the benefit of the Masters of the **Apāramahāvinaseliya** sect (ed. *ibid.*: *āchariyānaṃ Apāramahāvinas[e]liyāma[m]*) this pious foundation of the Mahāchetiya has been completed by the Reverend Ananda, who knows the *Dīgha*- and the *Majjhima-nikāyas* by heart, (*who is*) a disciple of the Masters of the Ayira-haṃgha (Skt. *Ārya-saṅgha*) who are resident in Paṃṇagāma and who are preachers and preceptors of the *Dīgha*, the *Majjhima-nikāya*] and of the five *Mātukas*. This pious work, the Mahāchetiya, was completed and the pillars were erected. In the 6th year of (*the reign of*) King Siri-Virapurisadata the 6th fortnight of the rainy season, the 10th day.’ The school is named in several other inscriptions on the site, cf. *ibid.*: 20, 22; cf. also SIRCAR 1961: 210–211; and following fns.

⁵⁴ VOGEL 1929–1930: 21–22 (inscription E): ‘[...] A *chetiya-ghara* (*chaitya*-hall). Chātisiri (*who is*) the uterine sister of Mahārāja Vāsethiputa Siri-Chātāmūla of the house of Ikhāku [...] having due regard to the past, future and present bliss (?) of the great community of Buddhist monks consisting of all the holy men who have renounced the world and who have penetrated (?) into various countries, and both the houses to which she herself belongs, has erected a stone shrine surrounded by a cloister and provided with everything at the foot of the Mahāchetiya for the benefit of the Masters belonging to the sect of the **Apāramahāvinaseliyas** [ed. VOGEL 1929–1930: 21: *Apāramahāvinaseliya[ā]naṃ parigahe savaniyuta[m] chātūsala-parigahitaṃ selamaṃṭava[m] patith[ā]pitam*]. In the eightieth year, anno 18, of King Siri-Virapurisadata [...].’

28m in diameter and its inner structure contained at least 40 chambers; in one such chamber a *stūpa*-shaped relic casket came to light, which was believed to contain the corporal remains of the Buddha.⁵⁵ Each of the *stūpa*'s *āyaka* projections bore five pillars. Between the monastery and the *stūpa* there was a *caityagr̥ha* containing a *stūpa*. What is missing here is the second apsidal temple with the Buddha figure, but the space for it is available. This temple may have been built using perishable materials or perhaps was never built in the first place. Inscriptions reveal an 18-year interval between the construction of the *stūpa* and the *caityagr̥ha*, the missing building may well have been in its planning stage but was never erected. Except for the non-existence of the second apsidal temple, the design of the site corresponds precisely with the other monastic units of the Aparamahāvīnaśāila school.

The amazing fact is, however, that the *mahācaitya* was not decorated with narrative reliefs; stucco pieces of geometrical and floral designs were all that was discovered in the area of the monastery (RAMACANDRAN 1953: 27). How was it possible that at the most imposing *stūpa* in the entire valley, sponsored by the royal family, and part of an establishment of the very school which applied reliefs in all their other sites, no decoration was found whatsoever?

In my opinion, the answer can be quite simple: the *mahācaitya* at Nagarjunakonda had the *pradakṣiṇapāṭha* enclosed by a surrounding railing. The top view of the railing enclosure equals the reconstruction of the great *stūpa* in Amaravati. In both cases there were entrances into the enclosure in front of the *āyaka* platforms. While, however, in Amaravati the *stūpa* was fenced in by means of a mighty stone railing, in Nagarjunakonda only a brick foundation repeats the shape of the latter. The railing, which must have stood on it, is gone. It must have been made of wood⁵⁶ and when it perished, all the carved or painted scenes and other ornaments disappeared with it.

It might be that one of the inscriptions mentioning a *mahācaitya* contains a piece of evidence for the wooden railing. The inscription on a stone was found in site no. 6. While Elizabeth STONE 1994: 25 argued that the relief must have originally been intended for site 1, Akira SHIMADA (forthcoming) presented a convincing theory that before *stūpa* 1 was built, the name *mahācaitya* was given to *stūpa* no. 6.

⁵⁵ The inscription (VOGEL 1929–1930: 20) calls the relic *dhātuvara-parigahita*. On the understanding of a relic as the living presence of the Buddha see SCHOPEN 1988. After the valley was flooded, the relic was enshrined in the Mūlagandhakūṭi Vihāra at Sāmāth (S. DUTT 1962: 127).

⁵⁶ LONGHURST 1938: 16: 'The *stūpa* was surrounded by a processional path 13 feet in width, and enclosed by a wooden railing standing on brick foundations, which still remain. The gateways were formed by extending the railing outwards, so as to form a screen on each side of the entrance [...].'

The stone bearing the inscription is a frieze and was part of an *āyaka* platform (Stone 1994: 27). The inscription refers to a donation of the slab (*paṭo*) and coping (*unisa*).⁵⁷ The ‘slab’ might perhaps refer to the frieze carrying the inscription, but it seems that no *uṣṇīṣas* (the coping stones from the railings) were needed for site no. 6 (Fig. 12a–b). Might it be that the coping named in the inscription that was installed *mahācetiye*, at the Great Caitya, was not a ‘stone’ but a coping timber for the railing of the *stūpa* in site no. 1 (Fig. 15)?

It appears that the Ikṣvāku, who imitated the great Sātavāhanas wherever possible, obviously wanted their own *mahācaitya* with a gorgeous railing. However, the railing had to appear there as soon as possible and not after many years of tedious work executed by stonecutters. A wooden railing must have certainly been a better option for them.

Let me sum up the most important results of the investigation at hand: it seems that there existed a phenomenon that could be referred to as a school-specific design of monasteries. I hope to have shown that we have to distinguish between Buddha images, which definitely were more common, and narrative reliefs, which were only present in a limited number of monasteries, maybe only those of particular Buddhist schools.

As emphasised at the outset, this essay does not claim to completely cover all the Buddhist monasteries of the region. The inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda have given us only a few names of Buddhist schools and of course it is by no means certain that these were the only schools present in the region. The Aparamahāvīnaśāila was most probably not the only school interested in the production of reliefs illustrating Buddhist narratives. At the site of Kanaganahalli which was richly decorated with such reliefs (POONACHA 2011, ARAMAKI, DAYALAY and NAKANISHI 2011, ZIN 2018b), inscriptions mention the Aparāśāila school (TOURNIER 2020: 870–871), a school also known to have been present in Amaravati,⁵⁸ but also the Kaurukulla school.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ VOGEL 1929–1930: 25 (ed., trans.): *Sidham namo bhagavato aga-pogalasa Budhasa Chhadakapavatic[e]na Padumā[vā]-niya gharaniya sagaya saputakānam Hagas[i]r[i] sa sagasa Nagatarasa cha sabhaja[sā] saputikāna[m] cha deydham[o] paṭo unisa cha mahācetiye patiḥ[ā]vito*; ‘Success. Adoration to the Lord Buddha, the best of beings. A meritorious gift (consisting of) a slab and a coping stone, has been dedicated at the Great Chaitya by Chhadakapavaticha, Padumavānī his house-wife, together with their sons Hagasiri and Nagatara with his wife and together with their daughters.’

⁵⁸ BAREAU 1955: 104: ‘Hiuan-tsiang trouva le monastère de l’Aparāśīlā sur une montagne à l’ouest de Dhanyakataka, mais il était alors désert depuis plus des cent ans.’

⁵⁹ The longest inscription discovered in Kanaganahalli records the gift of various architectural elements to the *mahācaitya*, primarily by the *bhikṣuṇī* Dhammasiri, whom the record identifies as *korukulana*. Previous interpretations (FALK 2009: 202–203; POONACHA 2011: 458, no. 75; NAKANISHI and von HINÜBER 2014: 31–33, no. I.8) have recently been refuted and an

The circumstances surrounding the suggested activity of these two Buddhist schools in Kanaganahalli deserves further research; it appears, however, certain by now that the Aparasāila/Aparamahāvinaśailas, the only school in Nagarjunakonda whose *stūpas* were covered with narrative reliefs, played a crucial role in Buddhist art of ancient Āndhradeśa.

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