

Identification of two Jain Bronzes from the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Fransisco

From the vast repository of Indian Art, now located at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco¹, USA, two inscribed Jain bronzes are being discussed here, with the kind courtesy of the Trustees of the Asian Art Museum. They are, (1) A large Digambara Stele of the 'Jaina Chovisi' dated A.D. 1492, and (2) A Svetambara gilded bronze of the Panchatirthi of Shreyansanatha, dated A.D. 1512.

It is a universal truth that art and patronage go hand in hand and the former cannot survive without the latter. It is also true that no art has grown without the support of the donors, the guilds or the communities. This applies to both, Buddhism as well as Jainism equally. Since both the bronzes being discussed here are Digambara, and from Kamathaka region, we look at the ancient tradition of Kanrataka briefly to emphasize the antiquity of these images.



**Shridhar
Andhare**

By and large South India has been a great seat of Digambara Jain faith, Chandragupta Maurya had journeyed to the south towards the end of his life in the company of his guru Acharya Bhadrabahu (ca. 3rd century, B.C.) Kalakacharya of the Svetambara sect was received by the Satavahana king ruling at that time in Pratisthana (paithan) by about the 1st cent. B.C. not only this but also Acharya Kundakunda² himself from South India, the first in all the genealogies of the jainas, as attested by Tamil literary sources, had spread the faith further. The whole of South for that

matter, particularly Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had great dynasties often dedicated to Jainism. Thus, we observe that kings from Pallava to Kalachuri to Hoysala, royal families were devoted to Jainism and its spread; and there are umpteen numbers of monuments, sculptures and other artifacts testifying to this fact.

The Western Gangas had made Jainism almost the religion of the state and were the great patrons of Jain teachers. This is where Jainism continued to flourish because of the abiding and stable relationship with the ruling Ganga dynasty (ca 5th / 6th cent. A.D.) Moreover, it was because of Acharya Simhanandi, a revered Jain monk, that the dynasty was firmly established around ca. 3rd cent. A.D. Chamundaraya, the great general of Marasimha, the Ganga King, was the architect of the colossal statue of Bahubali of Sravanabel gola in A.D. 982³ which became the holiest of the Jain Tirthas in India.

The successors of the Gangas were the Hoysalas who also were the supporters of the Jains. Thus, it is apparent that from 3rd till the 14th century, the Digambara communities in Karnataka flourished and were able to build temples, consecrate holy images in stone and metal without any hindrance from outside; which is evident from the two metal images being discussed here. With such a long tradition of so many centuries, it is obvious to find some stylistic and antiquarian traits percolating in later period among the Digambara art (especially the metal icons) from the 14th century onwards, which are available in even smaller towns in South Karnataka and South of Maharashtra region. Among these the Jain chovisi from chopada⁴ of the former Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai though of Svetambara sect is a worthy landmark.

In the context of style, it is generally accepted that "If sculpture is the index of art of a particular region and period, then all art forms, whether plastic or graphic, follow the same trend" which is easily discernible⁵. This is particularly true of Ajanta sculpture and its wall paintings of the same period. The Eastern Indian Sculptures with illustrated manuscripts of the Pala period. So also, the Jain icons of 12th / 13th century echoing with the early Jain paintings of that period including the palm leaf MS. from Mudabidri⁶ and the sculptures of that area.

'A Jaina Chovisi' of Rishabhanatha: (A Digambara Jain altarpiece with twenty four jainas). Bronze, Karnataka or South Maharashtra dated V.S. 1549=A.D. 1492, Ht. 42 cms (approx), Inscribed on the pedestal at the back and on both sides of the pitha Acc. No. B 69 B 11.

The large temple shaped altarpiece has a flat, semi-open parikara, with scalloped upper edge terminating in a Shikhara and a finial. The parikara has three Digambara images of jainas standing in kayotsarga pose having chhatras over their heads. The remaining seated jainas are shown in miniature niches in two vertical columns on either side and also in the niches above. The recessed portion at the back of the mula-nayaka's head is occupied with

elephant riders and other human figures. A couple of miniature jinas are seen standing at the base of the vertical columns, thus making the total of twenty four jinas as chovisi. A pair of male chauri bearers or yakshas stands between the three standing jinas near their feet. A step below on the pedestal is a navagraha panel (nine planets) represented symbolically in a row with a bull in the center as the cognizance of Rishabhanatha, the first tirthankara (the liberated one). To the extreme left in the same level is an elephant and a male figure identified here as Ajitanatha, with his cognizance of an elephant. To the extreme right is a male figure which cannot be identified.

The six legged simhasana (lion throne) is supported by a couple of stylized lions in front looking in opposite direction while a human figure stands in the middle at the base of the stele. A long three line inscription in Sanskrit in Devanagari script runs on the back and the sides of the pedestal giving the date and certain other details of the image. An separated rectangular tablet appears attached at the back of the parikara which may be identified as द्वादशगंगसूत्र meaning the forty two Agamas of the Jains. The inscription reads :

‘सं. १५४९ व. जेष्ठ वदि ६ बुद्धदिने श्री मूलसंघेन श्री कुदकुदाचार्यान्वये भ. जिनचंद्रदेवा स्तदाम्नाये साहिलवाल वरवंशे चौ. भार्या मलो(ला) तयोः पुत्रा चौ. लौदेव. चौ. (?) कर्मू चौ. सायर चौ. (वौ.) अनंत श्री पंचायण एते शां मध्ये (?) तयोः पुत्र वेगराज वौ. कर्मू ना म्ता इयं प्रतिमा कर्मक्षयाय चतुर्विंशतिः कारिता प्रतिष्ठापित च ॥’

The random translation of the text can be :

“On Wednesday, the 6th of the bright half of the month of Jyestha, (July-August) under the order of Acharya Kundakunda of the Mula-sangha, Bhattaraka Sri. Jinachandra in service of his patrons of the Sahilwal community, namely, Wegara and his wife Malo, son Powow and Ladu and son Yara, Sri Anant, Sri Pabhayana and also his son Vegaraj, in order to gain wisdom and reducing bad karma (misdeeds) installed the image” of the Trithankara.

Note : Due to illegibility of some letters it was difficult to read and interpret the above inscription. Therefore a very random translation is attempted here, which is open to correction. For comparison of the above image from Karnataka, another image of a Jaina Chovisi (Digambara) is being illustrated here.

Jaina Chovisi of Mahavira

Digambara bronze, Karnataka/South Maharashtra Ca. 14th / 15th century A.D., Ht. 16 cm. No. 1, 1400 private collection, Mumbai.

The stele has pancharatha pitha and a flat parikara in the shape of a pointed arch surmounted with a kirtimukha. Inside the arch is a torana motif of three loops on either side filled with floral motifs and lotus buds. This cleche of parikara in the shape of a pointed arch equipped with loops on either side, the tri-chhatra element, above the heads of the Tirthankaras and placing the

miniature Jinas above in rows of shown in vertical rows is a regular feature of the metal sculptures from Karnataka region from 11th - 15th cent. A.D.⁷.

The second bronze image from the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco is a Svetambara Jain altarpiece, called the Panchatirthi of Sreyansanath, the eleventh Tirthankara and his cognizance is the Rhinoceros.

Panchatirthi of Sreyansanatha

A Svetambara alterpiece, gilded copper inlaid with silver. Western India, dated V.S. 1569=A.D. 1512. Inscribed in Devanagiri on reverse on the parikara No. 2003 33.38

A seated image of Shreyansanatha is shown enshrined within a semi-circular parikara flanked by a Tirthankara on either side. Two miniature Jinas appear seated above them. Thus, making it a panchatirthi type image.

The mula-nayaka or the central figure is seated in padmasana on a Simhasana (lion-throne) flanked by a seated yaksha on the left and a female yakshi on the right. Below on the pedestal appear the navagrahas (nine planets) represented here symbolically. Five on the left and four on the right. On either side of these are Dwarapalas or Sasanadevatas in sitting posture. The circular parikara and the whole of the altarpiece is decorated with inlaid silver pieces at various locations including the seat of the main image.

An elaborate Devanagari inscription appearing on reverse reads.

‘सं. १५६९ वर्षे माह सुदि प सुक्रे ३. ज्ञा.सा. भांडाभा. भ रमादे पु. दुगासाडा भा. सिंगार दे. पु. नागामोल्हा (?) सकुदुंब वतेन पिशचि (?) मित्रं श्री. श्रेयांस बिंबं प्र. श्री खेत्रगच्छ प. श्री भूवनकीर्ति सूरिभि. ॥’

The random translation of the above is

“On Friday, the 5th of the bright half of the month of Magha. (Feb.-Mar.) in V.S. 1569=AD 1512, Shah Bhandra and his wife of the Oswal Jati, Bharamde son of Dugasada and his wife Singarde and son of the Nagamathas(?) Family and friends got the image of Sreyansanatha installed at the hands of Panyas Sri Bhavana-Kirti who belonged to the Khataragaccha order (of the Jains). ”

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