

Divine Images in Stone and Bronze

South India, Chola Dynasty (c. 850–1280)

ASCHWIN LIPPE

INTRODUCTION

The southeast coast of India had been, from ancient through medieval times, the region where the maritime trade routes to Southeast Asia and China began and those from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea ended. We call this region—which harbored the oldest European settlements in India—the Coromandel Coast. The word *Coromandel* is derived from *Cholamandala*, “the realm of the Cholas.”

In India, the name of the Cholas has been kept alive by the religious literature and poetry created under their patronage, and by the innumerable temples with which they studded the land. Many of these are still extant and functioning. They include little-known masterpieces, which carry some of the most beautiful sculpture of medieval India; they also include the largest and tallest of all Indian temples, which are architectural and technical marvels.

The bronze icons of the Early Chola period are one of India’s greatest contributions to world art. In recent years, they have begun to make the Chola name once more familiar in the West.

During the first three or four centuries of our era, the far south of India had been divided among the “three crowned kings” of the Chera, Pandya, and Chola lines, who occupied the southern Malabar and Coromandel coastal plains. These kingdoms entertained a lively trade with the Yavanas (Greeks and Romans). Many

Roman coins have been found all over the south, and the remains of a Roman trading station were excavated near Pondichery.

After the interval of a mysterious “dark age” when Buddhists and Jains had the upper hand, the ancient kingdoms of the Pandya (Madurai) and Chera (Kerala) were reestablished in the sixth century. To the north of the Pandya realm, the mighty Pallava kings as well claimed to descend from an earlier dynasty of the same name.

It was not until the middle of the ninth century, however, that the Cholas reemerged from obscurity. At that time Vijayalaya, probably a Pallava feudatory, took Tanjavur (Tanjore) and the surrounding area from the Muttarayars, local chiefs who had transferred their allegiance from the Pallavas to the Pandyas. The region around Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli was to remain the heartland of the Chola kingdom. The son of Vijayalaya, Aditya I (871–907), defeated and killed his Pallava overlord and annexed most of that dynasty’s territory (c. 890). A royal charter engraved on a copper plaque states that on both banks of the Kaveri River, from the Sahyadri Mountains (the Western Ghats) to the wide ocean, he built in honor of Siva rows of tall stone temples, which stood as monuments of his success.

The following centuries saw the stabilization and

NOTE: The following photographs are by the author: Figures 1–7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 25–31, 33–36, 43–48, 53–56.

enlargement of the Chola kingdom in fights against the Pandyas in the south and the Rashtrakutas in the north and northwest. The capital of the Pandya kingdom, Madurai, was conquered soon after 910, and the Pandya ruler had to flee to his ally, the king of Ceylon. Before 916, the Chola king Parantaka I defeated the Rashtrakutas and their tributaries.

However, in 949, the Chola crown prince was defeated and killed in a battle with the Rashtrakutas and their Ganga allies. The turn for the worse in the Chola fortunes lasted until about 985, and the territory of the Cholas was temporarily much reduced, although they managed to lead some victorious campaigns against the Pandyas and the Ceylonese in the south as well as against the Rashtrakutas in the north.

The accession of Rajaraja I in 985 marked the beginning of the great period of Chola power. He destroyed the Pandyas and Cheras in the south and, in an amphibious expedition, overran northern Ceylon. He conquered the Ganga territory in Mysore and, around 1007, administered a crushing defeat to the Western Chalukyas, successors of the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan. Toward the close of his reign, he destroyed the Chera fleet and conquered the Maldive Islands. It was Rajaraja who in 1010 built the Rajarajesvara, the great temple at Tanjavur.

His son and successor, Rajendra I, completed the conquest of Ceylon (1018) and installed a viceroy over the Pandya and Chera countries in the south. He defeated the Western (Deccan) and Eastern (Kistna River) Chalukyas as well as the rulers of Kalinga (Orissa) and marched northward until he reached the Ganges. After this victorious campaign to the north he built his new capital and the great temple at Gangaikondacholapuram; into the temple tank was poured water that his war elephants had carried back from the sacred Ganges River. Called to help by the Khmer king Suryavarman I, Rajendra also launched, during the first quarter of the eleventh century, one or two maritime expeditions against the kingdom of Sri-Vijaya in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra; this country had probably been obstructing his profitable trade with Cambodia and China. Rajendra sacked the capital and took the king into captivity.

Under his successors, the campaigns against the Chalukyas were repeated; so were the naval expeditions. Intermarriage between the Chola and the East-

ern Chalukya dynasties finally led to a personal union of these two kingdoms under Kulottunga I (1070–1118). Ceylon was lost but the south was pacified once more, and there were several victorious campaigns into Kalinga, celebrated in a famous poem. Diplomatic relations with Sri-Vijaya, Burma, Cambodia, and China continued. Wars against the Pandyas and the Ceylonese weakened the Chola kingdom during the second half of the twelfth century, but Rajaraja II was still strong enough to build the Darasuram temple (before 1167). A last great ruler, Kulottunga III (1178–1218), delayed the disruption of the empire and built the last great Chola temple at Tribhuvanam, probably after the third conquest of Madurai (c. 1205).

The campaigns against the Pandyas and Sinhalese continued with varying fortune. One traditional enemy, the Western Chalukya kingdom, collapsed under the revolt of the Hoysalas and other former feudatories (c. 1190). But the Pandya resurgence finally was victorious, and the Cholas had to recognize the Pandya king as suzerain. King Rajendra III (1246–1279) made an unsuccessful attempt to restore the Chola power, and Jatavarman Sundara Pandya, who came to the Pandya throne in 1251, once more brought the old Pandyan kingdom to the peak of power in south India, defeated the Hoysalas, and invaded Ceylon. His successor again defeated the Hoysalas in 1279 along with their ally Rajendra III, who was the last Chola king. This was the end of the Chola dynasty and of one of the most glorious periods in south Indian history.¹

This article will summarize the theological and iconographical traditions that the Chola sculptors so beautifully translated into stone and bronze. It will examine some of the most important images of Hindu deities, nearly all of them in situ in dated or datable monuments, along with comparable examples in The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

I. BRAHMA

We generally think of Brahma as one of the members—together with Vishnu and Siva—of the Hindu Trinity (trimurti), which represents three basic aspects of God: as creator, preserver, and destroyer. However, the concept of the trimurti was a relatively late and artificial one, developed during Gupta times in order

to reconcile the sectarian trends in Hinduism. What little influence it had did not last long, and the vast majority of Hindus remained fundamentally monotheistic.

Brahma himself is a somewhat artificial creation. His earliest components or prototypes of later Vedic times are: the primeval man, Prajapati, the "Lord of Beings" who existed before creation; and Visvakarman, the architect of the universe. In the early Buddhist scriptures, Brahma and Indra are the greatest of the gods. In the great epic *Mahabharata*, Brahma is still important, but after Gupta times he was little worshiped. In the whole of India, only a handful of temples dedicated to Brahma have been identified, of which one is still functioning; there is another in Nepal.

The worship of Brahma seems to have been an exclusive privilege of the brahmins, the priestly caste. The god is represented as a brahmin sage. He has four faces, which symbolize the four ages; his mouths chant the four Vedas; he turns toward the four directions—an echo of his cosmic role as creator. His attributes are those of a priest: the ladle for purification, the water bottle for communion, the rosary for prayer.

The god's decline is expressed in the epic and Puranic legends, where he is weak and helpless, unable to cope with the magic power accumulated by gods and demons through penances and ascetic practices. Soon he is shown as being subservient to Vishnu or to Siva. Finally, his reputation is destroyed by character assassination: he is depicted as a liar and as an incestuous lecher pursuing his own daughter.²

Despite these misfortunes, Brahma is the standard occupant of the northern niche outside the sanctum of

a Chola temple.³ In the tenth-century temples of the Chola heartland (Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts) he is invariably a standing figure. The same pattern prevails on the ninth-century temples of this area whenever they have sanctum niches (*devakoshtas*). I know only one exception to this rule, the Cholisvaram at Kilayur, built in 884 (see below). In the outlying districts the picture is, as we shall see, somewhat different.

Brahma may further appear in a niche on the north side of the neck (*griva*) of the sanctum building (*vimana*), i.e., below the cupola (*sikhara*) and above the top story of the superstructure, and sometimes as well in the northern niche of the upper story, if there is one. The latter two arrangements seem to occur, in the center of the Chola country, in temples of the ninth century only; the god sometimes is seated.⁴

We can compare a number of standing *devakoshta* images of the ninth and tenth centuries, from the Chola country.⁵ An important one is at Kumbakonam, an ancient and holy city on the banks of the Kaveri River not far from Tanjavur, the Chola capital. A local legend claims that Brahma's bottle of nectar, source of creation, was carried away from Mount Meru by the floods of the deluge and deposited by the subsiding waters at this very place. The Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam was already sung by the famous hymnist Appar in the early eighth century. The principal parts of the present temple can, on the basis of the inscriptions, be assigned to the fifteenth year of Aditya I, second ruler of the Chola dynasty, i.e., to A.D. 886.

The Brahma image in the northern sanctum niche is a splendid life-size figure, carved in very high relief

1. The historical outline is based upon material in K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India* (Madras, 1958) and *The Colas* (Madras, 1955). For the maritime expeditions of Rajendra I, see R. C. Majumdar, "The Overseas Expeditions of King Rajendra Cola," *Artibus Asiae* 24 (1969) pp. 338 ff.

2. For the preceding paragraphs, I have consulted Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, II, part 2, pp. 501 ff.; Banerjee, *Development*, pp. 514 ff.; Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 240, 312; P. Mus, "Brahma's Four Faces," *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5 (1937) pp. 60 ff.

3. In the Viralur and Lalgudy temples, Bhikshatanamurti occupies the northern niche; see S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 56, 99. At Lalgudy, Brahma occupies the northern *griva* niche. A loose Brahma at Viralur may belong to the *griva* as well; if so, this might indicate that the Bhikshatanamurti in the sanctum niche is a later replacement.

4. Tirukkattalai (874), Viralur, and Visalur, all in Pudukkottai, see Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 90-91, 56, 57. Kilayur (884, see below) and Lalgudy in Tiruchirappalli district, see Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 110, 99. Sendalai, Tanjavur district, see Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pl. 72 c, p. 140. For the outlying districts I mention the Pandya temples Vettuvankoil (c. 800), C. Sivaramamurti, *Kalugumalai* (Bombay, 1961) pl. 7, and Tiruvalisvaram (tenth century), both in Tirunelveli district, and the Bana temple at Tiruvallam in North Arcot district, Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pl. 98 a.

5. In addition to the images illustrated and described here, I mention those at Tirukkattalai (874) in Pudukkottai and at Sriniivasanallur (895) in Tiruchirappalli district, Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 47.



FIGURE 1

Brahma, 886. Nagesvara temple, Kumbakonam

(Figure 1). Parts of the block from which the figure was carved have been left attached where they are necessary for the support of the extremities, and have become a kind of back panel. The back hands hold, by their fingertips, a rosary (right hand) and a bottle (left hand); these emblems are tilted slightly inward. The front right hand is in the gesture of protection; the front left rests on the hip. The crown is conical. The sacred cord, a broad ribbon falling to the girdle and over the lower arm, seems to be tied on the shoulder; its loose ends fall low on the chest. We note the heavy, vertical belt pendants.

The knees look somewhat patched in, but the body is charged with inner life and radiates divine beauty. The gentle visage facing us is lit by a serene smile; the profiles recall the lovely nymphs on the vestibule of the same temple (see Figures 46, 47). The flat back panel is reduced to the areas between the arms and the body and faces. Almost circular in shape, and emphasized by the back hands and emblems, it seems to form a kind of halo.

The contemporary image on the Agastyesvaram⁶ at Kilayur (884), in the district of Tiruchirappalli, is slender and elongated (Figure 2); so is its crown. The front right hand is slightly tilted outward. Perhaps these features are echoes of the preceding Pallava style; on the other hand, the present Kilayur and its temple were, through the patronage of the local ruling family and its relations, associated with the Chera country (Kerala). The back hands are pulled close to the shoulders; the emblems are held almost vertically.

The back panel is much more in evidence than on the previous icon. It narrows from the calves upward to the bows of the lateral sashes, and rises behind the shoulders and emblems to the top of the crown in an irregular, nearly triangular shape. The thick sacred cord falls nearly to the girdle; a thin strand branches off to the right from the bell clasp with tassels—which is worn rather high. There are no vertical girdle pend-

6. The twin shrines Agastyesvaram and Cholisvaram are the principal parts of a Siva temple called Avani-Kandarpa-Isvaram; see Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, pp. 14 ff.



FIGURE 2
Brahma, 884. Agastyesvaram temple, Kilayur

ants. The slender and graceful body is sensitively modeled; the principal face probably has been recut.

The differences between the two contemporary images show that the local schools or workshops followed somewhat different traditions. The sculptors of Kumbakonam, close to the Chola capital, worked in a manner more typical of the new Chola style than those of Kilayur and, as the awkward shape of the back

panel at Kilayur illustrates, were both aesthetically and technically a step in advance.

The icon on the Brahmapurisvara temple (910) at Pullamangai near Tanjavur (Figure 3) dates from the third year of the long reign of Parantaka I, who succeeded his father, Aditya, on the Chola throne. Only a quarter of a century later than the two previous examples, it shows a certain synthesis or unification of styles. The tall, elongated figure and its high crown echo the Kilayur icon, but the torso is less modeled and somewhat tubular. The scarves with their pronounced lateral bows, the vertical girdle pendant, the wide ribbon fall-

FIGURE 3
Brahma, 910. Brahmapurisvara temple, Pullamangai

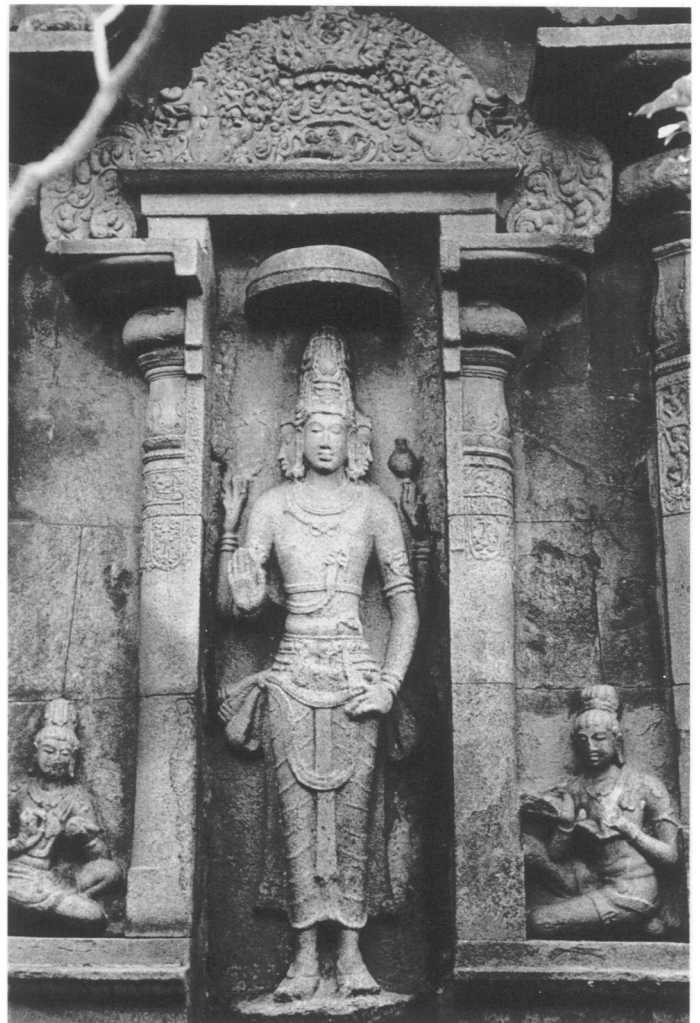




FIGURE 4

Brahma, c. 950. Naltunai Isvaram temple, Punjai

ing over the arm and tied on the shoulder, and the necklace with festoons of pearls all correspond with the Kumbakonam sculpture. The divine nobility of the god is emphasized by his proportions, compared to those of the kneeling worshipers on either side of him.

The back panel of the relief—supporting an umbrella—here fills almost the entire niche and thus is visually almost nonexistent. While the sculpture apparently was inserted after construction, the two worshipers were carved in situ. The pilastered niche with a projecting lintel supported by wide abaci and carrying a makara torana (crocodile arch) is a splendid example of Early Chola architecture.

The corresponding image on the Naltunai Isvaram temple (c. 950) at Punjai, near Tanjavur, is less slender and somewhat heavy (Figure 4). The torso again is rather tubular and only slightly modeled. We have already noticed this trend at Pullamangai, but here even the stomach roll has virtually disappeared. The sacred cord once more is a flat band without bell clasp but with a bow tied on the shoulder. The flap of the dhoti or sash sticking out above the girdle at the side has become more prominent and three-dimensional; the girdle clasp here is a real lion mask. In addition to the vertical belt pendant hanging between the legs—which already occurred on two of the preceding examples—there are heavy pendants and festoons hanging to the thighs. The frontal loop of the girdle is twisted and undulating. The lateral sashes falling from the large bows at the hips are shown as separated from the legs. The emblems are held almost vertically, as at Pullamangai. For the first time we notice two fly whiskes in the background, flanking the divine head. The back panel neatly fits the niche; the relief was probably carved in situ.

The beautiful Punjai temple can be dated only approximately, to about 950. It is evident that its construction was not yet affected by the consequences of the defeat that the Cholas suffered in 949 at the hands of the Rashtrakutas in the battle of Takkolam, where their crown prince Rajaditya was killed, and the subsequent occupation of the northern realm by the enemy. King Parantaka I himself died a few years later, to-

ward 955. The shadow that these events cast over the Chola fortunes did not begin to lift until the reign of Uttama Chola (969–985), whose mother, Sembiyan Mahadevi, was a prodigious patron of religion and the arts and sponsored the construction of a large number of temples, many of which still exist.

The Brahma reliefs of the late tenth century once more have somewhat less tubular and more modeled bodies, but despite this they are more formalized and often lifeless. There are among them considerable differences in quality. A Brahma in the Tiru-Alandurai-Mahadeva temple at Kilappaluvur, near Kilayur (984),⁷ still carries a distant echo of the Punjai icon but has lost the latter's imposing majesty. The Brahma in the Gangajataadhara temple at Govindaputtur (982) in the same Tiruchirappalli district, which was built in the thirteenth year of Uttama Chola, is plump and mannered (Figure 5). The ribbon of the sacred cord, tied on the shoulder, is twisted into a sinuous curve, repeated in the bow of the sash. The undulating, twisted girdle loop recalls Punjai but has become soggy; the lion mask has lost its magic power. The mannered pose of the lower left hand is even more stilted than at Kilappaluvur; the knees, which had disappeared on the latter icon, here have become pudgy little cushions. The face, lovely still at Kilappaluvur, has lost its radiance. We notice the fly whisks first seen at Punjai, which are here much more prominent. The back panel fills most of the niche.

The extraordinary revival of Chola power and creativity that took place under the great Rajaraja I (985–1014) perhaps found its fullest expression in the construction of the great temple at Tanjavur, the Rajarajesvara (now Brhadisvara), in 1010 (Figure 56). Almost 200 feet high, it is probably the tallest and most beautiful of all Indian temples.

In the gate tower (gopura) of the Tanjavur temple we encounter for the first time the bearded Brahma, a northern variant of the icon.⁸ He occurs again on the great temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, which was built in 1030 by Rajaraja's son and successor Rajendra I.

I mentioned above that a seated Brahma sometimes

appears, in ninth-century temples of the Chola heartland, in the northern niche of the neck under the cupola or of the upper story, but extremely rarely in the northern sanctum niche. On the Cholisvaram, twin temple of the Agastyesvaram at Kilayur (884), there are, on the north façade, three seated Brahmas, one on each of the three architectural levels of the temple: at the top on the neck, beneath it in the upper-story niche, and below in the sanctum niche. In the top image, Brahma is seated on the double lotus, his right foot supported by a small lotus or extension of the throne. On

FIGURE 5
Brahma, 982. Gangajataadhara temple, Govindaputtur



7. Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, fig. 24.

8. See Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, II, part 2, p. 505, who quotes the *Rupamandana*.

the upper story he sits with crossed legs, on a regular throne.⁹ In the devakoshta image (Figure 6), Brahma again is sitting on a throne, his right foot supported (this part of the sculpture is unfinished). The crown is quite elongated. The sacred cord, tied rather high on the chest, falls to a position just below the stomach band. The back hands hold their emblems well above the shoulders. The front right hand is tilted outward as on the Agastyesvaram, in a manner typical for this early period. The pensive face is sensitively modeled; the eyes are half-closed. The body is either much eroded or, more probably, never was completely finished. The back panel fills almost the entire niche. For a more

perfect example of this period (except for the face) we have to refer to the standing Brahma on the neighboring Agastyesvaram (see Figure 2).

At some distance from the Chola center, a seated Brahma in the northern sanctum niche occurs in the Kadamba-Vanesvara temple at Erumbur in South Arcot district (Figure 7),¹⁰ built in the twenty-eighth year of Parantaka I (935). Here Brahma is seated on a double-lotus throne in a yoga position called "lotus

9. Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, fig. 9.

10. S. R. Balasubrahmanyam and K. V. Raju, "Parantaka Cola's Erumbur Temple," *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 7 (1939) pp. 113-114.



FIGURE 6
Brahma, 884. Cholisvaram temple, Kilayur

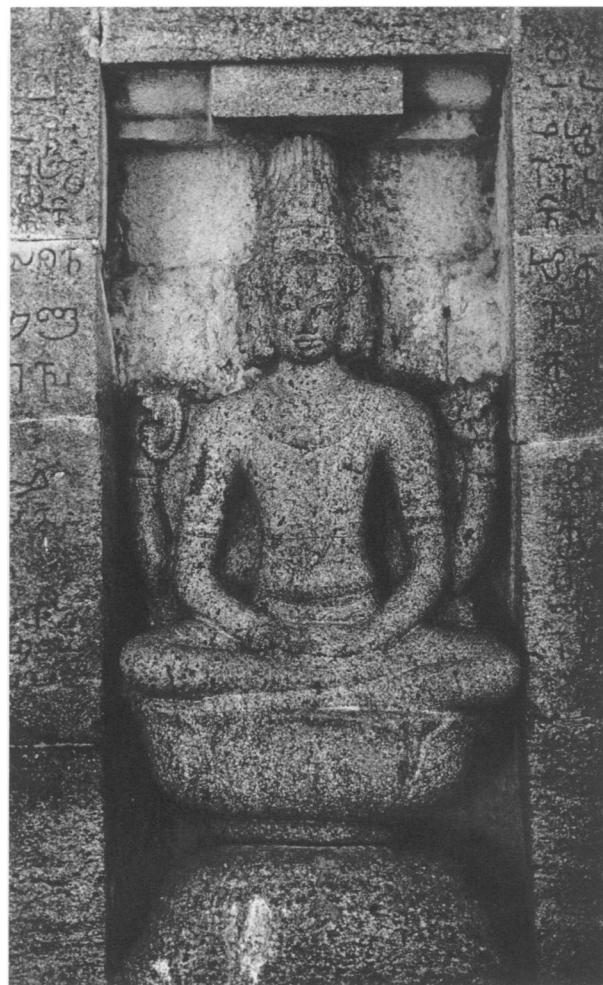


FIGURE 7
Brahma, 935. Kadamba-Vanesvara temple, Erumbur



FIGURES 8, 9

Brahma, late ix or early x century. Height 58 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Eggleston Fund, 27.79

seat," i.e., with legs folded under and hands folded in his lap. The back hands holding the usual rosary and bottle are close to the shoulders and not raised above them; the front arms rest on the thighs. Consequently, the background panel has been retained only between body and arms, between upper arms and back hands, and below the back elbows. The relief almost creates

the illusion of seeing a sculpture carved in the round. The god's faces are distinguished by a gentle and meditative expression. The body is less sensitively modeled and rather tubular, although we still notice the stomach roll. This corresponds with the date of the temple, which places the icon between Pullamangai and Punjai (Figures 3, 4). We note the ribbon of the sacred cord,



tied on the shoulder. The parasol above has not been finished.

This last pattern of a seated Brahma in the northern sanctum niche is or was formerly applied in at least six temples of the late ninth century in the adjoining northern districts of North Arcot and Chingleput, which represent a local offshoot of the Late Pallava style.¹¹

In all six reliefs the back panel has been retained and fills most or all of the niche. In all of them it is the left



leg that is hanging down—contrary to the Chola pattern (Cholisvaram, Figure 6).

A different type of Brahma image, carved in the round, was first discussed by O. C. Gangoly. In 1928 he published the sculpture in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Figures 8, 9)¹² and compared it to a very similar one in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo (Figures 10, 11), and to yet another, with two arms, from the temple of Kandiur in Tanjavur district, now

11. Tiruttani: D. Barrett, *Tiruttani* (Bombay, 1958) pl. 2. Tirukkallukkunram: Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 103 c. Tirupparkadal: Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 89 b. Takkolam: Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 94. The images from Kaveripakkam (Barrett, *Tiruttani*, pl. 18) and Tiruvakkarai (O. C. Gangoly, "A Group of Stone Sculptures from

Southern India," *Rupam* 35-36 [1928] pp. 62-64, fig. F; Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, p. 195) surely were in devakoshta as well.

12. O. C. Gangoly, "Some Images of Brahma of the Chola Period," *Rupam* 35-36 (1928) pp. 29-30, frontispiece, fig. A.

in front of the Collector's office at Tanjavur.¹³ A few more can be added to this group. One is a seated Brahma carved in the round that was given by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Figure 12).¹⁴ A fifth image of this type was found at the canal near Karandai in the northern suburb of Tanjavur; it now is in the Tanjavur Art Gallery (Figure 13).¹⁵ In the Kandiyur temple there is a second sitting Brahma image carved in the round, which has four arms like most others.¹⁶ At least two more similar figures have been found in the Tanjavur area.¹⁷

The Metropolitan's splendid Brahma is a nearly life-size figure, carved in the round from south Indian granite. Face and body are those of a beautiful youth. The expression is serene and benign, lit by a faint smile. We note the sensitive modeling of chest and limbs, and the slightly swelling stomach. The god is represented as an idealized young brahman sage, ready to listen to the prayers of the believers and to bestow boons on the faithful. We remember that Indian naturalism aims at showing phases of spiritual conquest and attainment: the body is transformed by yoga.

Iconographically, all these three-dimensional images are nearly identical. The four-faced god is seated on a double-lotus throne, his right leg hanging down. His front right hand holds a lotus bud; the back right hand

is in the attitude of protection; the back left hand carries a rosary; the front left hand is in the attitude of charity or bestowing a boon. The god wears asymmetrical earrings, a broad, richly bejeweled necklace, and a string or strings of pearls with jewel and, in the case of the Buffalo sculpture, festoons (cf. Figure 3, Pullamangai). There are makara armlets, wristlets, rings, and thin foot ornaments. On the New York and Boston images, the sacred cord falls to the girdle; it consists—except at Kandiyur—of three strings of pearls and is held by a bell clasp with bow and tassels. On the New York and Boston examples two thin strands branch off from the clasp: the lower one disappears under the girdle; the upper one falls around the right chest, above the jeweled stomach band. On the Buffalo Brahma, we find only the upper one. The shape of the crown is conical on the New York image, somewhat more rounded on the Tanjavur and the two Kandiyur icons; that of the Buffalo Brahma is squat, that of the Boston image elongated. The first three recall the Kumbakonam icon (Figure 1), the last that of Pullamangai (Figure 3). The crowns of the New York, Boston, Buffalo, and Kandiyur images are decorated, in front, with a three-dimensional lion-head medallion supported by two adorsed makara protomas. We find this ornament on the Brahma images at Kilayur (Figure 2) and Pullamangai (Figure 3) as well as at a more distant temple

13. Gangoly, "Some Images," fig. c; K. R. Srinivasan, "Some Aspects," pl. vi; P. R. Srinivasan, "Rare Sculptures of the Early Chola Period," *Lalit Kala* 5 (1959) p. 63; P. R. Srinivasan, "Art and Architecture of Kandiyur," *Transactions, Archaeological Society of South India* 1957–1958, pp. 54 ff., fig. 9.

14. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "An Indian Image of Brahma," *Bulletin, Museum of Fine Arts* 40 (Boston, 1942) pp. 40–41. Coomaraswamy assigned it to the sixteenth century. Since the present article was written, the sculpture has been republished by Pratapaditya Pal ("South Indian Sculptures: A Reappraisal," *Bulletin, Museum of Fine Arts* 67 [Boston, 1969] pp. 151–173) and assigned to the tenth century.

15. P. R. Srinivasan, "Important Works of Art of the Early Chola Period from near Tanjore," *Transactions, Archaeological Society of South India* 1956–1957, fig. 62; *Guide Book, The Tanjore Art Gallery* (Tanjavur, 1958) pl. 1. Srinivasan assigns it to the second half of the ninth century.

16. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 77 b. The earliest inscription on the Kandiyur temple is dated A.D. 876; it does not refer to the construction, which must be earlier.

17. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, p. 149, mentions "similar figures of Brahma found at Sendalai, Nemam, and Karuntatangudi (now in the Tanjavur Art Gallery)." The last is also mentioned by P. R. Srinivasan ("Rare Sculptures," p. 63), who assigns its temples to Parantaka I (907–955). The Sendalai image is not illustrated by Balasubrahmanyam; the figure from Sendalai that he does illustrate (fig. 72 c) is not carved in the round and probably was placed on the griva. The Nemam image, not mentioned in his discussion of the temple (pp. 142–143), perhaps is identical with that in the neighboring Tiruvayaru temple mentioned by K. R. Srinivasan ("Some Aspects," p. 179); see also Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 149 ff.



FIGURE 12

Brahma, late ix or early x century. Height 63 ½ in. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., acc. no. 42.120

of the late ninth century,¹⁸ but no longer at Punjai (Figure 4) and Erumbur (Figure 7).¹⁹ The lion mask of the girdle clasp is less realistic on the Buffalo image.

In back, the end of the dhoti is pulled up between the buttocks and under the girdle, above which it stands out, three-dimensionally, as a furled, shell-

shaped splay; it is most prominent on the Buffalo icon. Between the shoulder blades of the Boston Brahma, a large pipal-shaped pendant hangs from the necklace. The backs of at least the New York, Buffalo, and Boston images—we have no photographs of the others—are rather flat and do not show the same precision and finish as the fronts; this is especially true in the case of the Boston one.

The stay supporting the right arm is, on all these sculptures, cut down to the absolutely necessary. In the four-armed images the back hands and their emblems are pulled close to the shoulders, reducing their support (the connection with the upper arm) to a minimum. The background panel seen in the relief sculptures has been almost entirely eliminated.

In front, the body is sensitively modeled. We notice the swelling stomach, which is almost a stomach roll on the sculpture in the Tanjavur Art Gallery. On the Buffalo icon, the chest muscles are underlined, while the torso of the Kandiur one seems to be rather tubular. The swelling stomach has been noted at Kumbakonam and Kilayur, and in even more pronounced form at Pullamangai and Erumbur, but it was not in evidence at Punjai.

Gangoly assigned the New York Brahma to the late tenth century. It seems fairly evident already that it cannot be as late as those at Kilappaluvur (note 7) and Govindaputtur (Figure 5). It is actually closer to the Kilayur icons (Figures 2, 6) than to those at Punjai and Erumbur (Figures 4, 7). The sensitive treatment of the slender body strongly recalls the Srinivasanallur image of 895.²⁰

Taking the regional differences into account, I do not believe that the entire group covers a period of much more than fifty years, approximately between 875 and 925. As we shall see, there are other arguments to support this date. Gangoly claimed that these sculptures were not and could not have been the main images of temples, but were subsidiary icons placed in niches outside the sanctum. Coomaraswamy also be-

18. Kaveripakkam: Barrett, *Tiruttani*, pl. 18.

19. At the other end of India, it occurs in Nepal in the eighth and ninth century; see Pratapaditya Pal, "Vaishnava Art from Nepal," *Bulletin, Museum of Fine Arts* 65 (Boston, 1967) pp. 40–60, figs. 3, 6.

20. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 47.



FIGURE 13
Brahma, late ix or early x century, from Karandai. Tanjavur Art Gallery

lieved that they were devakoshta images, because their backs are flatter and not as well finished. I think that this emphasis on the front is due to the fact that it was here that the ritual offerings were made; here, too, was the main or only source of light.

I have shown that Brahma indeed belongs in the northern sanctum niche of an Early Chola temple but that he is nearly without exception standing. In all the devakoshta (as well as upper story and griva) im-

ages of the Early Chola period, including the seated ones, the relief technique is applied and the back panel retained. Only at Erumbur does the devakoshta icon come close in treatment to our group of images. None of the devakoshta icons is carved in the round—the griva and upper-story images are smaller as well—as there is no possibility of circumambulation.

The images carved in the round, consequently, were not placed in a sanctum niche as Gangoly and Coomaraswamy thought. Some may always have been placed in the cloister (prakara); others once were the main images of a temple or, more likely, of a secondary temple or shrine devoted to Brahma.

There are iconographical differences as well between the Brahmas carved in the round and the devakoshta images, which always have rosary and bottle in their back right and left hands. These differences probably are due to their different religious functions.²¹ The lotus in the right hand of the former images is, according to Coomaraswamy, a token of the essentially “playful” character of the divine act of creation. The lotus throne alludes to Brahma’s birth from a lotus and thus once more to creation—his role in the trimurti. There is a raised mark on his forehead that resembles the third eye of Siva or the luminous lock of the Buddha, but for this we have not been able to find an explanation. Perhaps it is a reflection of the concept of Siva as Dakshinamurti, repository of the wisdom of the Vedas (see pp. 31, 59), which in turn had been influenced by that of the Buddha as teacher. In any case, the images carved in the round emphasize the cosmic role or function of Brahma, whereas on the devakoshta reliefs he is little more than a deified priest.

Incidentally, the emblems of the devakoshta images also occur on some Chola bronze icons of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara;²² perhaps this is another echo of the absorption of Buddhism.

21. I do not believe that the lower (front) left hand ever held an emblem (book, bottle, or ladle) as Coomaraswamy suggests.

22. T. N. Ramachandran, “The Nagapattinam and other Buddhist Bronzes in the Madras Museum,” *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum* 7 (1954) pls. vii, 1; ix, 3, 4. In Gandhara sculpture, Maitreya was represented as a regally ornate version of Brahma; see A. Foucher, *L’Art Gréco-Bouddhique de Gandhāra*, quoted by J. M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Art of the Kushans* (Berkeley, 1967) p. 232. Compare the Gandhara Maitreya in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Aschwin Lippe, “The Sculpture of Greater India,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 18 (1959–1960) p. 181.

The temple of Kandiur²³ (or Tirukkandiur) mentioned above provides the clue to the original location of at least some of the three-dimensional Brahma images, which now are placed in the outer cloister, or circuit around the sanctum. This temple devoted to Siva consists of three independent shrines for the trimurti. The temples of Brahma and Vishnu both face east; that of Siva is oriented to the west.

By an irony of mythology, Kandiur also is the place where, according to a late legend, Siva cut off, with his trident, the fifth head of Brahma, who—lecherous to the point of incest—was trying to seduce his own daughter. We shall encounter another instance of this downgrading of Brahma in the legend concerning the Lingodbhavamurti (see below).

Kandiur proves that, in the beginning of the Chola period, there were temples in which the trimurti was represented and worshiped in separate, individual shrines. The cult images were worshiped by circumambulation and consequently had to be carved in the round. When the worship of Brahma became less popular and his shrine fell into disrepair, his image was placed in the cloister.

K. R. Srinivasan has shown²⁴ that, in the preceding Pallava period, beginning in the reign of Mahendra (c. 600–630), the trimurti had been worshiped in the cave temples, but with a steadily increasing emphasis on Siva (or, respectively, Vishnu). In the trimurti cave at Mamallapuram (c. 700), Brahma is replaced by Brahmasasta, i. e., Subrahmanya or Kumara—son of Siva—who humiliated Brahma by exposing his ignorance of the Vedas. The popularity of Subrahmanya in the south was due to his identification with the Tamil god Murugan.

In the Kanchi Kailasanatha, Brahma and Vishnu are relegated to the walls of the vestibule. In the Muktesvara and other Pallava temples of the eighth century, Brahma already occupies the northern devakoshta; the other images as well are distributed in the pattern followed later by the Cholas.

In the Pandya cave temples (Tirumalaipuram, Tiruchirappalli), Vishnu and Brahma seem to have re-

tained a larger degree of power. The cult of the trimurti was (from c. 750) often combined with the cult of the gods of the “six creeds.”²⁵ The latter were reformed by Sankara (c. 800–825), who extolled the concept of Siva as the teacher—Dakshinamurti. Here as well the cult of Siva became dominant.

In far-off Java, which was colonized and missionized mainly from the east coast of India, the three central shrines of the great temple of Prambanam (c. 900) were devoted to the trimurti.

The concept of a triple Siva temple, which is so beautifully realized in the Muvarkovil at Kodumbalur²⁶ (between 956 and 973), perhaps still is an echo of the trimurti cult, as it serves the glorification of a Siva who has arrogated to himself the functions of both other gods.

According to P. R. Srinivasan,²⁷ Brahma worship was completely avoided from about the middle of the tenth century on. The Brahma cult was replaced by that of Subrahmanya, who was assigned one of the subshrines of the Early Chola temples, such as those at Narttamalai and Tirukkattalai, and thus had his individual cult, while Brahma was relegated to the northern devakoshta outside the sanctum. P. R. Srinivasan accordingly dates the Kandiur images to about 950, the four-armed one slightly later.

If the first statement is correct, I do not see how the Kandiur images can be dated to 950 and even later. I believe, following K. R. Srinivasan, that the religious change took place considerably sooner. It is perhaps significant that we know only one Early Chola bronze icon of Brahma.

Brahma already was relegated to the northern sanctum niche in the Muktesvara temple at Kanchi (eighth century). Ever since the very first Chola temples (Narttamalai, between 860 and 870; Tirukkattalai, 874), Brahma was not allotted any of the seven subshrines, but appears in the sanctum niche when there is one (Tirukkattalai). The earliest inscription on the Kandiur temple, registering a gift of gold and food, is dated 876. The original shrine probably was a Pallava foundation; it was celebrated by the hymnists Appar (early

23. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 146–149.

24. K. R. Srinivasan, “Some Aspects,” pp. 177 ff.

25. Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa, Subrahmanya, Surya, and Sakti; see K. R. Srinivasan, “Some Aspects,” pp. 180–181.

26. Venkataranga Raju, “Cola Temples in Pudukkottai,” *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5 (1937) pp. 78 ff.

27. P. R. Srinivasan, “Kandiur,” pp. 54 ff. and “Rare Sculptures,” pp. 63, 67.

eighth century), Sambandar (c. 730), and Sundarar (early ninth century). The present temple is, by architectural and sculptural details, closely related to other temples of the late ninth (Nagesvara, Kumbakonam, and Koranganatha, Srinivasanallur) and early tenth (Brahmapurisvara, Pullamangai) centuries.

All this confirms the above attribution of the three-dimensional images to the period of about 875 to 925 or perhaps even somewhat earlier. I believe that we can safely date the Brahma in The Metropolitan Museum of Art to the late ninth century. The magnificent image of Nisumbhasudani in the eastern suburb of Tanjavur,²⁸ which was dedicated by the first Chola king after his conquest of the area (c. 850), is ample proof that the sculptors of the period were able to create images carved in the round of such perfection and beauty.

II. VISHNU

Vishnu is one of the two great gods of Hinduism—the other being Siva. His manifold aspects and manifestations are due to the fact that he is, historically speaking, a composite deity, as indeed are all the others. His earliest component is a minor solar deity who occurs in the Rig Veda, he who with three strides traversed the entire universe (Trivikrama)—a legend referring to the movement of the sun. Subsequently, in the late Vedic period of the Brahmanas, Vishnu was associated with sacrifice and thus already more important. By the age of the epics and Puranas he had become the most powerful member of the later Brahmanical Trinity—a concept evolved in Gupta times.

His rise to this importance resulted from his identification with Vasudeva. Like the Buddha and the Jaina savior Mahavira, Vasudeva was a princely member of the warrior (kshatriya) caste and was associated with ancient religious reform. He too was deified after his death and soon widely worshiped by the Bhagavata sect as they called themselves. The famous column at Besnagar in central India, erected by the Greek

Heliodorus, shows that by the late second century B.C. his cult—associated with the sun bird Garuda—was embraced by the ruling classes and even the foreigners.

This Bhagavata cult absorbed the concepts of the Vedic sun god Vishnu and of the cosmic god Narayana, who appears in late Vedic verses and in the Brahmanas. To this was fused—perhaps somewhat later—the cult of Krishna, itself a merger of several traditions: tragic hero, amorous cowherd, and divine child. Of these aspects, the first may be of Near Eastern or European origin; the second probably was developed by the Dravidian tribes of the peninsula; the third perhaps was due to Christian inspiration. These three traditions and some other cults were fused—often in the form of incarnations (avatars) of Vishnu—and became the Vaishnava religion, prominent from the early Gupta period.

The theological development of Vishnu as the universal god continued. His incarnations were gradually formalized as ten, although some texts enumerate as many as twenty-two or thirty-nine, mainly seers and sages. However, Krishna alone is considered as a total incarnation. The ninth—the last historical avatar—is the Buddha, symbolizing the reabsorption of Buddhism into Hinduism, from which it had sprung. In the *Mahabharata*, as well as in the *Vayu-Purana*, the Buddha is not yet listed. According to most of the Puranic texts, incidentally, Lord Vishnu incarnated himself as the great teacher in order to delude the asuras, or titans, who threatened the supremacy of the gods, and the wicked. Kalki, the tenth avatar, riding a white horse and brandishing a flaming sword, is yet to appear in the twilight of this age of strife, “when all kings will be thieves.”

A myth prophesying the advent of a foreign avatar is today, in popular Hindu thought, sometimes quoted in order to claim Christ as an avatar of Vishnu. At any rate, there may be new incarnations in a future age, after the destruction and re-creation of the world.

Parallel to the incarnations of Vishnu, the concept of his emanations was developed. From the four basic emanations—Vasudeva with his brother, son, and grandson, really four aspects of Vasudeva—descend two groups of twelve subemanations. These twenty-four manifestations or aspects of the god, formalized at the end of the Gupta period, overlap with the incarnations, as both include the Man-Lion (Narasimha),

28. P. R. Srinivasan, “Important Works,” fig. 2; Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 8.

the Dwarf (Vamana), and Krishna. The emanations, incidentally, include all the principal components of Vishnu mentioned above (Trivikrama, Narayana, Vasudeva, and Krishna).

These twenty-four forms (murti) of Vishnu are distinguished by the distribution, in his four hands, of his emblems. The wheel disk, weapon and symbol of the sun, came to symbolize the universal mind. The conch calls to sacrifice and terrifies in battle; born of the causal waters, it was associated with primeval sound from which developed creation. The club or mace, weapon and emblem of authority, came to stand for the power of knowledge. The lotus is associated with creation and thus with the universe.²⁹

As I have mentioned above, the Cholas were Saivas, i.e., devotees of Siva, and most of the temples they built were dedicated to him. At the same time, they were tolerant even toward the Jains and Buddhists, not to speak of the Vaishnava Hindus, worshipers of Vishnu. Monasteries and temples dedicated to Vishnu continued to flourish and received endowments from members of the royal family.

Already during the preceding period, in the realms of the Pallavas and Pandyas, images of Vishnu, who was represented standing, seated, and reclining, included several of his incarnations and emanations. The most popular icon was perhaps Ranganatha or Seshasayana—Lord Vishnu in “wakeful slumber,” reclining on the coils of the serpent Sesha in the primordial waters, before creation. This concept, which emphasizes Vishnu’s cosmic role, is a development of his Narayana component.

I stated earlier that, already in the late Pallava temples devoted to Siva, Brahma was allotted the northern sanctum niche, Vishnu the most important western one, and Siva as the Teacher (Dakshinamurti) the one facing south. This pattern—reflecting the trimurti concept—was inherited by the Cholas; on the

early Pudukkottai temples, which have no sanctum niches, it was applied on the griva. However, it soon was modified. While Brahma kept his place and there was only a little variation in the occupancy of the southern niche, we notice a considerable amount of change in the western (or, in temples oriented west, the eastern) one.

Vishnu was gradually replaced first by the androgynous Siva (Ardhanarisvara), then by Siva in the flaming pillar (Lingodbhavamurti). On the whole, Ardhanari was favored in the days of Aditya I, while the Lingodbhavamurti succeeded as the standard icon; it will be discussed below. To the north of the Chola heartland the Pallava pattern lingered on; here Vishnu—just as Brahma—often is seated.³⁰

In the precinct of the Brahmapurisvara temple at Pullamangai (near Tanjavur), which dates from 910, two detached relief sculptures of Vishnu were found; one now is in the National Museum in New Delhi (Figure 15).³¹ The western devakoshta of this beautiful temple is occupied by a representation of the Lingodbhavamurti (Figure 27, 28). The latter is coeval with the temple; it shows the precise but gentle touch of the same sculptor who created the other icons, and the flanking figures of Vishnu and Brahma were carved in situ from the masonry blocks.

The Vishnu relief consequently cannot have been a part of the present temple; it is stylistically different as well. The posture is much more formal than that of the Brahma discussed above (Figure 3). The broad shoulders are high and straight, and the raised hands are pulled close to them. The elongated body is taut and tense; the torso is not modeled, except for a hardly perceptible swelling of the stomach. The sash around the hips and its lateral bows are less exuberant. The high crown is nearly cylindrical. All these traits recall earlier Pallava icons (Figure 14), of which this relief is a more elegant descendant.

29. For the preceding paragraphs, I have consulted Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, I, part 1, pp. 80, 229, 231; Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 403 ff. and “Hindu Iconography (Vishnu),” *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 13 (1945) pp. 90 ff.; Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 300 ff.; B. B. Bidyabinod, “Varieties of the Vishnu Image,” *Memoirs, Archaeological Survey of India* 2 (1920); A. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism* (New York, 1964).

30. Tiruvakkarai, Tirupparkadal, Takkolam, Tirukkalluk-

kunram: see O. C. Gangoly, “A Group,” pp. 64–65, pl. D; Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 193, 199, fig. 89 a, p. 210, fig. 92, p. 220, fig. 102 b. Tiruttani: see Barrett, *Tiruttani*. Compare note 11.

31. C. Sivaramamurti, “Some Recent Sculptural Acquisitions in the National Museum,” *Lalit Kala* 1–2 (1955–1956) pp. 113–120, pl. xxxvii, fig. 6. J. C. Harle, *Pullamangai* (Bombay, 1958) and “The Early Chola Temple at Pullamangai (Pasupatikoyil),” *Oriental Art* 4 (1958) pp. 96–108.



FIGURE 14
Vishnu, c. 800, from
Tirukkaraivasal. Tanjavur
Art Gallery



FIGURE 15
Vishnu, IX century, from Pulla-
mangai. Courtesy of the National
Museum, New Delhi

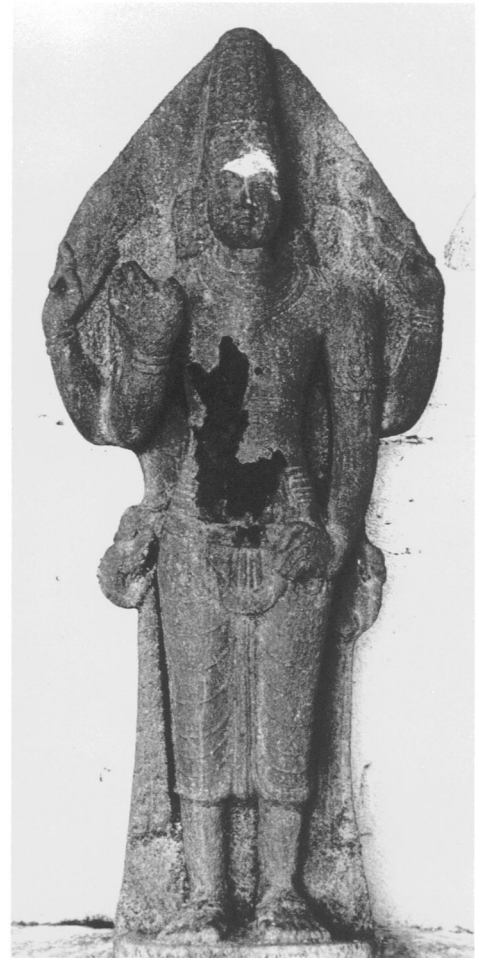


FIGURE 16
Vishnu, first half of the X century.
Sundaresvara temple,
Melappaluvur

The flaming emblems are tilted inward, and the disk is held edge forward. We note the girdle pendants that already occurred on late Pallava icons. The tasseled ribbons between the legs appeared on the Kumbakonam Brahma (Figure 1). The relief can be dated to the second half of the ninth century; perhaps it once occupied the western devakoshta of a brick temple that was replaced by the present structure.

Already in the Pallava cave temples Vishnu was represented with four arms: the back hands holding the disk (right) and the conch (left), the front right hand in the gesture of assurance, the front left placed

on the hip. The other two emblems, mace and lotus, generally were not shown. This pattern was followed constantly, whether the god was accompanied or not. It was applied to the seated images as well, where the front left hand rests on the thigh. This icon does not represent the god in any of his incarnations or emanations.

The Vishnu in the Sundaresvara temple at Melappaluvur (Tiruchirappalli district) must have occupied the western sanctum niche of the original temple (Figure 16). The figure is less elongated and less taut than the Pullamangai Vishnu. Despite the more relaxed



FIGURE 17

Vishnu, 982. Gangajathadhara temple, Govindaputtur

posture, we are struck by a certain stiffness and lifelessness; the unmodeled torso is quite tubular. The bows of the sash on the hips and its lateral ends are more prominent; the front loop is twisted. The relief can be dated to the first half of the tenth century.³²

The Vishnu relief on the Gangajathadhara temple (982) at Govindaputtur (Tiruchirappalli district) is considerably more modeled (Figure 17). We note the stomach roll and the swelling calves. The posture is more relaxed, the expression more gentle. The god has become more human—but he has lost most of his power and majesty.

32. Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, calls it “late ninth century”; Barrett, *Chola Bronzes*, dates it “circa 940.”

The emblems are held more vertically, the disk still with the edge forward. The front left hand is placed no longer on the hip but next to it, touching the sash, in a somewhat mannered pose. The twisted loop of the sash is U-shaped; the belt clasp is a realistic lion mask. An arch or mandorla (prabhavali) is carved in low relief on the back panel, which almost fills the niche.

A superb bronze icon of Vishnu was acquired by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1962 (Figures 18–21).³³ Crown, face, and chest are somewhat worn through worship, but luckily eyes and eyebrows were not recut, as happened so often. What the face has lost in sharpness, it has gained in the softened expression of remote kindness.

The image is in perfect condition—except for the loss of the hair ornament (siraschakra) in back, and perhaps a club or mace (gada) on which the front left hand may once have rested. The details, down to the last piece of jewelry, have retained an astonishing degree of their pristine crispness. The bronze is a masterpiece of casting and chasing.

Perfectly balanced, the god stands erect in all his iconic dignity and majesty but without any stiffness, clad in a human body of eternal youth and beauty. His additional arms—symbols of his manifold power—remind us of his godly nature.

The face is egg-shaped, recalling the Melappaluvur relief; the lips are full. The god wears his usual elongated crown, nearly cylindrical in shape, with a rounded top surmounted by a jewel. In front we decipher the “face of glory” (kirttimukha: a lion mask spitting jewels) above two addorsed makara protomas; this ornament seems to appear on the Pullamangai relief as well. The splendid earrings as usual are in the shape of sea monsters (makaras); here strings of jewels flow from their mouths and cascade along the god’s shoulders.

There is the customary double necklace, and a tasseled pendant hangs from the right shoulder. Each arm

33. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22 (1963–1964) p. 69; *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 17 (1963) p. 50, fig. 27.

is adorned with three elaborate jeweled wristlets as well as an elbow ornament consisting of a double bangle. The intricate armlets are worn high, on all arms. Suspended from them are two festoons and tassels, as on the Melappaluvur relief; in the center, there is the lion mask over makara heads (on the two front arms only), and above, a five-pronged ornament over which we notice the loop of the string that secures it to the arm. The thick, jeweled stomach band is adorned all around the waist with festoons and tassels.

The sacred cord is held high on the left side of the chest by a clasp and bow, which are much rubbed. The main cord of three strands falls over the stomach belt. The upper strand branching off at the clasp swings to the right above the belt, while the lower one falls straight down, disappears behind the girdle, and becomes visible again when it loops around the right ankle, as on the Pullamangai relief; both are adorned with jewels.

The girdle is held by a lion clasp, now somewhat rubbed. Jeweled festoons hang from a girdle band, interrupted by longer pendants with cruciform ornaments. The central festoon is fashioned in openwork. A three-dimensional strip of pearls with bangles and pendants is suspended in the center and falls between the legs to the shins. The end of a girdle band is tucked up, on the left side.

The usual sash is tied around the hips, hanging down in front in a narrowing loop, which is done in openwork; from the flaring bows at the hips, the two ends fall to the hem of the garment. Double incised lines indicate the pattern of the dhoti. The foot ornaments are once more double.

We note that the emblems held by the fingertips of the back hands are only slightly tilted toward the head; the wheel disk is partly turned outward, to about 45 degrees. Simple flames adorn the cardinal points, including the base, of both disk and conch. The front left hand perhaps once rested on a mace; the right is, as usual, raised in the gesture of reassurance.

At the back of the image we notice that a hair orna-

ment once was attached to the knob on the base band of the crown. The curled locks fall over neck and shoulders in a loose semicircle. The end of the dhoti stands out over the girdle in a beautiful large splay.

A flat double-lotus base crowns the low, articulated, rectangular pedestal, which has three more bands of lotus petals. The flamed arch, once fitted over the two spikes, is missing. The rings at the base served to hold poles, by means of which the image could be carried in procession.

The lotus is not represented in our bronze. We find it, however, in the lower (front) right hand of a number of bronzes generally attributed to the Pallava period, and in a few images of the late tenth century.³⁴

Disk and conch are, in all Pallava and Chola bronzes, in the same hands as they are in the New York bronze; we cannot always be sure whether the club or mace originally was represented or not. When all four emblems are shown, this pattern of distribution identifies, among the twenty-four emanations of Vishnu mentioned above, Janardana or, according to another scriptural tradition, Vasudeva;³⁵ it also corresponds with the representation of Vasudeva as the Supreme Lord.³⁶ I do not believe, however, that any of these interpretations was intended for the New York bronze.

The position of the lower left hand is the same as on the Govindaputtur relief. The standing Vishnu in this particular attitude was thought to represent Srinivasa, i.e., the Abode of Sri. Vishnu is thought to carry his consort Sri or Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, in his body. This cult was associated in particular with the Tirupati temple. The peculiar position of the lower left hand is said to indicate to the devotees that the ocean of mundane preoccupations (samsara) for them is only thigh-deep.³⁷ This interpretation seems a rationalization of the particular position of the hand as it looks without the mace, which has disappeared. It would then be based upon a bronze image—where the mace was cast separately and easily got lost. The Srinivasa concept as such, however, is much older; Vishnu is described as “the god who bears Sri in his chest” in a

34. P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, figs. 15, 17, 25, 123, 184; Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pls. 10 b, 11 c, 14 a–b, 15, 17.

35. *Agni-Purana* and *Padma-Purana*; see Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, I, part 1, pp. 227 ff., and Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 386 ff.

36. *Agni-Purana*; see M. Th. de Mallmann, *Les Enseignements*

Iconographiques De L'Agni-Purana (Paris, 1963) pp. 16, 24.

37. F. H. Gravely and T. N. Ramachandran, “Hindu Metal Images,” *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum* 2 (1930–1937) p. 69.





FIGURES 18-21

Vishnu, c. 950-975. Height 33¾ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, John D. Rockefeller III Gift, 62.265



FIGURES 22, 23

Vishnu, c. 900–950. Height 31 in. Vira Narayana Perumal temple, Kodumudi

Tamil poem of the Sangam era (first half of the first millennium).³⁸

To return to certain details of the New York Vishnu, we note that a stomach band adorned all around with festoons like the one here occurs but rarely,³⁹ though a few festoons in front appear frequently on tenth century bronzes. The armlets are tied on in a similar way

on the New York Parvati (Figures 49–51) and on the Tiruchcherai Rama and Vishnu,⁴⁰ but without the

38. K. R. Srinivasan, "Some Aspects," p. 144.

39. We find it on the dvarapala from Kalyani at Darasuram (now in the Tanjavur Art Gallery).

40. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pls. 45, 47.

FIGURE 24

Vishnu, c. 950. Height 35 in. Kalayana Varadaraja temple, Paruttyiur. (Photo: Courtesy of Mr. Douglas Barrett)

little loops at the top; we notice the latter on the Parvati at Konerirajapuram (Figure 53).

When we seek to compare the New York Vishnu with other outstanding Early Chola icons in bronze, the first that come to mind are the Vishnu images at Kodumudi and Paruttyiur. The Kodumudi Vishnu (Figures 22, 23) has been called "certainly the finest bronze representation of the deity in Indian art."⁴¹ The conch is inclined, the disk, edge on, held vertically; we note a fourth flame at the base. The lower left hand is in the same position as on the New York bronze. The crown is more elongated, but the earrings are the same. The five-pronged armlets with looped strings of pearls are similar, but there is no elbow band; the shoulder ornament (on the figure's right) is hardly in evidence. The triangular mark on the right chest, originally thought of as a lock of hair, is called *Sri-vatsa*, i.e., Beloved of Sri (Fortune), and symbolizes the Srinivasa concept mentioned above. The triple sacred cord and its two separate strands are of pearls; the vertical strand does not fall around the ankle, which is adorned by a jeweled bangle instead. There is no lion mask on the girdle clasp. The sash knotted around the hips falls in a wide, twisted loop in front of the thighs; its lateral bows are more prominent and lifelike, the falling ends less formalized. The folds of the dhoti—pulled up in the middle—are very naturalistically rendered. The jeweled festoons hanging from the girdle are longer and have long tassels; they adorn the back as well. Two chain strips carrying pipal pendants and tassels hang in front of the thighs, to the knees; between the legs an elongated pendant falls over two tasseled bands.

In back, we note the very large, shell-like splay of the dhoti and the delicate bows tying the armlets. An animal protoma spewing jewels decorates the hub of the lotus-shaped hair ornament. The broad shoulders and the powerful chest splendidly express the almighty god's grandeur and glory.

The outline of the face and the treatment of the torso suggest that this bronze is not far removed in time from the Melappaluvur relief. We might also place it some-



where between the Pullamangai and Punjai Brahma reliefs (Figures 3, 4), which brings us to the same date, i.e., the first half of the tenth century.⁴²

Another image of great beauty, the Paruttyiur Vishnu (Figure 24),⁴³ is close in style to the New York image. The shape of the crown is similar; so are the earrings with makaras pouring forth strings of jewels, as well as

41. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 38. Kodumudi is located in Coimbatore district, in the old Kongu country.

42. The image has been dated by Sivaramamurti—who calls it Pandya—to the tenth century, by P. R. Srinivasan to about 950, by Barrett to about 940.

43. Sivaramurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 15 b (with *prabha*); P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, fig. 91; Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pls. 73–74.

the treatment of the shoulder ornament and the sacred cord, though the clasp is worn lower, in the center of the chest. The armlets, with a flower-shaped jewel above and festoons below, are not worn as high; there is an elbow band. The lower necklace has a pronounced central jewel. The emblems—with three flames each—are only slightly inclined, as on the New York image, but the disk is held nearly edge on; it is more simple and has fewer spokes. Only a small tucked-up end of a band stands out above the wide girdle; the intricate clasp has no lion mask. The sash falls in a similar U-shaped loop in front; the ends of the bows and the lateral strips are simple and less formalized. There are similar girdle festoons but shorter intermediate pendants hanging from the girdle; no pendant falls between the legs. There are no foot ornaments.

The curled locks in back are disposed somewhat more loosely; a pipal pendant hangs between the shoulder blades. There is no splay of the dhoti above the girdle. The folds still are indicated by slightly raised ridges—on the New York image they are represented by double incised lines. The whole figure is more slender than the one at Kodumudi. The back arms begin at the shoulders—not above the elbows as at Kodumudi. I might add that the mandorla with three-pronged flames and with loops at the top (not shown in Figure 24)⁴⁴ recalls those of the Kodumudi⁴⁵ and Tiruvedikudi⁴⁶ Natarajas. We can assign the Paruttiyur Vishnu to the middle of the tenth century.⁴⁷

The Vishnu of the famous Kalyanasundara group excavated at Tiruvengadam⁴⁸ (early eleventh century) wears a double sash with strongly formalized ends; the frontal loop is deep and narrow. The disk is turned to a frontal position, and both emblems are held up vertically. Datable stone sculptures confirm that this pattern had become dominant after about A.D. 1000.⁴⁹

The noble Vishnu in The Metropolitan Museum of

Art can be assigned to the middle or to the third quarter of the tenth century. There can, in any case, be no doubt that this bronze is the finest Early Chola image of Vishnu outside of India. Even among the published bronzes in India it ranks with the best.

III. SIVA LINGODDBHAVAMURTI

Siva, the third member of the Hindu Trinity, is, with Vishnu, one of the two most powerful gods of the Indian pantheon, around whom, in the course of the centuries, the two great sectarian religions of Vaishnava and Saiva were built. Contrary to Vishnu, Siva belongs (along with the Goddess, see below) to the oldest known stratum of Indian civilization and religion. His prototype in the Indus Valley civilization was a three-headed, horned, ithyphallic god associated with the bull and other animals. We can see this god's image on cylinder seals from Mohenjo-Daro, but we do not know his name; he probably survives as Siva-Pasupati, the "Lord of Beasts." Numerous lingas—phallic emblems that we can associate with his cult—were found at Harappa.

A later ancestor of this great Hindu god belonged to the pantheon of the Aryan invaders. The Vedic Rudra ("the Howler") was an amoral and terrifying god associated with storms; remote, dwelling in the mountains, he was an archer whose arrows brought death and disease to men and cattle. He was invoked to ward off plague and disaster. The father of the Maruts (winds), he also was identified with Agni, the fire god, and thought to manifest himself as lightning in the skies and as fire on earth. In his beneficent aspect, this ambiguous god was the guardian of healing herbs, which probably earned him the epithet Siva—"the Auspicious One." From the merging of the Vedic Rudra with elements of the ancient non-Aryan fertility god evolved the concept of Siva.

44. Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 15 b.

45. Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 90 a; P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, figs. 82–83; Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pls. 87–88.

46. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 81 b; *Master Bronzes of India* (Chicago, 1965) no. 29.

47. Sivaramamurti: ninth–tenth century; P. R. Srinivasan: about 950; Barrett: about 975.

48. Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pls. 85, 88 a; P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, figs. 126, 127 a; T. N. Ramachandran, "Bronze Images

from Tiru-Venkadu-Svetaranya," *Lalit Kala* 3–4 (1956–1957) pp. 55 ff., pls. xviii–xix.

49. See Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pl. 75 and p. 6. In addition to Figures 14–17, the following Vishnu images can be compared: that from Kottur in the Tanjavur Art Gallery (late Pallava, between 800 and 850); those in the Vaishnava cave at Narttamalai (about 860); that at Viralur (about 870); that at Alambakkam (about 910; Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, fig. 49 a); as well as those on the great temples at Tanjavur (1010) and Gangaikondacholapuram (1030).

A late hymn of the *Rig-Veda* mentions holy men (munis, “the silent ones”) who are not brahmans, who have drunk the magic cup of Rudra and rise on the wind to fly with the gods. The *Atharva-Veda* speaks of another group called vratyas who were priests of a non-Vedic fertility cult that involved ritual dancing and flagellation. These priests traveled about in carts, each with a woman whom he prostituted and a musician who performed.

By the time of the Upanishads, asceticism was widespread. Some ascetics were living in the forests as solitary hermits, suffering self-inflicted tortures; others were performing their fakir’s demonstrations in the “penance grounds” on the outskirts of towns. The quest for magical power led to the search for mystical knowledge as expressed in the Upanishads. Despite the extremes pursued by psychopaths and charlatans, the ascetics were the source of many new and profound developments in Indian thought.

Siva was believed to roam in burning-grounds for the dead and on battlefields; naked and covered with ashes, he wore a garland of skulls and was surrounded by goblins and demons. He laughed and wept, speaking like a madman, singing, playing the vina or beating the drum, and dancing in ecstasy. He presided over terrible rites, which included human sacrifices.

But he also was the great ascetic and patron deity of all ascetics who sits forever on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas, in a deep meditation by means of which the world is maintained. He is seated on a tiger skin and wears the matted hair of a yogi. The third eye shows his superior wisdom, the crescent moon is suspended on his topknot, the river Ganges flows from his hair. His neck is black because, in order to save the other gods, he had drunk a deadly poison. This potion was created when gods and titans churned the cosmic ocean to produce the nectar of immortality. Poisonous snakes, whose lord he is, are writhing around his limbs; his weapon is the trident.

This imagery still shows his two-sided character, but developing away from the original Rudra, Siva gradually became a primarily beneficent deity, a bestower of grace and knowledge. It also shows that Siva, by and large, is a non-Aryan god. The brahman priests had hated this fertility god who accepted human sacrifice and the drinking of liquor, who danced in the burial grounds, who could be ritually worshiped by an initi-

ated member of the lowest caste (sudra); they despised the worship of the linga. In a Puranic legend we still hear that it had been all along ordained by the (Aryan) gods that no portion of any sacrifice should be offered to Siva. Nevertheless, ever since a time near the beginning of our era, the cult of the linga had a place in Hinduism, and by the Puranic period Siva had become one of the supreme deities. His reconciliation with the Aryan gods found expression in the cult of Hari-Hara, i.e., Siva and Vishnu combined in one body.⁵⁰

The temple is, as Stella Kramrisch put it, both the house and the body of god. In the sanctum or cella of a temple devoted to Siva, the god is worshiped in his essential and purest form—the linga. We have seen that the worship of this phallic symbol connected with an ancient fertility cult goes back to the Indus Valley civilization.

The essence of the god permeates the entire temple and is manifest in the icons and secondary sculptures on the outer walls. The most important of these occupies the niche on the outside of the back wall of the sanctum, on the axis of the temple.

I pointed out above that in this western devakoshta of the Early Chola temples Vishnu was first replaced by the androgynous Siva, i.e., Ardhanarisvara. This concept surely is related to that of Hari-Hara. The latter icon—rather rare in the south—combines the principal deities of the Saiva and Vaishnava cults; the former, those of the Saiva and Sakta (the devotees of Siva and of the Goddess, see pp. 68–69). Already in the Hari-Hara icon—at least in a Saiva temple—the Siva component probably was the dominant one. The manifestation of Vishnu (Hari) as a woman (Mohini) perhaps furnished the link to the concept of Ardhanari, the union of Siva with his consort, Parvati, or rather with his Sakti, his female energy. The latter at the same time represents the Goddess in all her aspects.

The beautiful relief on the Nagesvara temple (c. 886) at Kumbakonam (Figure 25) shows how successfully the Early Chola sculptor could cope with this aesthetically and “anatomically” difficult concept. The two halves of the divine hermaphrodite are perfectly fused, one exalting male strength, the other female grace.

50. For the preceding paragraphs, see Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, II, part 1, pp. 39 ff.; Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 63, 446 ff.; Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 238, 244 ff., 298, 307.



FIGURE 25
Ardhanarisvara, 886. Nagesvara temple, Kumbakonam

Siva, two-armed, holds high his battle axe and leans on his bull vehicle, Nandi. Parvati has only one arm, which holds a mirror.

The Ardhanari icon was in turn succeeded by Siva in the fiery pillar (Lingodbhavamurti), which gradually became the standard occupant of the western devakoshta.

I mentioned previously Siva's slow but irresistible rise to power and how in the Gupta period the concept of the trimurti was created in order to reconcile the sectarians, already mainly grouped around Vishnu and Siva. But this reconciliation did not last. Brahma lost whatever power he had, and for the believers in either of the two great sectarian gods—Vishnu and Siva—their lord assumed the functions, virtues, and powers of the two other members of the trimurti as well.

This development is reflected in some of the Puranic myths.⁵¹ The story of the origin of the linga (lingodbhava) begins with an acrimonious dispute between Vishnu and Brahma, who both claim to have created the universe. While they quarrel, there appears in a blinding light a flaming pillar that seems to pierce heaven and earth. (We remember the ancient association of Rudra, the storm, with Agni, the fire.) They decide to investigate it. Brahma flies up into the sky to find its top while Vishnu digs into the earth to reach its bottom, but although they continue for a thousand years, their labors are of no avail. Only when they enter deep meditation does Siva in all his glory reveal himself to them in the fiery pillar; they worship him and are accepted as his right and left arm. In a later version,⁵² Vishnu assumes the shape of his boar avatar (Varaha) in order to burrow into the ground, while Brahma's mount, the wild goose (hamsa), rises to heaven.

At a somewhat later stage of the legend's development, Brahma lied, asserting that he had reached the top of the flaming pillar, bringing back as proof a pandanus flower that had fallen from Siva's headdress. Siva put upon him a curse depriving him forever of a cult of his own; in one version, he even cut off Brahma's

51. *Vayu-Purana, Brahmanda-Purana, Linga-Purana*; quoted by Gopinatha Rao, Banerjea, Basham. J. Filliozat, "L'Image de l'Origine du Linga (Lingodbhavamurti)," *Arts Asiatiques* 8 (1961) pp. 43–56; D. Barrett, "An Early Cola Lingodbhavamurti," *The British Museum Quarterly* 28 (1964) pp. 32–39.

52. *Skanda-Purana*, quoted by Filliozat, "L'Image," pp. 47–48.

fifth head. The Agamas, religious texts created in the south, follow the Puranic stories and describe the icon accordingly, with minor variations.⁵³

Although the cult of the linga is as ancient as the Indus Valley civilization, the Lingodbhavamurti concept appeared only in post-Gupta times and was created in south India. It corresponds with the aniconic tradition of the early historic south, which associated stones with burial (this idea continued in the hero stones) and included the worship of wooden posts, anthills, and trees. The puritanical element in the early medieval bhakti movement of the hymnists, moreover, did not take kindly to the vestiges of the old fertility cults, which had survived more freely elsewhere. Therefore the linga was now conceived as a flaming pillar, apparently devoid of phallic associations.⁵⁴

We first encounter the icon in cave XV at Ellora in the Deccan⁵⁵ (first half of the eighth century), and on the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi⁵⁶ in the south (about 730), where a small Brahma (in his human form) and Varaha try to measure the fiery pillar while full-size figures of the two gods stand at either side worshipping Siva. The flames, garland, and lenticular opening of the linga as well as the flying Brahma and digging Varaha on the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal in the Deccan⁵⁷ (about 740) still are very close to the Das Avatara (Ellora cave XV) sculpture, but the large figures of the two worshipping gods have disappeared. They are present, however, on another Chalukya temple of this period, the Padma-Brahma at Alampur.⁵⁸

In a Muttarayar cave temple of the late eighth century at Tirumayam in Pudukkottai (Figure 26), Siva has two arms and is not accompanied by Vishnu and Brahma in any form. The concept of the sudden and blinding manifestation of the god who reveals himself in the fiery pillar is most beautifully realized in this little-known relief.

The earliest Chola sanctuary in which the Lingodbhavamurti appears in the western sanctum niche is

FIGURE 26

Lingodbhavamurti, late VIII century. Cave temple, Tirumayam



53. Filliozat, "L'Image," pp. 47-48; Barrett, "Lingodbhavamurti," pp. 37-38.

54. K. R. Srinivasan, "Some Aspects," pp. 191 ff.

55. Louis Frédéric, *L'Inde* (Paris, 1959) pl. 127.

56. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, II, part 1, pl. xiii.

57. Filliozat, "L'Image," fig. 2.

58. Barrett, "Lingodbhavamurti," pl. xiii.

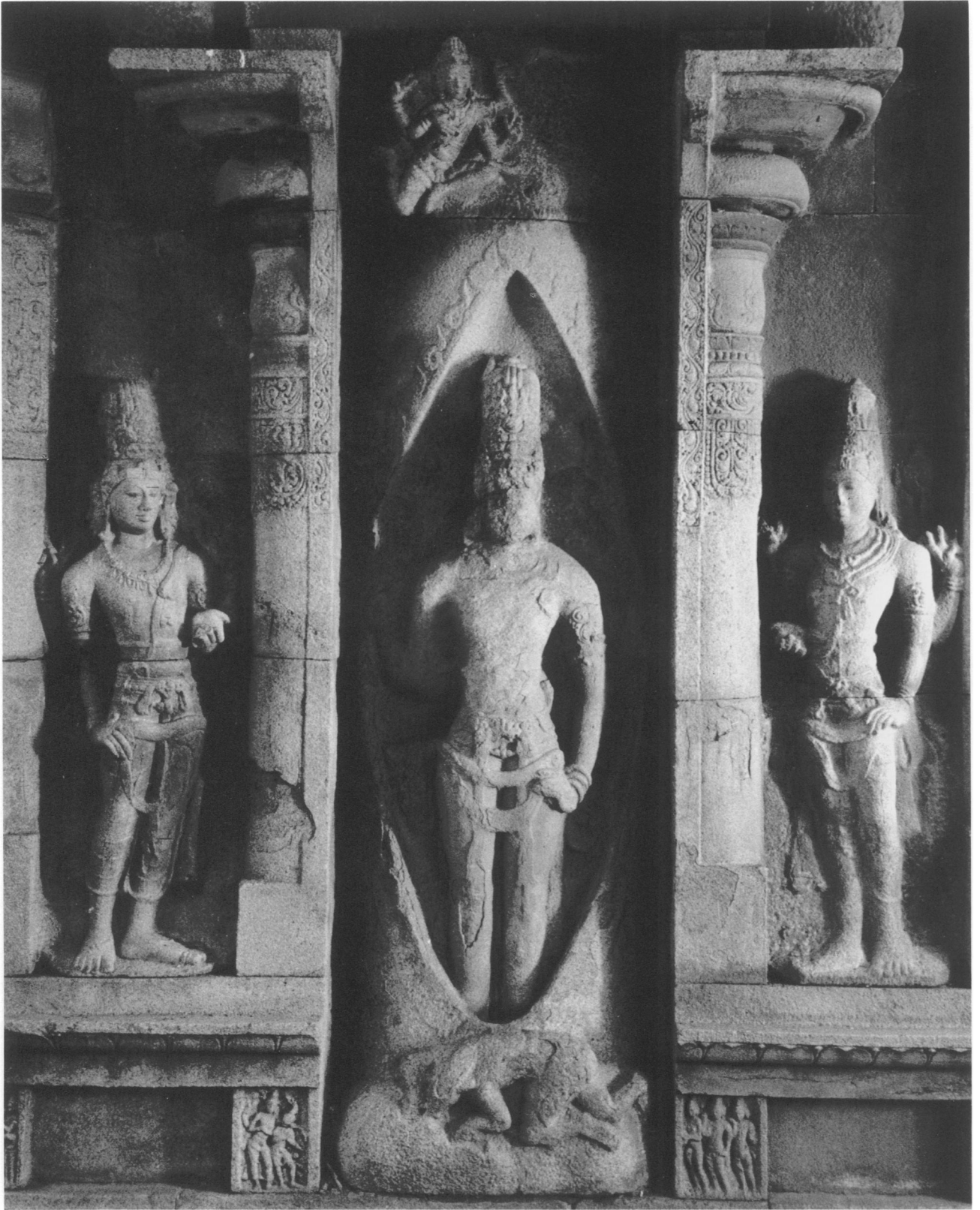


FIGURE 27
Lingodbhavamurti, 910. Brahmapurisvara temple,
Pullamangai

FIGURE 28
Brahma, detail of Figure 27



the Sundaresvara temple (c. 874) at Tirukkattalai in Pudukkottai.⁵⁹ About four decades later, on the Brahmapurisvara temple at Pullamangai (Figure 27), we once more find the complete representation as in Ellora cave XV. Following the Chalukya and Pallava pattern, Vishnu in his boar incarnation (Varaha) is burrowing into the ground; the flying Brahma, however, is shown on or in front of the linga, not beside it. The figure of Siva in a halo of flames is much eroded by worship. The two attending gods, however, chiseled in situ from the masonry blocks, still display all the delicate detail of the carving. In the guise of beautiful young princes, they stand in relaxed but elegant poses, each with one hand raised holding an offering. Their gentle and tender expressions do not signify awe, but bhakti, the love of god (Figure 28).

In the Naltunai Isvaram temple (about 950) at Punjai⁶⁰ (Figure 29), Vishnu, as Varaha, and Brahma, still in human form, again are vainly trying to measure the linga, adorned with garlands, but the worshipping gods have disappeared. Concurrently, a number of variants developed. On the Rajarajesvara temple (about 1010) at Tanjavur the flying Brahma has wings.⁶¹ At Kilur (about 930), Brahma is seated on his vehicle, the wild goose; this pattern continued to occur in the twelfth century.⁶²

At Kilappaluvur⁶³ (between 969 and 985), Brahma is represented by the hamsa; the worshipping gods are present. Without the latter, this concept still prevails on the Chidambaram gopuras⁶⁴ (twelfth century and later), where we also see the two garlands on the linga, first encountered at Punjai (Figure 30).

The last version of the legend, emphasizing Brahma's lie, is illustrated at Kamarajavalli⁶⁵ (about 960), where the pandanus flower is represented by a falling garland. In other examples we see a flower carried in the beak of the wild goose.

59. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, pp. 89–92.

60. The same pattern already appears on the beautiful Early Chola Lingodbhavamurti in the British Museum, which has been dated "about A.D. 900"; see Barrett, "Lingodbhavamurti," pl. xii.

61. Barrett, "Lingodbhavamurti," pp. 38–39; Banerjea, *Development*, pl. xxxi, 4.

62. Barrett, "Lingodbhavamurti," p. 38.

63. Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, fig. 23.

64. J. C. Harle, *Temple Gateways in South India* (Oxford, 1963) fig. 125 and p. 99.

65. Filliozat, "L'Image," fig. 8.



FIGURE 29

Lingodbhavamurti, c. 950. Naltunai Isvaram temple, Punjai

The worshipping gods in the flanking niches still appear on the Kampahesvara temple (between 1200 and 1215) at Tribhuvanam (Figure 31).

Not all the variants mentioned above can be related to the Agamas. We can probably interpret the relief where Vishnu and Brahma are not represented in any way (Tirumayam) as illustrating an earlier and more conciliatory version of the legend, while the representation of the pandanus flower and, perhaps, already the transformation of Brahma into his vehicle, hint at the latter's total humiliation.

The Lingodbhavamurti in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 32), carved from south Indian granite, certainly once adorned the western sanctum niche of a Late Chola temple. As usual, the four-armed Siva appears in the lentil-shaped opening of a pillar; his lower legs and the top of his crown are hidden. The front right hand, now broken off, once was in the gesture of protection; the back right holds a battle axe, the back left an antelope; the front right rests on the hip. Flower garlands fall over both shoulders.

The sacred cord is a sinuous ribbon, with an upper strand branching off at the clasp. The girdle with jeweled bands, festoons, and pendants is held by a lion-mask clasp. The sash falls in a formalized narrow loop in front; the vertical strips at the sides as well as the bow on the right hip are stylized and flat. Arms and legs are heavy and tubular, the knees knobby.

Varaha, a small figure with boar's head and human body, is burrowing into the earth in the right foreground. The wild goose flutters on the left near the top of the pillar, which is adorned with a flower garland.

Stylistically, the New York relief evidently belongs to the Late Chola period. When we compare it to the image on the Kampahesvara temple at Tribhuvanam (Figure 31)—which can be dated between 1202 and 1216—with its extremely knobby knees, we are tempted to date it a little earlier, close to the western gate tower at Chidambaram (Figure 30)—which was begun about 1150—or the somewhat later eastern one. Since only a rudimentary documentation of Chola temples is available, however, we can only date the sculpture approximately, to the twelfth or thirteenth century.



FIGURE 30

Lingodbhavamurti (right), c. 1150. Western gopura, Sri Nataraja temple, Chidambaram

The southern sanctum niche of an Early Chola temple is, as a rule, occupied by another manifestation of Siva, as Dakshinamurti, the Teacher. This beautiful icon is, once more, a creation of south India; its earliest occurrences are on Pallava temples of the first third of the eighth century and on a contemporary Chalukya temple at Pattadakal (in the Deccan),⁶⁶ which was directly influenced by the Pallava shrines.

The concept is based on that of Siva as the great yogi. He has replaced Brahma as the lord of the four Vedas and has become the guru or teacher par excellence.

Seated under a banyan or pipal tree, he is in meditation or playing the vina (vinadhara) or, most frequently, expounding the truth to his disciples and to the deer of the forest, which have come to listen to him. The latter features immediately recall the concept of Buddha as teacher, preaching the first sermon to the ascetics in the Deer Park near Varanasi (Benares).⁶⁷ We remem-

66. K. R. Srinivasan, "Some Aspects," p. 187.

67. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, II, part 1, pp. 273 ff.; Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 470 ff.



FIGURE 31
Lingodbhavamurti, c. 1200. Kampahesvara temple,
Tribhuvanam

FIGURE 32
Lingodbhavamurti, XII–XIII century. Height 47 ½ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund,
62.81





FIGURE 33 Dakshinamurti, c. 950. Naltunai Isvaram temple, Punjai

ber that Buddhism (and Jainism) had swept over south India before the Hindu revival that began in the seventh century. When we look at the beautiful Dakshinamurti (Figure 33) on the Punjai temple (c. 950), we recognize the heritage of the seated Brahma and, especially, of the teaching Buddha. The god is seated under a sacred tree, recalling the Tree of Wisdom; he has the matted hair of a yogi. His front hands are in the attitude of expounding the truth (right) and of bestowing a boon (left); the back hands hold rosary (right) and lotus (left). At one side of his foot is a resting deer and at the other a writhing serpent. Flanking the central niche, two listening sages accompanied by their disciples raise their right hands in the same gesture as the lord; their small scale in relation to that of the god underlines his greatness.

IV. SIVA NATARAJA

We have seen above that, from very early times, Siva and his cult were associated with the dance. This led to the concept of Natesa or of Nataraja, Siva as Lord of the Dance, to which we owe some of the most beautiful images ever created by man.

The symbolic significance of Siva's dance has been eloquently expounded by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.⁶⁸ Coomaraswamy discusses three of the numerous dances of the god: the twilight dance in the Himalayas, with a chorus of gods who play musical instruments and sing, before the host of demigods; the wild,

68. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva* (New York, 1918).

ecstatic tandava dance, performed by the many-armed god in cemeteries and burning-grounds during his midnight revels; the nadanta dance before the assembly (sabha) in the golden hall of the Sri Nataraja temple at Chidambaram (south India), the center of the universe—first revealed to gods and ascetics (rishis) after the submission of the ascetics in the forest of Taramgam. It is this last dance that Coomaraswamy identifies with the particular dance pose called ananda-tandava (Figures 34–42).

In medieval Saiva thought, the fivefold activities of Siva were creation, preservation, destruction or absorption, conferment of grace, and power of concealment or obscuration; they correspond to the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Mahesvara, and Sadasiva. To the believer, they are all expressed in the Nataraja icon.⁶⁹

An early Tamil text says: “Creation arises from the drum; protection proceeds from the hand of hope; from fire proceeds destruction; the foot held aloft gives release.” We remember that the fourth hand points to the raised foot; the flaming mandorla in this context signifies illusion.

As Coomaraswamy explains, Siva by his dancing destroys heavens and earth at the close of a world cycle. He also destroys the fetters that bind each separate soul. The heart of the believer is the burning-ground where the ego is destroyed, where illusion and deeds are burnt away. Ananda means “bliss”; the perpetual dance is his play (lila). He dances to maintain the life of the cosmos and to give release to those who seek him.

The essential significance of Siva’s dance is threefold. First, it is the image of his rhythmic play as the source of all movement within the cosmos, which is represented by the arch. Secondly, the purpose of his dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snares of illusion. Third, the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the center of the universe, is within the heart.

Thus, at its roots the dance of Siva is the manifestation of primal, rhythmic energy. It is, as Coomaraswamy said, “the clearest image of the activity of God which any art or religion can boast of.”

Chidambaram (Tillai) was associated with the dancing Siva from very early times; the dance destroying the three demons’ fortresses in the skies was celebrated in song in the early eighth century by the hymnist Appar. However, the particular legend quoted by Coomara-

swamy that links the dance at Tillai with the discomfiture of the rishis is much later and first occurs in a text of the early fourteenth century.⁷⁰ But King Parantaka I (907–955) already had the roof of the sanctum covered with gold, and the god of Chidambaram, the Lord of the Dance (Sri Nataraja), became the family deity of the Chola kings.

In southern literature, the first definition of the three attributes held by the Lord of the Dance—serpent, drum, and bowl of fire—occurs in a song of the Saiva hymnist Sundarar (first half of the ninth century); this is repeated by Manikkavachakar (after 850), who is the first to mention the term ananda-tandava.⁷¹

The attempt has been made to interpret a well-known Indus Valley figurine⁷² as the dancing Siva, but the figure is neither male nor a dancer and probably dates from a much later period.⁷³ The famous bronze statuette of a dancing girl from Mohenjo-Daro⁷⁴ has a monumental quality and great beauty, but it cannot be used as absolute proof that ritual dancing was already practiced at the time of the Indus Valley civilization. We do know that religious dancing was part of the earliest known Tamil traditions and that the Nataraja concept was developed in the south. Among the oldest existing sculptures of the dancing Siva are the reliefs in the cave temples of Elephanta (near Bombay) and Ellora (cave XXI), which date from the late sixth or early seventh century. Around A.D. 630, the image appears in cave I at Badami (in the southern Deccan) and in the Pallava south at Siyamangalam (near Kanchi).

The last of these reliefs can perhaps be interpreted as a precursor of the ananda-tandava mode; the others show the god in the chatura or lalita pose in which both feet touch the ground. In the Pallava and Pandya temples of the eighth century the repertory is enlarged by at least two more dance poses; the Dwarf of Ignorance (apasmara) now makes his appearance under the feet of the divine dancer. The same pattern still prevails on the earliest Chola temples, where the dancing Siva

69. Banerjea, *Development*, p. 446.

70. Harle, *Temple Gateways*, p. 29.

71. K. R. Srinivasan, “Some Aspects,” p. 189.

72. H. R. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (New York, 1955) pl. 3 e; Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization* (London, 1931) I, p. 46, fig. 1; *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology* 12 (1937) p. 4 and pls. 1 d–e.

73. Communication to The Oriental Club of New York by Professor Eve Harrison on November 7, 1956.

74. Zimmer, *Indian Asia*, pl. 3 c.



FIGURE 34 Nataraja, c. 950. Naltunai Isvaram temple, Punjai

FIGURE 35

Nataraja, 1030. Siva temple, Gangaikondacholapuram

(Natesa) first occurs in one of the small relief panels⁷⁵ or in a torana.⁷⁶

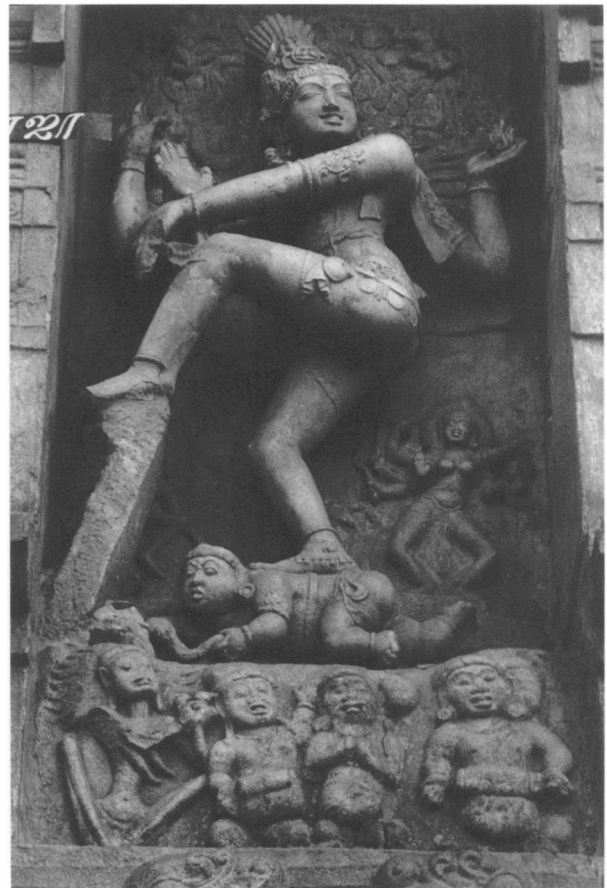
The specific form of the Nataraja, i.e., Siva dancing in the ananda-tandava mode, perhaps appears for the first time in a torana of the Naltunai Isvaram temple (c. 950) at Punjai (Figure 34).⁷⁷ The lovely figure of the dancing god is carved in very high relief and seems to be freestanding. Three musicians are seated next to him. The extraordinary arch, rising from the mouths of two sea monsters, is made up of rows of horned lions (vyalas), wild geese, and horsemen.

It is astonishing to see the perfection with which this motif—so difficult for sculpture—is realized even at its first appearance. The most likely explanation is that the Nataraja in ananda-tandava mode was first developed in bronze and was only afterward translated into

75. Kandiur (876), Srinivasanallur (895), Pullamangai (910).

76. Kilayur (884), Kumbakonam Nagesvara (886), Pullamangai (910).

77. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 8, notes as the first appearance the torana figure at Tiruvaduturai; he dates the temple to 945. (Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, p. 254, interprets the inscriptions in favor of a date of 909.)



stone.⁷⁸ The literary evidence quoted above proves that at least by the second half of the ninth century the ananda-tandava concept existed.

From the miniature panel and the torana arch, the Nataraja soon moved to a more important place: a niche on the south wall of the porch or entrance hall (ardhamandapa). We find him in this place on the Uma-Mahesvara temple at Konerirajapuram (between 969 and 972 or 977).⁷⁹ From then on, this apparently was the standard placement. The relief on the great temple at Gangaikondacholapuram near Chidambaram, which was built in 1030 (Figure 35), illustrates the difficulties with which the sculptor had to battle in this medium. The swinging leg apparently was broken off—as in most extant examples—and (badly) repaired with the help of a strut; a certain awkwardness is the result.

78. This was first suggested by John Irwin.

79. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pp. 21, 27.

FIGURE 36

Nataraja, c. 1010. Height c. 53 in. Rajarajesvara temple, Tanjavur



FIGURE 37

Nataraja, XII century. Height 60 ½ in. Museum van Asiatische Kunst, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The god dances on top of the Dwarf of Ignorance (apasmara-purusha), who toys with a serpent. In the background, the Goddess dances in her terrifying aspect as Durga; other figures are concealed by the strut. As prescribed for the ananda-tandava mode, the back hands of the god carry drum and fire. A serpent writhes from his right arm, another behind his shoulder. His hair is adorned with a skull, a crescent moon, and a fan-shaped crown of feathers or leaves; the goddess of the river Ganges is not in evidence.

It is in the bronzes—portable icons made for pro-



FIGURE 38
Detail of Figure 37

cessions—that the unique potential of the Nataraja motif was realized in all its extraordinary beauty. The great Nataraja in the Rajarajesvara temple (c. 1010) at Tanjavur (Figure 36) is, both aesthetically and technically, a superb example of Chola bronze-casting. The flying locks, interlaced with garlands of flowers and ribbons, could not have been carved in stone; nor could the fluttering ends of the god's sash. The Dwarf, half turned, glances up in awe. The goddess of the river Ganges, a tiny mermaid, has become entangled in the lord's tresses and joins her hands in worship; we see

her on the mandorla at our left. The flaming mandorla (prabhavali), oval in shape, has been repaired, the lower part with the makara heads being a substitute for the original.

The energy of the swinging arm seems to flow into the elegant fingers that point at the tensely arched foot. The bent and the raised leg are at precisely the ideal angle. The composition is perfectly balanced. The divine dancer seems to be, for a timeless moment, suspended in the air, in a magically arrested movement full of rhythm and grace.

The Amsterdam Nataraja (Figures 37, 38) represents a somewhat later stage.⁸⁰ The mandorla, almost circular, issues from makara mouths and carries numerous five-pronged flames; a strut connects it with the headdress. This type of mandorla does not seem to appear before the late eleventh century.⁸¹ The feathers or leaves of the headdress, arranged fanwise in two tiers as at Tanjavur, here have a triangular shape. The god wears a small bell on his right shin—a feature that appears on the east gopura at Chidambaram (begun between 1178 and 1218).⁸² The first sector of the lateral locks is solid; those falling over the neck are bounded by a necklace.⁸³ The flying, flower-braided locks have been formalized into a kind of trellis, which now carries Ganga as well. The sash over the shoulder has lost its movement; the one around the waist has vanished. Arms and legs move gracefully and are well balanced, but the swinging hand and foot are more relaxed.

Torso and head are somewhat inclined to the right, and the head slightly more turned to the left; this de-

80. Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 69 b: "twelfth century"; P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, p. 232: "circa 1250"; J. Irwin, "The Amsterdam Nataraja," *Marg* 4, no. 2 (1950-1951) p. 32: "before 1300."

81. Compare the Nataraja from Syali (Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 27 a), whose lateral locks are still more formalized.

82. Harle, *Temple Gateways*, figs. 107, 113, 120, 129, 132, p. 63.

83. We can further compare a Nataraja in the National Museum, New Delhi (twelfth century?), C. Sivaramamurti, "Some recent sculptural acquisitions in the National Museum," *Lalit Kala* 1-2 (1954-1955) pp. 113 ff., pl. xl, fig. 8; the ornate openwork mandorla looks later than the New York image, but the lateral locks have, on both sides, a solid and decorated first sector. The Nataraja in the Dharmapuram Adinam at Tanjavur (late twelfth century?), P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, fig. 234, has a circular prabha, which is connected with the triangular, two-tiered feather headdress by an extension of the latter, as on the New York icon. The position of the front left hand and the shape of the pedestal are very similar as well.

FIGURES 39-41

Nataraja, late XII-early XIII century. Height 25 3/4 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 64.251





prives the Amsterdam bronze of some of the majestic vertical lift or levitation that seems to propel and sustain the Tanjavur icon. It has retained, however, an extraordinary buoyancy.

The lovely Nataraja in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figures 39–41) dances in the same classic ananda-tandava mode. The god wears a double jeweled necklace; the sacred cord is a triple strand. On the back arms there are armlets; on all arms, elbow bands and wristlets. This corresponds with the Amsterdam bronze but for the wristlet on the front left arm, which is loose and not a part of the cast. There is a string with bell on each shin. The bow of a short girdle band or sash is visible on the left hip; another short sash falls over the left shoulder, as on the Amsterdam bronze. The ear ornaments are—apparently also on the Amsterdam icon—a ring on the left and a makara on the lengthened right earlobe; the presence of two different ornaments probably is a hint at the god's androgynous nature. As usual, the base band of the headdress is decorated with flow-



ers; a rope holds the hair together. Next to the skull, a serpent is tucked in behind the rope; on the other side (left) we see the poisonous datura flowers and, above, the crescent moon. Three tiers of peacock feathers or kondrai leaves rise above the skull, spread out like a fan in a triangular shape, as on the Amsterdam icon. Here as well, the headdress is connected with the flaming mandorla by a strut. The braided locks end in tightly rolled curls and are treated in much the same way as the garlands or flower ribbons, which alternate with them and hold them apart. The trellis of tresses and flowers is less animated than at Amsterdam; once more it contains the goddess Ganga, in an attitude of worship. The first section of locks on the god's right is solid and treated as if it were part of a hair ornament.

The Dwarf of Ignorance is playing with a serpent; he seems to have acquiesced in his role, or does not feel the weight of the divine dancer. The mandorla—not issuing from makara mouths—is circular. It carries only nineteen flames, eighteen of them five-pronged



FIGURE 42
Nataraja, early XIII century. Victoria and Albert
Museum, London. Crown Copyright

and one seven-pronged, rising from flowers, and is decorated with rosettes and lozenges. The double-lotus base has a much larger lower part, and its profile is that of an inverted cup.

In back, there is the usual hair ornament (*siraschakra*) with three tassels. The locks falling over the shoulders are contained by the lower necklace as on the Amsterdam Nataraja. The tucked-up splay of the loincloth is not very pronounced.

The image must have been buried for a long time. Part of the sandy accretions could be removed, but the remainder is still attached to the patina, which originally had a lovely bluish hue.

The later of the two Natarajas in the Victoria and Albert Museum (early thirteenth century?) (Figure 42) is very similar to the New York bronze although it does not have the same lightness and elegance. The head-dress here again is attached by a strut to the circular mandorla; so are the back hands. The lateral locks are broken off. The god wears an anklet on the right leg.⁸⁴

In view of the parallels quoted above, we probably

can assign the New York Nataraja to the late twelfth or the early thirteenth century.

The unknown artist has succeeded, to a rare degree, in realizing the impression of weightlessness, of suspension, the illusion that time has stopped—which only a great dancer can achieve. The pose is, as we have seen, a classic one and defined by the scriptures. Yet the slightest change in the posture of the body, in the position and direction of a limb, affects the delicate balance of the composition and the effortless grace of the movement. The image is small in size and does not have the awe-inspiring power of some of the large icons. However, the graceful rhythm, the sensitive modeling, and the gentle and remote expression make it a masterpiece.

V. THE GODDESS

The Goddess—like Siva or his prototype—was already prominent in the oldest layer of Indian religion, represented by the Indus Valley civilization. Temporarily eclipsed in the pantheon of the Aryan invaders, she reasserted herself all the more strongly, and, deeply rooted in popular belief, infiltrated Buddhism and Jainism. In Hinduism, she manifested herself in many forms: as mother and as virgin, as goddess of fertility and of the earth, as consort of the gods, as helper, and as scourge. Disguised as a divine consort, the ancient Mother Goddess became socially acceptable to the upper classes. Her cult emerged, in the Middle Ages, from obscurity to a position of real importance. By the Gupta period, the wives of the gods, who had been shadowy figures in earlier theology, began to be worshiped in special temples.⁸⁵

The Hindu renaissance gave additional powerful impetus to the many cults focused on one or another of her aspects. This ecstatic, devotional Hinduism, which was spread by the wandering preachers and hymn singers of the Dravidian south, helped to make her once more the most popular divinity.

84. Two anklets appear on the Nataraja at Kankoduttavanitam (first half of the thirteenth century?), P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, fig. 250, and Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pl. 70 a, which has many later features, like the ornate *prabha* narrowed near the base.

85. For the preceding paragraph, I have consulted Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, I, part 2, pp. 327 ff.; Banerjea, *Development*, pp. 489 ff.; Basham, *Wonder*, pp. 311 ff.

While Durga (The Inaccessible) is one of the manifestations of the fierce and awe-inspiring aspects of the Goddess—very popular in the south as well—Parvati (Daughter of the Mountain) is the chief representative of her benevolent side. Her name refers to her father, Himavat, personification of the Himalaya Mountains.

As the spouse of Siva, she is his *sakti*, or female energy. While the god was conceived as inactive and transcendent, his female element was thought of as active and immanent. Thus, the Goddess embodied and represented the strength or potency of her male counterpart. Sankaracharya (ninth century) wrote: “When Siva is united to Sakti, he is able to create; otherwise he is unable even to move.”⁸⁶

86. Quoted in Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, p. 51.

I mentioned above, in passing, the Ardhanarisvara motif, which is one iconic realization of this concept (Figure 25). The three-figured group of Siva, his consort Parvati, and their son Skanda (Somaskandamurti) is another manifestation of these beliefs. This Somaskandamurti had been the principal cult icon in the Pallava temples until about the end of the eighth century, when the transition to linga worship began. Subsequently on the Early Chola temples there is no Somaskanda.

The Goddess in her terrifying aspect, as Durga, also appeared in the Pallava cave temples. Her most popular manifestation was that of Mahishamardini, the slayer of the Buffalo Titan. The legend illustrates the reemergence of her power and popularity. The Buffalo Titan, evil incarnate, had become almighty, and the

FIGURE 43 Durga, 910. Brahmapurisvara temple, Pullamangai

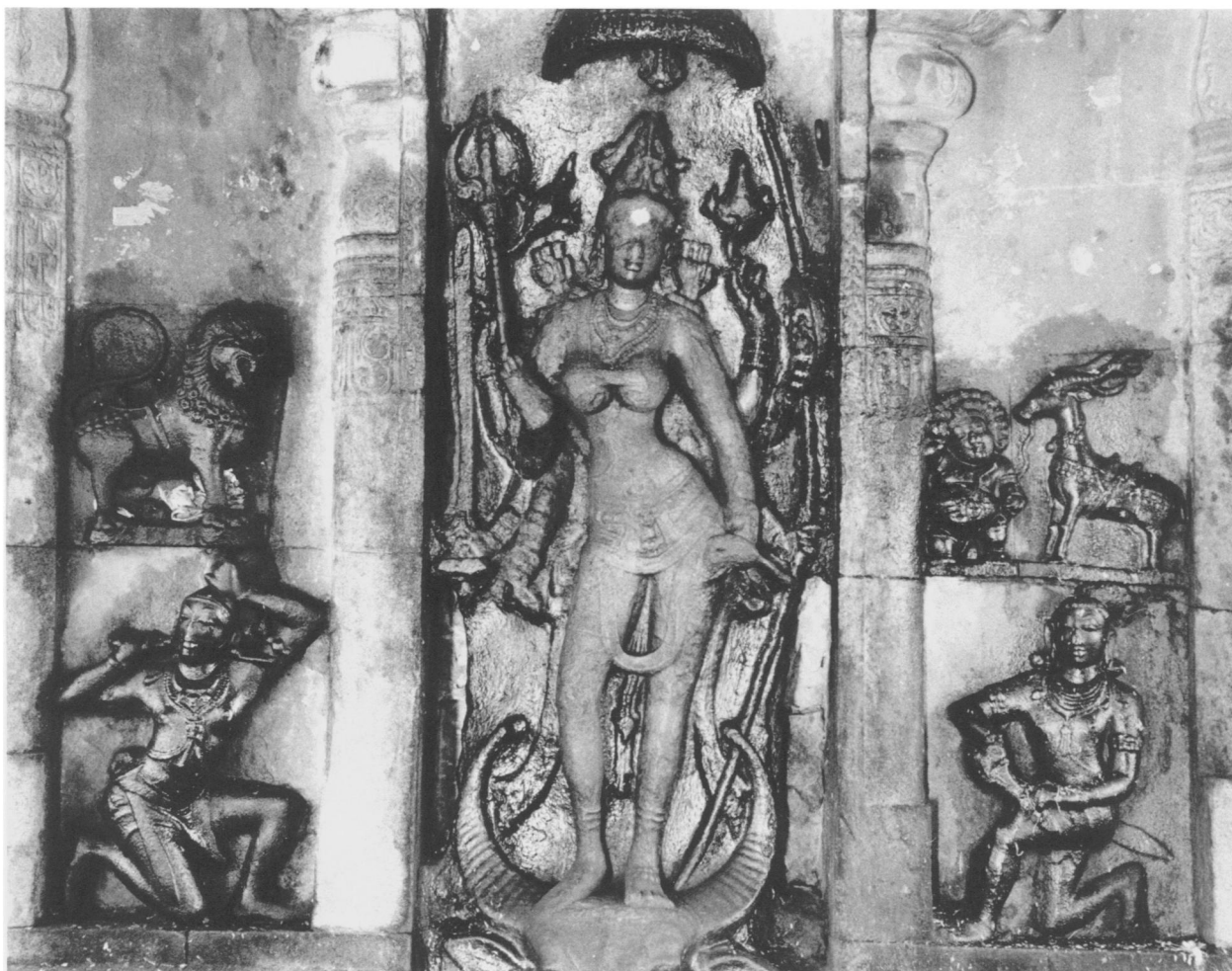




FIGURE 44

Durga, c. 950. Naltunai Isvaram temple, Punjai

gods were helpless against his arrogance. They handed their weapons, symbol and essence of their power, to the virgin Goddess, whom the demon had demanded in marriage. And it was the Goddess who engaged him and his host in bloody battle and slew him.

In the Pallava relief, this aspect of Durga generally is shown as a beautiful maiden standing on the severed head of a buffalo, wielding her many weapons, as an apotheosis of victory. Often she is accompanied by devotees, each about to cut off his head or a hand and lay it at her feet.⁸⁷ Such offerings actually took place, although often the devotees were only drawing blood with their swords as a symbolic sacrifice. This form of Durga has been identified with Korravai, the victory goddess of a south Indian tribe of cattle thieves, highwaymen, and professional soldiers.⁸⁸

Under the Cholas this cult continued, and Durga Mahishasuramardini was assigned a niche on the north wall of the porch or entrance hall (ardhamandapa). The beautiful relief on the Brahmapurisvara (c. 910) at Pullamangai (Figure 43) illustrates the early Chola sculptor's realization of this concept. Displaying a formidable array of weapons (we recognize sword, trident and wheel disk, two quivers of arrows, conch and bow) the victorious maiden in a graceful "triple-bend" pose, or tribhanga—as the Indians call the alternating rhythmic accent on inclined head, jutting hip, and bent knee—under a parasol, stands on her trophy, the buffalo head (*pars pro toto*). It is not the combat that is the subject, but the victorious power of sakti. In the lower sections of the flanking niches, two warriors are about to immolate themselves. Above them, at her right, a fierce lion—her mount and attribute—stands guard. At her left we see a gana, one of the sprites or goblins who make up Siva's host, leading a buck, which sometimes, in a specifically southern (Tamil) configuration,⁸⁹ is Durga's second mount.

87. As at Singavaram and Mamallapuram (late seventh century).

88. J. Ph. Vogel, "The Head-Offering to the Goddess in Pallava Sculpture," *Bulletin, School of Oriental Studies* 6 (London, 1930-1932) pp. 539 ff.; J. C. Harle, "Durga, Goddess of Victory," *Artibus Asiae* 26, nos. 3-4 (1963) pp. 237 ff.

89. K. R. Srinivasan, "Some Aspects," p. 153.

The glorious relief on the Punjai temple of about 950 (Figure 44) concentrates on the essentials of the motif and on the aesthetic effect. The warrior-devotees have been included in the composition of the panel; so have her two mounts, the lion and the buck (which has lost its horns), rising behind her shoulders, looking at her head. The divine maiden here has four arms only, the back hands holding Vishnu's disk and conch. Siva's trident and bow rise, magically suspended, behind her shoulders. The relief is less worn by worship and weather than the previous one. The stance is more erect and formal, the modeling of the body less soft and sensitive.

The image on the Gangajataadhara temple (982) at Govindaputtur (Figure 45) once more is eight-armed, and very successfully realized. Much attention is given to detail. The trident has disappeared; the emblems are held almost vertically, the disk still edge-on. The sinuous curves of the lateral sashes are a new feature. Altogether the formalizing trend that we already noticed at Punjai is much more in evidence now.

We do encounter, on a few very early Chola temples, beautiful life-size female figures that are not icons. They do not represent the Goddess, but they are emanations of the female principle on a theologically lower plane or even on a secular one. They have been taken for lady donors, Chola princesses. But both their scale and their attitude seem to exclude this attractive interpretation, and I believe that they are denizens of a higher realm, though not equal to the great gods—nymphs (apsarases) perhaps, or just devotees from the heavenly world. Unlike the icons, they are more immediately modeled on the human body and shown in a relaxed and human pose or stance as well. Among them we find some of the most beautiful sculptures of south India. On some of these early temples there are, in the secondary niches, both female and male devotees;⁹⁰ on later temples there are sometimes males alone.⁹¹

Two heavenly maidens on the Nagesvara temple (886) at Kumbakonam are among the loveliest realizations of this concept (Figures 46, 47). On each figure, the large coil of hair is braided with flowers; the raised hand holds a lotus. The sari clings to the slender legs,

90. Kumbakonam, Nagesvara (886); Srinivasanallur, Koranganatha (895).

91. Tiruvarur, Achalesvara (992); Tanjavur, Rajarajesvara (1010).



FIGURE 45

Durga, 982. Gangajataadhara temple, Govindaputtur

with a soft ripple of raised folds. Large pendants, suspended from the belt on heavy chains, fall to the knees. The bodies are modeled with a gentle softness that is matched by the chaste and demure expression. The slim waist and heavy breasts express the age-old Indian ideal of feminine beauty. The much-mutilated figure on the Koranganatha (c. 895) at Srinivasanallur (Figure 48) represents a different local school.

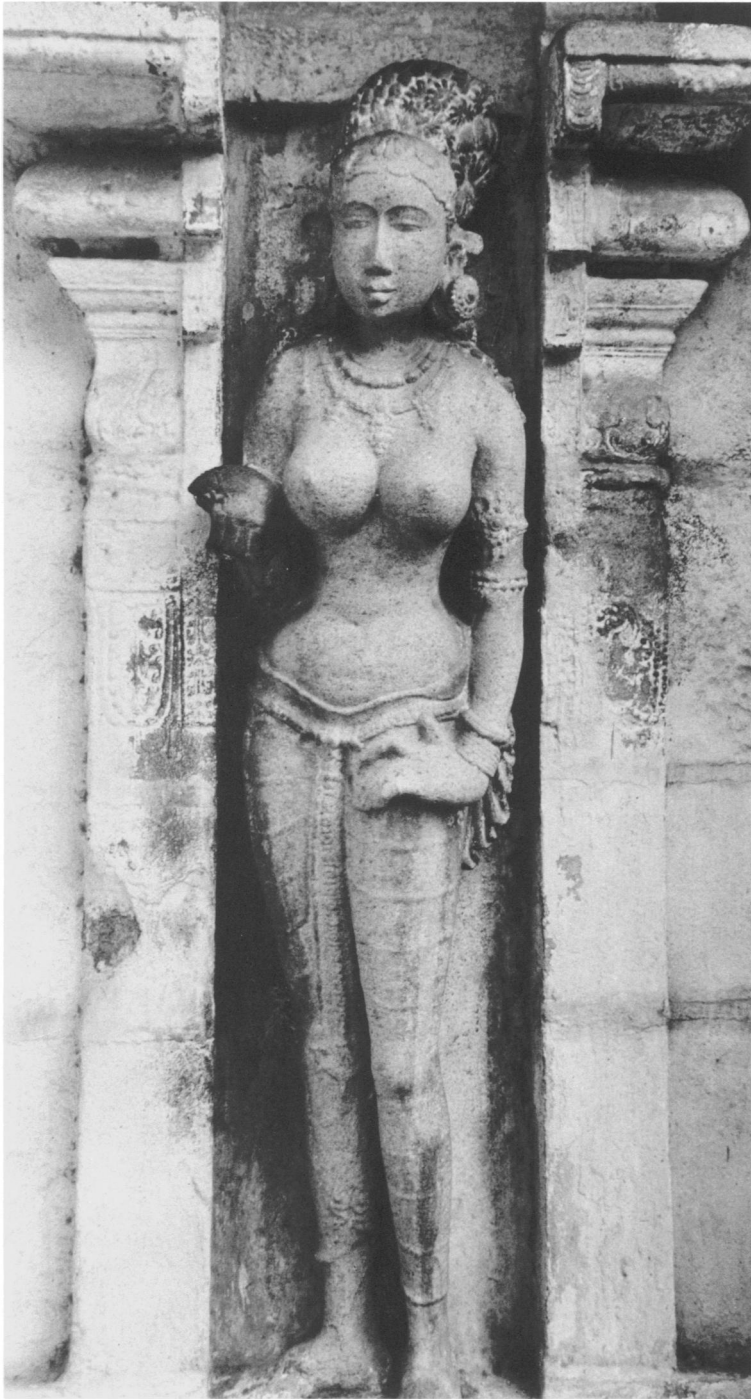


FIGURE 46
Maiden, 886. Nagesvara temple, Kumbakonam

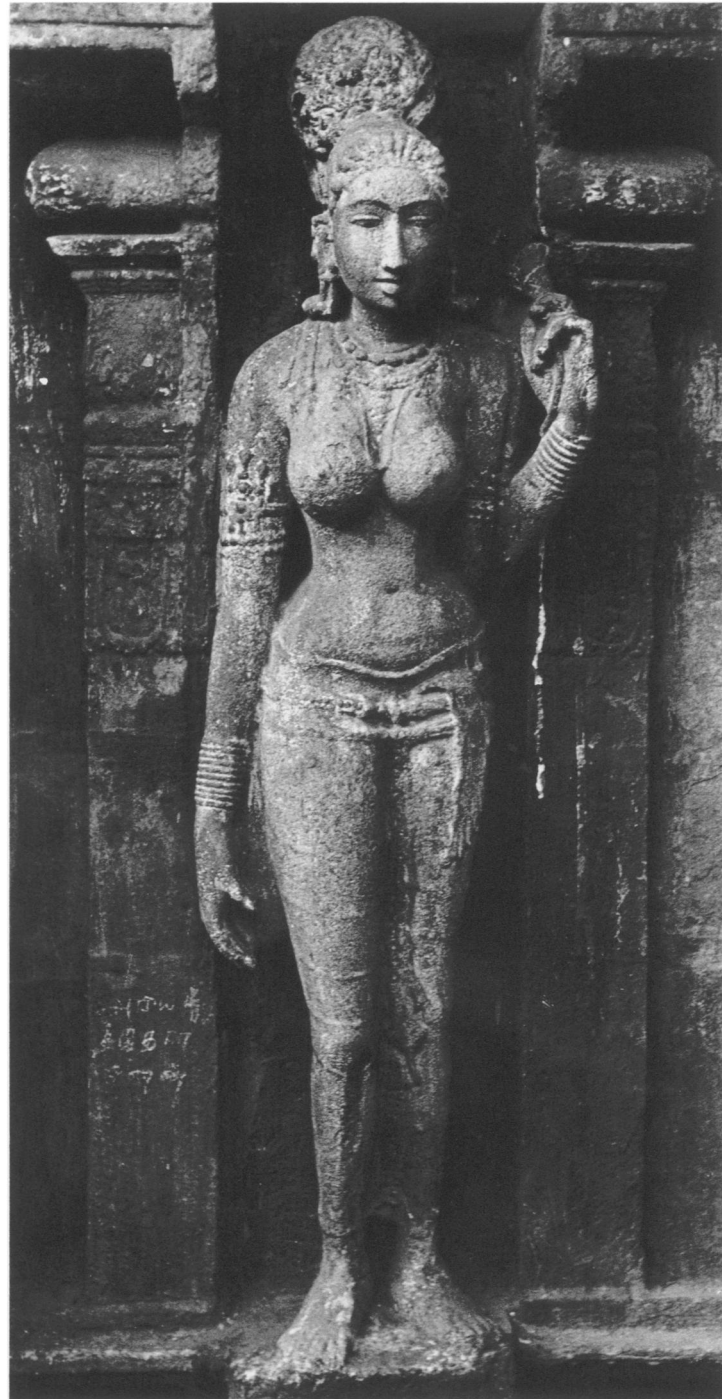


FIGURE 47
Maiden, 886. Nagesvara temple, Kumbakonam

In the temples of the Early Chola period, bronze images of the consort of the main deity (Bhogesvari) had been set up, judging from inscriptions, at least as early as the reign of Parantaka I (907–955).⁹² A separate shrine devoted to the Goddess was first erected by Rajendra I (1012–1044) in the precinct of his great temple at Gangaikondacholapuram (c. 1030). From the time of the accession of Kulottunga I (1070), at least, this was standard practice.⁹³

The magnificent bronze Parvati in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figures 49–51) is a bequest of Mrs. Cora Timken-Burnet, in whose collection she was for many years. The Goddess is standing in a gently accented “triple-bend” pose; her raised right hand once held a lotus. She wears a richly bejeweled crown, heavy circular earrings, a triple necklace, heavy wristlets, and foot ornaments. Each armlet carries a three-pronged jewel tied down by a string; below is a string of pearls forming festoons and tassels. We recognize a similar motif in the front of her crown and on its sides. The sacred cord, also of pearls, falls between her heavy breasts, following the flowing rhythm of her body; it is closed by a small round clasp with a bow. The girdle is held together by jeweled clasps; the tasseled end of a girdle band falls along her left thigh. Two large pipal pendants flanked by small bells hang from the girdle on chainlike straps, reaching almost to the knees. One folded end of the garment falls between her legs to a zigzagging tip; the other is tucked up on the left, falling over the girdle.

Looking at the back of the image, we note the flower-shaped hair ornament (siraschakra) with a small tassel of pearls hanging from the hub. At the nape of the neck, the hair is gathered in a loose coil. The rest of the curled locks fall loosely over the shoulders, some in closed or open loops; two end in a tasseled jewel. Between them we see the tasseled ends of a ribbon that probably holds the necklace and, perhaps, the pipal pendant falling between the shoulders. The armlets are tied in simple knots with tassels. That end of the garment which is pulled up between the buttocks and under the girdle stands out in a furred splay.

92. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 33.

93. K. R. Srinivasan, “Temples of South India,” *Archaeological Remains, Monuments and Museums*, xxvi International Congress of Orientalists (New Delhi, 1969) part 2, p. 233; Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Art*, p. 122.

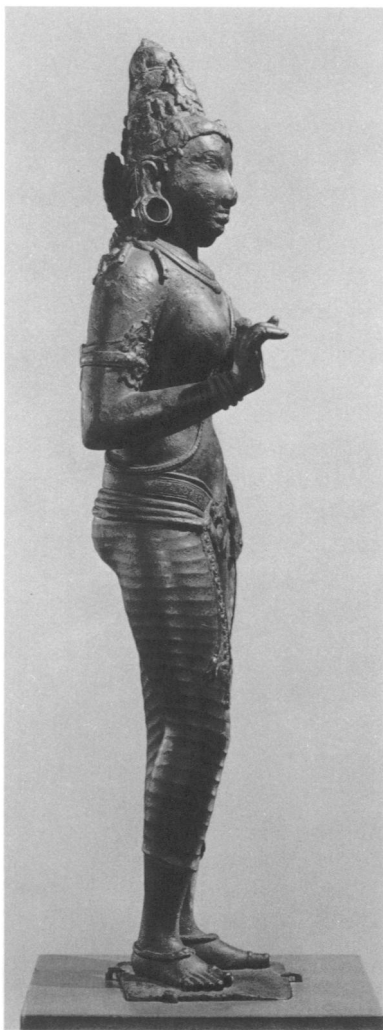


FIGURE 48
Maiden, 895. Koranganatha temple, Srinivasanallur



FIGURES 49–51

Parvati, late ix–early x century. Height 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 57.51.3



The tip of the nose and the index finger of the right hand are broken off and missing; the lower left arm is partly broken.

The bronze Parvati was first published in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*⁹⁴ and dated to about A.D. 900. Authorities vary somewhat in dating this sculpture. C. Sivaramamurti⁹⁵ called her “ninth–tenth century” and praised her for possessing “all the charm of the transitional period”; the latter phase lasted, in his reckoning, until the accession of Parantaka I in 907. P. R. Srinivasan⁹⁶ dates her to c. 950. He compares her to the

FIGURE 52

Parvati, x century. Height 40 in. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.



Freer Gallery Parvati (Figure 52), which is assigned by him to c. 900–925. He also refers to the Kodumudi Vishnu (Figure 22), which he dates to the middle of the tenth century as well, but which I believe to be somewhat earlier (see above). Douglas Barrett⁹⁷ dates the New York Parvati to c. 975. He compares the image to

94. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16(1957–1958) p. 53; 18 (February, 1960) cover.

95. Sivaramamurti, *Bronzes*, pls. 58 a–b.

96. P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, figs. 76–77.

97. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 24.



FIGURE 53

Parvati, c. 970. Height 35 ½ in. Uma-Mahesvara temple, Konerirajapuram

the Bhogesvari⁹⁸ and (Somaskanda) Parvati⁹⁹ at Pallavanisvaram and to the Sita¹⁰⁰ at Teruchcherai, assigning the same date to all of these. The similarities, especially with the Parvati and the Sita, are striking indeed and extend to details of the crown, coiffure, hair ornament, jewels, and rippling garment folds. Eyes and eyebrows of some of the images have been recut so that they do not have the dreamy expression of the New York Parvati. The bodies, however, especially that of the Pallavanisvaram Parvati, are modeled in the same sensitive and sensuous way; the latter has the same heavy breasts, the same gently accented waist.

According to Barrett these figures are coeval with the Konerirajapuram (Figure 53) and Tiruvelvikudi (Figure 54) bronzes, which can be related to each other and to dated inscriptions on the former temple (between 969 and 977). In my opinion, these elaborate and elegant images must be at the least a generation later than the New York Parvati and the bronzes related to it.

When we look back at the reliefs in stone, the first images that come to mind are the heavenly maidens on the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam (Figures 46, 47), where the treatment of the torso is quite similar, although the legs are longer and the figures in their entirety are more slender. We notice the very long and heavy pendant suspended from the waistband. On the Srinivasanallur relief (Figure 48) the treatment of the body is close to that of the New York bronze.

The graceful pose of the Durga at Pullamangai (Figure 43) is the same as that of the New York Parvati, including the lateral inclination of the head. We again notice the pipal pendant with tassels between the legs, below the knees. The pose of the Punjai Durga (Figure 44) is somewhat more formal, the modeling of body and limbs less sensitive.

98. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pls. 32-34.

99. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pls. 35-36.

100. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, pl. 44.

FIGURE 54

Kalyanasundaramurti, late x century. Height 37 in. Manalesvara temple, Tiruvelvikudi





FIGURE 55 Naltunai Isvaram temple, c. 950, Punjai

The Durga images of the last two decades of the tenth century (Figure 45)¹⁰¹ are much more formalized. The stance sometimes is awkward, the knees knobby, the modeling lifeless. There are iconographic changes as well.

Thus, we find the closest affinities with the Metropolitan Parvati in the stone images of the late ninth and early tenth century, while those of Barrett's Phase III (beginning c. 970) seem to be furthest removed.

The Tripurasundari from the Muvarkoyil (between 956 and 973) at Kodumbalur¹⁰² is an exception. She once more recalls the New York bronze in treatment and proportion of the body, while crown and jewels, girdle and sashes are more ornate. The temple—which follows in many ways an earlier style—is situated in Pudukkottai, at some distance from Tanjavur. Pudukkottai is ancient Pandya country; so is the Kongu-nadu (Coimbatore and Salem districts), where the famous Kodumudi Vishnu (Figures 22, 23) is found. The latter bronze is called Pandya by Sivaramamurti; it is generally assigned to the first half or the middle of the tenth century (see above).

In my opinion, the New York Parvati (as well as the related bronzes mentioned above) probably dates from the late ninth or the early tenth century. It is possible that the New York bronze comes from Pudukkottai, in which case it may be as late as the middle of the tenth century.

As only a few bronzes of the late tenth (compare Figure 53) and of the eleventh century can be dated with any certainty, the comparisons at best suggest a relative sequence. They do underline, however, the outstanding quality of the New York bronze. The image has been called "one of the world's best bronzes"¹⁰³ and "perhaps the only Early Chola bronze masterpiece to have left India."¹⁰⁴ The sensitive body of the Goddess is aglow with the refined voluptuousness of some spiritual realm. An interior life current swells the delicate forms. Her gentle and tender expression, the musical grace and flowing rhythm of her body, and the dignity of her

101. Other images that may be compared are those at Kilapaluvur (Balasubrahmanyam, *Four Chola Temples*, fig. 25; Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 12) as well as those at Sembian Mahadevi, Aduthurai, and Tiruvarur.

102. *Handbook, Madras Government Museum* (Madras, 1964) pl. vii; Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, fig. 40.

103. P. R. Srinivasan, *Bronzes*, p. 133.

104. Barrett, *Cola Bronzes*, p. 24.



FIGURE 56
Rajarajesvara temple, 1010, Tanjavur

carriage leave us in wonderment at the greatness of south Indian sculpture.

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