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LOST BOOKS IN PEOPLE'S HANDS: LOOKING FOR ILLUSTRATED BUDDHIST MANUSCRIPTS OF ODISHA IN STONE

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Introduction:

The thirteenth century king Narasimha I of the Ganga dynasty (c.1238-1264 CE), the celebrated royal patron of the Sun Temple at Konarak in the Indian state of Odisha makes frequent appearances in art historical scholarship on portraits in South Asia.¹ He is portrayed in a number of rectangular stone steles as a man of leisure, valor, and piety (**Plate 31.1**). These steles retrieved from the site of Konarak are sizable with an average height of 89 cm (about 3 feet), and we see him fully carved out of stone, often detached from the background. None of them bear an inscription identifying him as Narasimha. An image from the same group of Konarak steles now in the Indian Museum survives with a visible inscription, but this inscription does not identify Narasimha: it names three officers (all of whom are identified as a “Nāeka”).² In fact, no inscription is known from Konarak that declares the patronage of Narasimha I. The earliest mention of Narasimha as the builder of Konarak is found in the copper plate charter of Narasimha II dated Śaka 1217 (1295 CE).³ Here we learn that King Narasimha built “a temple (here humbly referred to as “*kuṭīraka*”) for the sun to live in with other gods at Koṇākoṇa, a place of great renown”. It is through the study of relational iconography that his visual identity is established. For example, a kingly figure appears piously kneeling while looking up the Sun God Surya along with his royal Brahman priest on a beautifully carved stone sculpture of Surya still in situ in the exterior niche of the main sanctum at the site (**Plate 31.2**). It seems reasonable to suggest that this handsomely ornamented man should be the one who sponsored the monumental temple. With the pronounced bun, a sword with a beautiful hilt (here, he put his weapon down to honor the Lord Surya), bedecked in ornaments, and wearing a stylishly pleated garment that flows like a stream, Narasimha’s iconography is recognizably repeated in most sculptures that depict him.

In one such sculpture, now in the National Museum, New Delhi, we see the king seated on a throne with a group of onlookers respectfully listening to him, some holding their hands together (**Plate 31.3**). Despite missing the head of the main protagonist, this image is of interest for a number of reasons: the most important for the purpose of this essay is that the king holds a book in his hand addressing his crowd. In his extended left hand is a book, a pothi-format manuscript probably prepared with palm-leaf (**Plate 31.4**). The artist deftly carved it as a manuscript held together with a cord through a single hole. What is Narasimha doing with a book in his hand? It is highly unusual to find a king holding a book addressing his audience

among the surviving corpus of sculptural portrayal of kingly behaviors from medieval South Asia. Curiously, he sits on a lion-legged throne precisely the same kind as the one on which three main tutelary deities of Odisha are installed in one of his steles (**Plate 31.5**). It is as if the king who holds the book has the authority that parallels that of the divine.⁴ While the parallel is instructive of the nature of kingship envisioned here, our interest lies in the book held in his hand and what it may have signified in medieval Odisha.

In this essay, I would like to address two somewhat tangentially related points: one is on a historical puzzle, the question of continuity in the art of the book in Odisha. I suggest that it may be possible to identify a candidate for a medieval Odishan Buddhist manuscript based on paleographic and art historical evidence, if we adjust our expectation of what a painted Odishan manuscript from pre-1300 CE should look like. Second one is on the increasing vernacularity in artistic production that starts incorporating the lived human world more prominently in the overall iconographic program. A book in use is a key iconographic element in discerning this pattern of change that seems to turn to capture the lived world of historical persons -- teachers and kings of their own time or immediate past.⁵ Donaldson has already observed this trend in his study of what he calls “*śikṣādāna* (lit. giving of instruction) motif” and characterized it as secularization.⁶ While secularization may be a largely apt characterization, this concept remains rather generic and does not help to recognize the impulse behind this artistic change that captured the human world in a distinct visual language. I propose to reckon this epistemological shift with vernacular since the concept of vernacular can help signal an intimate tie to and awareness of a place. One small last point is that artistic strategies of carving images out of space especially in stone contributed to realizing this shift, as capitalized in the images of Narasimha (to the extent that he is missing his head because he was completely three dimensional)!

A historical puzzle: Odishan Buddhist manuscripts?

In today's Odisha, the art of palm-leaf manuscript is one of the region's celebrated artistic heritages. From the exterior, what Narasimha (I) holds in his hand does not seem too far from these Odishan manuscripts. Yet the art of illustration on palm-leaf manuscripts in surviving Odishan art historical records is only known from the eighteenth century onwards, with the earliest surviving securely datable manuscript dating to 1795 CE.⁷ Given the copious visual references to books in use in early medieval Odisha discussed below, it seems rather asymptomatic that nothing survived. This peculiar absence is often explained away with the harsh climate and the fragility of palm-leaf as material, but manuscripts from similar climate conditions do survive from earlier periods.⁸ The absence of evidence may also have to do with our expectation of what they should look like. If we expect to find something like the wonderful folios seen in celebrated Odishan manuscripts in which the text in Odiya script is inscribed with an iron stylus and inked afterwards on the surface (**Plate 31.6**),⁹ I believe our expectation is quite misplaced.



Plate 31.1: Narasimha I practicing archery, (c.1238-1264CE), Ganga dynasty, Stone steles from Konarak. Average H: 89cm. National Museum New Delhi.

Somavamsī ruler, Karmadeva dated year 5 (c. 1100-10 CE), are not far from inscriptions that belong to twelfth-century Bengal.¹³

Here, I would like to make a somewhat radical suggestion and identify a manuscript of which thirty-nine folios are in the Metropolitan museum's collection as a possible candidate for a twelfth century Buddhist manuscript from Odisha. Out of thirty-nine folios, twelve folios are

The particular type of palm used in recent centuries for making manuscripts in Odisha is the palmyra (*borassus flabellifer*), a tree that is useful for many different purposes to the extent that "Mahatma Gandhi once called the palmyra palm "an antidote to poverty".¹⁰ According to A.F.R. Hoernle's 1898 report, which cites research by "Dr. Prain, Superintendent of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sibpur near Calcutta", this species was introduced to South Asia from Africa most likely in the fourteenth century.¹¹ The first recorded appearance of this palm is 1328 CE, and the common use of palmyra palm for making manuscripts seems to have happened only from the late 17th century onwards.¹² If there is an Odishan manuscript surviving from the period before 1300 CE, it wouldn't be written in this manner using incision with a stylus, neither would it be in Odiya script with distinct rounded tops. We should note that paleographically speaking, surviving epigraphic evidence demonstrates that the script in use in pre 1300 CE Odisha looks rather similar to the script used elsewhere in medieval Bengal, so-called proto-Gaudi. For example, the characters in the Ratnagiri plates of a

illuminated, and they entered the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2001 (Acc. Nos. 2001.445a-z & ii). When I first saw the painted folios of this manuscript in 2005, I thought they were nearly impossible to believe (**Plate 31.7**). The colors were incredibly brilliant and fresh, and they were in a very unique painting style that I hadn't seen until then. The freshness was explained when it turned out that it belonged to a manuscript that survives in Tibet as many other painted Sanskrit manuscripts kept in Tibet also retain much of their brilliance in color.¹⁴ I settled on these being prepared somewhere in Bengal, somewhat hesitantly, following the prevailing assumption regarding the architectural framing device as a stylistic feature of manuscripts produced in the Varendra region, in today's northern Bengal.¹⁵ In addition, paleographically speaking, the letters in this manuscript show features of what is referred to as proto-Gauḍi, meaning that they prelude the development of Bengali (or Gaudī) script.¹⁶ As noted above, however, contemporary inscriptions prepared in Odisha, especially in northern Odisha, are written in similar script.¹⁷



Plate 31.2: Narasimha I kneeling at the feet of Surya, exterior niche, main sanctum, Konarak temple, Odisha, c. 1258 CE.

Among many unique features of this manuscript, especially noteworthy are unusual depictions of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā painted on folios 139v-140r respectively (**Plate 31.8**). Both deities are depicted as if holding onto a tree with their left hands raised delicately above their heads, dispensing boons with right hands to a group of eager followers. The artistic caliber is stunning as minute and lively details demonstrate. In addition to ornate details on textiles and busy filigree-like halo frame, the crowd is diverse and dynamic, and includes different types of

people, from an aged ascetic, to a brahmin youth, to a monk, to a crippled, to a hunchback (**Plate 31.9**). One can almost feel the excited murmurs of the group witnessing the miraculous and compassionate acts of the savior bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and the goddess Tārā. It is difficult not to marvel at the unnamed artist(s)' confident play of brush, especially when we realize what looks like a scrolling vine against a dark backdrop in the top portion of the painted panel in fact articulates the *saptaratna*, or seven jewels of universal monarch (**Plate 31.10**). This is cleverly indicated by the horse, the minister, and the woman, all drawn in swift but definitive yellow lines on the swirling green vines.

The iconography of jewel-dispensing Avalokiteśvara, sometimes referred to as Cintāmaṇi Lokeśvara is known from other manuscript paintings of the medieval period, as seen in the Karaṇḍavyūha manuscript in the British Library (Or 13940, folio.36r/32a) and the Lakṣmanaseṇa era Prajñāpāramitā manuscript in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (**Plate 31.11**). But these paintings are simpler and follow more or less the iconographic configuration depicted in the sculpture of jewel-dispensing Avalokiteśvara from the Hooghly district, near Kolkata, now in the Asutosh Museum of the Calcutta University (**Plate 31.12**). In the Asutosh Museum sculpture, we notice the wish-fulfilling magic plant (*kalpavṛkṣa*) growing out of a pot (based on the *puṇyagatha* motif).¹⁸ As the plant shoots upward with stems and buds shooting out of it, the first offshoots bear four of the seven jewels, starting with the elephant right above the left arm of the dwarf-like figure hugging the plant.¹⁹ The plant swoops around the bodhisattva who stands frontally swaying to his right while gently holding one of the flower stems in his raised left hand, in effect forming a full body mandorla

Other known painted panels depicting the same iconography more or less follow the same composition as seen in the folio in the British Library (see **Plate 31.11**). In comparison, the Metropolitan Museum's folio stands out because of the composition, which puts Avalokiteśvara in three-quarter profile bending towards the crowd on the left (to his right), and also due to the liveliness of the crowd gathered to receive the blessing. The most extraordinary is the vivid depiction of physically impaired, including a blind man and a man with kyphosis (**Plate 31.13**). In the Tara panel, facing the Avalokiteśvara panel, the physically impaired is even further diversified with a man with goiter, and a crippled man (**Plate 31.14**).²⁰

This extraordinary painting's potential connection to Odisha dawned on me when I serendipitously encountered an interesting detail on a stone stele of Avalokiteśvara in worship in Odisha published in Thomas Donaldson's *Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa* (2001, fig. 198). The sculpture is housed in the Marici Ma mandir in the village of Ayodhya in Balasore district in northern Odisha. The image is under worship along with an impressive image of Marici and another one of standing Mañjuśrī, both probably belonging to the twelfth century (**Plate 31.15**).²¹

Avalokiteśvara stands holding the wish-fulfilling plant that sprouts seven jewels, which now appears sturdier and stiffer than in the Asutosh Museum piece: as one can see more clearly in

Donaldson's black and white photograph, the plants sprouts a jewel (*triratna*), a sword, a horse, an elephant, a wheel, a woman and a treasurer (in this order) (**Plate 31.16**). The parallel with the painting is seen not only in the superbly ornate rendition of the jewel-sprouting plant but also in the rather unusual looking crowd that gathered underneath his hand: they include among others, a crippled man, an ascetic with ribbon shaped hairdo, and a hunched back, just as in the painting (**Plate 31.17**). This idiosyncratic representation of the supplicants is not seen elsewhere but in these two instances in two different media, as far as I am aware. Although the matching iconography does not prove that the manuscript was also prepared in northern Odisha, the visual similarity suggests proximity in terms of the time and the place of their production. It requires further study of paleographic and epigraphic evidence to locate this manuscript in Odisha.²²

One clue we can consider here is the name of the donor that appears on the last folio of the manuscript which is in Lhasa with the rest of the manuscript: queen (*rajñī*) Vihūṇadevī. of Odisha. In the Ratnagiri copper plate grant to "Rāñī Karppūraśrī" of Karṇadeva mentioned above, we find the mention of one enigmatic "Mahāvīmāhūṇa-devī," which interestingly also has "hūṇadevī" in her name.²³ If we put the sumptuous manuscript patronized by a queen with the early twelfth-century inscription found at the monastic site of Ratnagiri that granted the village of Koṇa to a royal woman whose mother's name rings similar to Vihūṇadevī, the connection between the manuscript and northern Odisha may not be beyond the realm of possibilities, especially since the region of "Uttara-tosālī" identified in the inscription refers to the area of northern Odisha, encompassing the "modern district of Balasore with parts of Cuttack and Midnapur" (today, this would also include, Jajpur and Bhadrak districts) according to Mitra (1963: 263), and the town of Ayodhya where the Avalokiteśvara stele discussed above is located in this area.

Stylistically speaking, the ornate framing device seen around each main deity seems comparable to those seen in eleventh and twelfth century images found in Odisha (especially in northern districts of Balasore and Kendujhar/Keonjhar).²⁴ For example, a seated Avalokiteśvara image (in the form of Khasarpaṇa) in Deogaon's Kosaleśvara temple features an ornate band on the halo/throne back element with beaded border, the filigree like ornateness of which parallels the treatment of the halo/backdrop in the painting (**Plate 31.18**). In addition, references to manuscripts being in use abound in artistic records in Odisha, especially as a central cultic object of ritual veneration, just as we see in the lower register of the Avalokiteśvara image in Deogaon just mentioned. It is worth remembering that beautifully painted Buddhist manuscripts were prepared precisely in response to these ritual needs. In the case of the Metropolitan folios, even the sides of the folios are painted, which is not apparent when we only focus on the two-dimensionality of each folio as a painting (**Plate 31.19**). When a few folios are stacked together and viewed from the side, it is clear that the manuscript as a whole was conceived as a three-dimensional object that has weight, thickness and volume, the exterior of which can be

ornamented from all sides. A side-view of a manuscript was most likely the view with which most people in medieval South Asia who had a chance to see a book would have been familiar, just as the manuscripts are represented as a narrow rectangular slab or bar in visual records in stone.



Plate 31.3: King Narasimha I (r. 1238-64) discoursing, c. 13th century, Konarak, Orissa. Ht: 80 cm, wd: 52 cm, depth: 29 cm National Museum, New Delhi, Stone Acc. No. 50.180.



Plate 31.4: Palm-leaf manuscript in Narasimha's hand, detail of **Plate 31.3**.



Plate 31.5: (left) detail of Plate 31.3, (right) detail of the stele depicting King Narasimha I paying homage to the three main tutelary deities of Odisha, Konarak, National Museum, New Delhi.



Plate 31.6: An Odishan palm-leaf manuscript (top) and the detail view of two folios of the same manuscript (bottom), Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar, Ext/1.



Plate 31.7: Śaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara, folio 76 (top), Kanyarāma Lokanātha, folio 81 v (bottom), a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [henceforth AsP], patron: Queen Vihūṇadevī, c. early 12th century, probably northern Odisha (Balasore district). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. Nos. 2001.445.A & 2001.445.F. Image: Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Plate 31.8: Jewel dispensing Avalokiteśvara and Jewel dispensing Green Tārā, the end of chapter 15, AsP Ms, folio 139v-140r: folio size: 42 cm × 7 cm. patron: Queen Vihūṇadevī, c. early 12th century, probably northern Odisha (Balasore district). Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.445.L & 2001.445.I.



Plate 31.9: Jewel dispensing Avalokiteśvara, detail of Plate 31.8 top.

This name has not been found in any known royal inscriptions from Bihar and Bengal. The search continues, but there is a distinct possibility for finding her in the epigraphic records



Plate 31.10: The wish-fulfilling plant with seven jewels, detail of Plate 31.9.



Plate 31.11: Cintāmaṇi Lokeśvara, folio 32a (36a). Karaṇḍavyūha manuscript, Southern Bengal, c. early 12th century. British Library Or. 13940. Photo© The British Library Board.



Plate 31.12: Cintāmaṇi Lokeśvara from Bhandarha, Hooghly, West Bengal, c. 12th century. Asutosh Museum, Kolkata.

Books in Use

A book ceremonially placed on a single legged pedestal/bookstand appears repeatedly on Buddhist images from Odisha like we see in the nearly over-life size image of Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara from Kasbā now in the Fakir Mohan College Compound in Balasore (**Plate 31.20**). In the bottom register, on either side are two human devotees each group with a book placed on a single-legged bookstand. Such visual recordings of a ritual with a book in the center seem to appear from the eleventh century onwards in many different parts of eastern India, not only in Odisha but also in Bengal and Bihar.²⁵ The centrality of the book as the focal point of a ritual is particularly prominent in Odishan examples, as seen in the stele of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā from Mangalpur, also in Balasore district (**Plate 31.21**), providing a rather fitting context for a sumptuously prepared manuscript like Vihūṇadevī's.

Another situation in which we find visual representations of books in use is in the context of instruction/knowledge transmission. On the Mukteshwar temple in Bhubaneswar, we encounter this delightful rendition of two sages discussing with a book on a cross-legged bookstand placed in between them (**Plate 31.22**). The sage on the left may be slightly older as his beard and slightly higher pile of hair seems to suggest. Given his *yogapaṭṭa*, he seems to be the one instructing while the other one who points to the book while holding another book under his arm may have come to call seeking instruction.²⁶ These scenes appear on the upper section of the temple architecture, especially around the level where the *shikhara*'s roof-level begins the level of transition from the earthly to the next level on temple architecture. Such scenes depict a

special type of human world activity, i.e., instruction and transmission of knowledge, and the specificity in its reference to the everyday human world is clear, as seen in the scene where a young pupil sits with his teacher while his teacher counts on a *māla*.²⁷



Plate 31.13: Detail of supplicants to Avalokiteśvara, detail of **Plate 31.9**.



Plate 31.14: Supplicants to Tārā including a crippled man and a man with goiters, detail of **Plate 31.8** bottom.



Plate 31.15: Stone sculptures in worship with Priest/caretaker Sarbeshwar Panda ji, Marici Ma Mandir, Ayodhya, Odisha.



Plate 31.16: Jewel-dispensing Avalokiteśvara, c. late 11th or 12th century. Marici Ma Mandir, Ayodhya, Odisha, photographed January 2017 (left), the same image after Donaldson 2001, fig. 198.



Plate 31.17: Detail of supplicants, Avalokiteśvara, c. late 11th or 12th century. Marici Ma Mandir, Ayodhya, Odisha.



Plate 31.18: Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara, ca. early 12th century, Kosaleśvara temple, Deogaon. After Donaldson 2001, fig. 218.



Plate 31.19: Painted side view of the stack of folios from the Vihūṇadevī manuscript, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 2001.445.



Plate 31.20: Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara, from Kasbā, Now in Fakir Mohan College Compound, Balasore, Odisha.

As Donaldson notes in his study of *śikṣādāna* motif, scenes representing the concrete human world of the time begin to appear on more prominent locations in Hindu temples of Odisha from the eleventh century onwards.²⁸ Thus, on the Lingaraja temple, an emaciated yet youthful looking teacher being adored by a group of sages appears on the South wall of the *mandapa*, where only deities used to be represented. The scene is two-tiered to fit the space, and the hierarchic scale makes it clear that the two sages below the main teacher who also sit under a canopy are the two foremost disciples receiving instruction from the master, with one of them holding a book (**Plate 31.23**). The book here is placed quite visibly on his resting left hand in a way signaling the transmission of knowledge and the authority ensuing from such transaction.²⁹



Plate 31.21: Ritual scenes on the bottom register of the Goddess *Prajñāpāramitā*, Mangalpur (Balasore district), Orissa, 11th century, Orissa State Museum. Photo© Sonali Dhingra.



Plate 31.22: Detail from Mukteshwar temple, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, c. 950-75.



Plate 31.23: Śikṣadānā scene, Lingaraja temple, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, c. mid-11th century. Image: AIIS archive accessed on ARTSTOR.



Plate 31.24: Detail of the lower register, Buddha stele, Khiching, c. 11th century. Photo © J Kim 2017.



Plate 31.25: Scene of instruction-knowledge transmission, Khichakeshwari temple, c. 11th century (?), Khiching, Odisha.



Plate 31.26: Narasimha with his guru, Konarak, 2nd quarter of 13th century, carboniferous shale, h: 51.5 cm, V & A 938 (IS). Image © Victoria & Albert Museum.

Even in a Buddhist context, there is at least one example where a book seems to signal the transmission of knowledge and the authority of transmission lineage. In this enigmatic scene on a lower register of a broken stele of the Buddha in earth touching gesture (Enlightenment), a book is prominently placed on a single legged pedestal while a small figure kneels under it (**Plate 31.24**). Donaldson identifies this scene as “śikṣādāna,” but who is giving instruction and who is the authority here is unclear, partly because the male figure, the obvious protagonist of the scene given his size, is represented like a layman, not a monastic or an ascetic, and his gesture and posture are rather indistinct to be those of a master. Who is the woman who holds a pot in her raised left hand and walks into the scene? Given the overall iconographic program of the stele with the earth-touching Buddha above, she may be read as the earth goddess (*bhūdevī*) who appeared to witness the Buddha’s enlightenment; but she can equally be an important agent



Plate 31.27: The Mahasiddha Chandragomin, Bangladesh, 12th century, H: 59.06 cm, LACMA Gift of Paul F. Walter (AC1992.208.2). Image: ACMA.

of a ritual, bringing the water pot necessary for tantric rituals, be it a consecration ritual (*abhiṣeka*) or an installation ritual (*pratiṣṭha*). The now hidden scene of kneeling devotees with offerings below this register gives a sense that this enigmatic scene represents an important ritual that happened in the lived world of the donors who were present to witness and support the ritual. The statue of the Buddha as a whole remembers this ritual that happened around a book, visually recorded on this stele.³⁰

A book is one of the distinctly human world devices that can have a place in both secular and sacred contexts. A book in surviving artistic records orients us to recognize the world of the people who made and experienced these images in their original contexts. In a somewhat damaged scene on the Kichakeshwari temple in Khiching in northern Odisha, a book, clearly rendered as a pothi-format palm-leaf manuscript placed on a cross-legged pedestal, marks the scene of instruction between a kingly figure and an ascetic figure (**Plate 31.25**).³¹ We do not know who they are, but those who knew the code would have recognized them as a king and his spiritual teacher who gave him the teaching: with the book that's pushed to the king's side and with here a secret

hand gesture of the teacher that would only have been meaningful for those who were initiated, the panel announces the king's acquisition of this spiritual authority, and this would have been part of a distinctly local memory, in this case, of the Bhanjas of the Khijjinga mandala (old name of the region). A king receiving teaching from his spiritual teacher is, of course, a trope that

appears in numerous variations from epics to *praśasti* (eulogy) inscriptions. A manuscript grounds it at a graspable present tense for the viewers and visitors of the time.

Epilogue: Lived World in Stone

Here, we circle back to Narasimha I with whom we started the essay. In a stele now in the V&A, Narasimha I appears in his most humble appearance, taking the localization of this trope to a new level (**Plate 31.26**). His figure is smaller than that of his guru, who sits tall raising his right hand pointing upward with his index finger. Narasimha, a bearded man, listens thoughtfully raising his left hand to the chin. Simply dressed without his usual dramatically pleated dress or elaborate jewelry, he has put his sword down and his guards wait outside. A manuscript held in his right hand placed on his right lap again sends a clear message of the transmission of knowledge and authority. He is the holder of the divine knowledge that's being transmitted through his guru. It is no wonder that we find him seated so grandly on a throne that equals those prepared for the three tutelary deities of Odisha, each rooted in a place (Jajpur Durga, Jagannath/Puruṣottama at Puri, and Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar), while holding a book (see **Plate 31.3**).³²

As we have seen, Narasimha I in the mid thirteenth century could commission his own image to be so pronounced and localized that these sizable stone carvings in a way serve as a visual chronicle of his accomplishments. How was this possible? One impulse that we should recognize is the gradual inclusion of recognizably human world moments of devotional daily life in visual programs on temple walls and sacred spaces which seems to have enabled knowledge experts and artists working with them to capture and represent more locally meaningful scenes in a historically situated manner. Another is the general trend towards more three-dimensional carving in stone sculpture production in medieval eastern India. Narasimha I in this series of stone sculptures stands out literally because he is nearly completely carved out from the background, making him appear akin to a bronze statue (see **Plate 31.1**). As Susan Huntington notes in her study of sculptures from Bihar and Bengal, “over the course of centuries, a gradual liberation of form from the back-slab occurred”.³³ It is in the twelfth century images from Bengal where Huntington notes the efforts to maximize the awareness of space “in a sense that figures are actually turning on an axis”.³⁴ As the stone carvers mastered how to liberate the image from the stone coming closer into the space of the viewer/devotee, their skill seems to have rendered a great service to the demand to have the human teachers made to be present in the immediate space and the time of the devotees. In the sculpture now in LACMA, Mahasiddha Candragomin completely juts out into the space turned 45 degree sideways with his raised right knee (**Plate 31.27**). Once spiritual masters are made into stone and living in the space, it seems not so surprising that the great King like Narasimhadeva I would be made to be present in his own time and space. Narasimha I's portrait sculptures are not far from these images of hierarchs, except that his images remain distinctly of the region and of the dynasty that he belonged to.

Notes:

1. For example, Donaldson 1988; Kaimal 1999, 2000; Branfoot 2000.

2. This inscription is believed to be a slightly later addition based on the paleographic and linguistic features. Although Donaldson identifies “rājaguru” and priests in this scene, it is more likely that they represent a group of administrators given the inscription and also given the presence of the “coffer” and a sack (held by a standing figure now missing head). Donaldson 1999, p.147.
3. Vasu, 1896.
4. On the nature of kingship in medieval South Asia, see, for example, Kulke 1981;1993;1995.
5. Claudine Bautze-Picron is one of the first scholars who drew attention to these human figures in religious iconography in her seminal 1995 essay. Also see Bautze-Picron 2016. I acknowledge my indebtedness to her scholarship.
6. Donaldson 1999, p. 137.
7. Williams 1996, p. 47. The Bhagavata Purana dated to the second year of the reign of Divyasingha Deva of Khurda who ruled from 1793-1798.
8. A few earlier Bengali palm-leaf and paper manuscripts are known to have survived from Bengal with a similar climate pattern as Odisha, like the manuscript of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* dated 1499 CE that was discovered in Bishnupur in the Bankura district of West Bengal (V & A I.S. 101-1955 and British Museum 1955.10.8.03). See Losty 1982, 62-63. There is also a twelfth century palm-leaf Jain manuscript of the *Dhavalā* that survives in Moodbidri in Karnataka. See Sivaramamurti 1968, fig. 45.
9. The practice goes back to inscribing sutras on sheets of metal, like the *sutra* sheets on gold leaf found in Sri Lanka. Most Tamil grantha manuscripts are scribed in this manner, so are Sinhalese manuscripts, and all of Southeast Asia we find these inscribed manuscripts. But this wasn't necessarily a common practice in the period before the adoption of Palmyra palm for manuscript production in South Asia, which seems to happen from the sixteenth century onwards.
10. Morton, 1988, 420.
11. Hoernle, 1900, 94.
12. This is a much more cultivatable type of palm than *corypha umbraculifera* or talipot which is the type of palm used for making painted manuscripts during the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries. Hoernle, *Ibid.* Also see Losty, 1982, 6-7.
13. D. C. Sircar (1983) characterizes this script as *gaudiya*. The frontal placement of medial vowels is certainly consistent with proto-gaudi or gaudi script. The loop on the top line of the characters (like in “hā”, “vi” and “ra” of mahāvihāra in line 42, is seen in some image inscriptions from Bengal. The first portion of this important inscription was initially published by Tripathi (1930) and Debala Mitra (1963) published the remaining two plates of the grant. This charter was originally found by Shri Sanatana Malik in late 1920s in an earthen pot in “the southeastern part of a mound, locally known as Rāṇipukhuri, at the top of the hill at Ratnagiri” (Mitra, 1963: 263). It unusually names a female beneficiary, Rāṇī Karpūraśrī, and her maternal lineage. As noted below, the argument for this grant being made for an offspring of a devadāsī as initially proposed by Tripathi should be revisited. See the overview discussion of the debate on the female lineage in Rangachari 2020, pp. 179-180.
14. The rest of the manuscript is in Lhasa. See the discussion in Guy, 2012; Kim, 2013. Regarding the vibrancy of color in manuscripts preserved in Tibet, see the discussion in Kim, 2021: 220-221.

15. The manuscript is identified as being prepared somewhere in Varendra in Kim 2013. I discuss my reservation about this feature as a regional stylistic feature in Kim, 2015: 2018.
16. We can consider the proximity between the script and the artistic style as expressions of regional identity. See the discussion in Kim, 2018.
17. When compared side by side with the script in the Ratnagiri copper plate inscription of Karṇadeva mentioned above and that of the Deopara stone inscription of Vijayasena, a Sena ruler, found in the Rajshahi district, the manuscript's hand falls in between the two.
18. Although often referred to as a wish-granting tree, it can be more aptly described as a "plant." According to Nicolas Roth who has done extensive research on botanical and plant-related terms in Indic and Persian sources, the term "vṛkṣa" in Classical Sanskrit that is often translated as "tree" in fact denotes a much broader semantic range of "plant", which includes "tree" as one of its sub-categories. This observation is also supported in the visual evidence as seen here. Personal communication with Nicolas Roth, March 2021.
19. This dwarf-like figure probably depicts Hayagrīva who often attends Avalokiteśvara with Sudhānakumara who appears standing on the other side of the stele.
20. I am preparing a separate study on these figures in an article on depictions of disease and medicine in premodern South Asia.
21. I visited the site on January 7, 2017. I was able to view these sculptures in worship thanks to the help from Sonali Dhingra and with kind permission from this small temple's pujari (priest), Sarbeshwar Panda ji. When asked about their Buddhist identities, it was clear that Panda ji was very much aware that these are Buddhist images, but he considers them precious and powerful to take care. How the tension between international communities' interests in these images as objects of Buddhist art and the local community's wish to keep their own heritage within their ritual environment is negotiated is an extremely interesting and complex story to tell that awaits future study. Unfortunately, as I prepare this essay, it has come to my attention that one of these statues in the shrine, most likely the image of Marici (identified in a newspaper report as an image of Vajravarahi) which served as the main deity of the shrine, was actually stolen on December 29 2017 about a year after my visit. I thank Sonali Dhingra for this information. On the theft of Odisha's Buddhist heritage and community responses, see Dhingra (2021), epilogue.
22. As I have suggested elsewhere (2013), the scribe's knowledge of Sanskrit may have been limited given the gender confusion on the term "mahāyānāyāyina". One should also note that northern Odisha and southern Bengal, especially in the area called Dandabukti in ancient and medieval literature and epigraphic sources, are culturally quite close.
23. It's been proposed that "Mahāvī" is a temple dancer, "māhāri" in Oriya, thus making Māhūṇa devī a temple dancer, and her daughter also a devadāsī. This devadāsī origin theory relies a lot on prevailing assumptions about female participation in religious domains and needs to be revisited. Debala Mitra questioned her own suggestion of Karpūraśrī being a Buddhist because she finds it "incongruous" with her gotra and pravara identification in the grant, but the assumption that a Buddhist would not have a gotra and pravara to relate to can be reconsidered, especially given that the name of the gotra provided here is "kāśyapa" whose name is sometimes invoked in monastic names/lineages in medieval South Asia.

24. Susan Huntington also observes these architectural, ornate framing devices (including the trilobate arch form around the main image's head) as possibly more Odishan features. Huntington. 1984: 178-179.
25. See the discussion in Kim, 2021: 86-93.
26. The panel above them makes it clear that the one with *yogapatta* is the senior and the teacher..
27. See Kim, 2021: fig. 2.20.
28. Donaldson, pp.137-138.
29. There are at least three books appearing in the top half of the panel but they are all very minute and not centrally positioned: behind the master's throne-support, a book (?) appears on a single legged pedestal on the floor, and next to it, a small attendant figure holds a book with two hands. On the upper left corner, a female celestial being lifts the edge of canopy while holding a book in her right hand. Although details of the master's hands are rather abraded, it seems clear that there was no book in his hand – the authority of transmission lineage has moved to the next generation depicted in the bottom half.
30. According to the Vajravali, a book is necessary to conduct an installation ritual.
31. His sectarian affiliation eludes me as he looks quite different from many of śaiva ascetics with long matted hair – he is rather plump and without hair - or wears a head covering – looks closer to the Vaishnava priests of Narasimha I.
32. With a horse, an elephant, and an offering of jewel (?), the bottom register also reminds us of the seven jewels of the universal monarch (*saptaratna* of *cakravartin*) that frequently appeared on Buddhist images of the preceding centuries (and on royal donations of imagery elsewhere during the thirteenth century, as in the case of the thirteenth century Amoghapaśa image donated by Krtanagara of the Singhasari dynasty in Sumatra. See Reichle, 2007: 123-124.
33. Huntington, 1984: 186.
34. Huntington, 1984: 184.

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