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NAMAKKAL CAVES

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The Namakkal Caves

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THE NAMAKKAL CAVES

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The Namakkal Caves

The mention of monuments belonging to the seventh and eighth centuries in Tamil nadu calls to mind primarily the magnificent rock-cut and structural temples of the Pallavas, and the somewhat lesser-known examples of Pāṇḍya rock-cutting. During this same period however, the relatively unknown Ātiya rulers excavated two cave-temples at Nāmakkal in the Salem district-caves containing large bas-relief sculptures possessing a vitality and dynamism hardly matched elsewhere. The caves are cut into the sides of the large rocky hill in the centre of the town, and both have later structural additions in the form of *mandapas* and subsidiary shrines. Both the cave-temples are dedicated to Viṣṇu and are under worship today. The Narasimha cave is located at the foot of the hill on the west side of the rock, while the Anantaśāyi cave is located half-way up the east side of the hill and has a set of built-up steps leading to it.

Historical Introduction :

The Atiya or Adiyānmān rulers were among the ancient ruling families of south India. Together with the Cheras, Pāṇḍyas and Cholas they are known to us from the Tamil Sangam literature that dates from the early centuries of this era. Among their most prominent rulers of that early time was Adigaimān Nedumān Āṇji, patron of the renowned poetess Auvaiyār. The Adiyāmāns ruled from Tagaḍūr, modern Dharmapuri, and their domain was northern Kongu which included the Salem district. The exact extent of the Kongu country itself is not known, except that it would seem to have been bounded by the territories of the Cheras, Pāṇḍyas and the Cholas. The Adiyāmāns appear to have been involved in frequent wars with the neighbouring kings, and in the days of Nedumān Āṇji were forced to accept Chera suzerainty. We know very little of the fortunes of the Atiya rulers in the succeeding centuries and hear of them again only in the eighth century from inscriptions of the Pāṇḍya kings and from their own undated records at Nāmakkal.

The eighth century Adiyamān rulers seem to have been engaged in conflicts with the Pāṇḍyas, the Western Gangas and the Pallavas. One Atiya king allied himself with the Pallava and Kerala rulers in a battle against the Pāṇḍyas. An inscription dated in the 17th year of Pāṇḍya Parāntaka Nedunjaḍaiyan—A.D. 784—tells us that this Adiyamān ruler who remains unnamed, was defeated in three battles, his chariot and a troop of horses confiscated, and his domain subdued and apparently taken over into Pāṇḍya territory. The previous Pāṇḍya king, Māravarman Rājasimha (A.D. 729-765) also appears to have fought with the Atiya rulers as we are told that he subdued the area of Malakongam—an area that quite possibly included the Nāmakkal region. Rājasimha Pāṇḍya's predecessor Koccaḍaiyan (A.D. 700-730) called himself Lord of Kongu, but we have no indication as to whether he was involved in any conflicts with the Ātiyas. It appears however, that around A.D. 784 Adiyamān territory was annexed to the Pāṇḍya kingdom. We may regard it as quite certain that the Atiya inscriptions at Nāmakkal were

engraved in the days of independent Ātiya rule prior to A.D. 784, since these records refer proudly to the Ātiya kula and proclaim the greatness of the ruler Guṇaśīla who was responsible for the cutting of the caves.

Inscriptions :

The four main inscriptions from Nāmakkal are engraved in the Ānantaśāyi cave, on the corbels of the pillars and on the beam cut above the corbels. The script is Grantha and the language Sanskrit. One inscription tells us that the cave known as *Ātiyanātha-vishnu-griham* was caused to be made as a shrine to Viṣṇu by the Ātiya king Guṇaśīla. Another inscription, much damaged, refers to the cave as *Ātiyēndra-vishnu-griham* and to the Ātiya kula. A third record, very fragmentary, refers to Sōma of the Ātiya family, who was the eldest son of a lady apparently connected with noble or royal lineage. It would seem that Sōma was another name of the king Guṇaśīla mentioned in the first inscription. The fourth record is engraved on the beam above the main sanctum containing the

Anantaśāyi Viṣṇu and is of great interest. It refers to the shrine as *śayyā griham* (*śayana griham*), and apparently lists the gods, attendants and *asuras* depicted around the reclining Viṣṇu. The iconographic importance of such a record will be apparent.

In addition to these inscriptions, nine *birudas* of the king Guṇaśīla are found engraved on the pillars and pilasters of the Anantaśāyi cave, and a single one on the rock-face near the spring beside the cave. While the Narasimha cave itself contains no inscribed records, two *birudas* may be seen engraved on the rock-face to the right of the cave 2. This engraving of *birudas* is reminiscent of the practice of the Pallava rulers, particularly of Narasimhavarman II Rājasiṃha who had some three hundred titles inscribed on his various monuments. The twelve *birudas* at Nāmakkal do not repeat any of those already assumed by the Pallavas although similar virtues are extolled. Guṇaśīla describes himself as *madana-vilāsa* (manifestation of the god of love compare with *kāma-vilāsa*,

a title of Rājasimha in the 48th niche of the Kailāsanātha at Kānchi); *udāra-chitta* (of exalted intellect); *vimala-charita* (of spotless character); *nara-dēva* (god among men); *naya-pāra* (one who exceeds worldly wisdom) *māna-sāra* (the epitome of honour); *prakṛiti-priya* (devoted to his subjects); *naravahana* (one whose vehicle is man); *utpala-karṇika* (one who has lily-like ears); *manōmaya* (the spiritual one); *śrībhara* (he who holds riches; compare with *śrīdhara*, a known title of Rājasimha); *śilibhṛitaṇ* or *śitibhūtaṇ* (of wide spread fame).

Palaeographic evidence cannot help us very much in the matter of fixing the date of the Nāmakkal inscriptions in any exact manner. Comparative material comprises on the one hand the records of pallava Rājasimha (A. D. 700--728), and on the other the Anaimalai (A. D. 770) and Tirupparankunram (A. D. 773) inscriptions of Pāṇḍya Pārāntaka Nedunjaḍaiyan. By this stage of its development the Grantha script was highly advanced and atleast three varieties of grantha are known from the inscri-

ptions of Pallava Rājasimha alone. Salient features of the Nāmakkal records include the presence of the looped variety of *na*, as well as a *na* with a closed loop at the base; the open-mouthed *bha*, as also a flat-topped broad form of *bha*; a round topped *ga* and *sa* with the arms tending to curl inwards; an open-mouthed *sa* and a *la* with its curve tending to circle around. A comparative analyses reveals that almost all these features, and further varieties, are to be found in one or another of the inscriptions of Pallava Rājasimha. The Panamalai record displays three types of *na* and two of the open-mouthed *bha*. The flat, topped broad *bha* is to be seen in the Atyantakāma labels on the Dharmarāja ratha at Māmallapuram. Both arms of the *ga* and *sa* display an outward curve of the left arm. The Pāṇḍya records at Ānamalai and Tirupparankunram on the other hand display only an h shaped type of *na*; the *ga* and *sa* invariably have outward hook to the left arm; and the curve of the *la* circles around and results in a cursive form. The form of conjunct *ya* at Nāmakkal is similar to that of the pallava records

and to the Tirupparankunram Pāṇḍya record and is quite different from Ānaimalai where it is of the hooked variety. This brief analysis indicates how difficult it is to place exactly within the eighth century any inscription from the Tamil nadu. On palaeographic grounds alone it is difficult to say much on the precise position of the Nāmakkal records. We would merely state that they appear to be earlier than Ānaimalai and Tirupparankunram in optionally retaining the looped *na* and the flat-topped *bha*. It is not possible to be more precise than this.

Narasimha Cave-Temple :

The Narasimha cave-temple is a wide rectangular cave with a raised shrine projecting from the back wall into the *ardha maṇḍapa*. The *adhiśthāna* moulding of the shrine consists of an *upāna*, *jagatī tripatta-kumuda*, *kaṇṭha* and a *prati* on top. The shrine platform has four pillars in front and two pilasters at the rear. Attached to the side walls of the *maṇḍapa* and on a level with the line of the four shrine pillars are a

further two pilasters. The *ardha maṇḍapa* itself has two pillars in front, and a once open facade. This has since been built in to enclose the cave, and access is now through a central doorway. The two pillars of the *maṇḍapa* are reminiscent of early Pallava as well as early Pāṇḍya examples. They are divided into two massive square *śadurams* with an octagonal *kattu* between and the *śadurams* are decorated with lotus medallions. The four pillars of the raised shrine reveal however a variation on this theme, and have a graceful, slender appearance. They consist of three *śadurams* with lotus medallions engraved on them, and two sets of octagonal *kattu* between. This is a rather unusual feature not known from the Pallava or Pāṇḍya caves. The pilasters are plain and square in section throughout. The pillars are topped with curved corbels with a *tarāṅga* moulding and a plain *patta* down their centre. Above the pillars of the shrine is a projecting cornice decorated with four *kūḍu* arches with a human head carved within each. The arches are quite plain and have a distinc-

tly shovel-shaped top. This feature is reminiscent of the pallava practice in which such *kūḍus* often decorate the moulding above the shrine entrance. This embellishment is also to be found in some of the Pāṇḍya caves. It is possible that there was some sort of veranda in front of the cave, but later construction has obscured any traces of this. The Mahishamardini *maṇḍapa* at Māmallapuram provides us with an example somewhat akin in floor plan to the Narasimha cave, in that it contains a raised rectangular porch with pillars. It differs from the Narasimha cave however, in having a cell cut into the ~~back wall~~ of this porch and in having pillars with a seated lion base.

The raised shrine of the Narasimha cave contains an enormous rock-cut seated Narasimha with attendant figures. The two back walls of the *maṇḍapa* on either side of the shrine, and the two side walls between the pilasters and the front of the cave, contain impressive bas-relief carvings. These commence on the level of the raised shrine. An examination of the

themes carved in the cave reveals three depictions of the Narasimha *avatār* of Vishnu : within the Vaikunṭha Nārāyaṇa relief in which Vishnu reveals to the gods the form he will take; the actual slaying of Hiranyakaśipu; and the seated Kevala Narasimha in the shrine itself. Two other incarnations are also represented—the Varāha *avatār* and the Vāmana *avatār*. Since the temple is in worship the main image has several gold *kavachas* as for example on the hands and *makuta* and the stone of both this image and of the bas-reliefs is quite black and shiny having been covered with a coating of oil. The raised shrine also houses the metal *utsava* images.

The Vaikunṭha Nārāyaṇa relief on the left wall of the *ardha maṇḍapa* displays a unique grouping of figures Vishṇu seated on the coiled Ananta whose five hoods are spread out behind his *kirīta makuta*, occupies the centre of the relief, and is depicted with four arms. The *śankha* and *chakra* are not actually held in Vishṇu's upper hands but are

depicted in the air somewhat above them, with tongues of flame. This feature is to be seen in all the Nāmakkal reliefs and seems to some extent, to set it apart from Pallava representations. Vishṇu's lower left hand rests on his knee, and the lower right is in the *kataka hasta* with the fingers bent lightly to touch the thumb—a manner in which the hands of Vishṇu are frequently depicted. *Makara kuṇḍalas* are depicted in his pendant ear lobes, and he wears broad *keyūras* and *kañkaṇas*. The lower garment is unusual. The angles in which the head, body and legs of the figure are depicted give it a delicate grace that sets it apart from other depictions of the theme, such as the comparatively heavy Chālukyan representation of Vishṇu seated on Ananta from Badāmi cave IV that belongs to the last quarter of the sixth century A.D. To the lower front of the relief is a four-armed seated Bāla Narasimha, revealing to the gods the man-lion form in which he will destroy the *asura* king Hiraṇyakaśipu, to whom Brahmā had previously granted the boon that he would be killed by neither man nor beast. Narasimha has a

peaceful expression on his face, indicative perhaps of the deliverance from trouble that he will bring about. His upper right hand is in the *abhaya hasta* the protection-giving or reassuring pose and the lower right hand rests on his knee. His upper left hand holds some indistinct object, perhaps a *śankha*, and the lower left is in the *kataka hasta*. A representation of Bāla Narasimha in a Vaikuṇṭha Nārāyaṇa relief is unknown elsewhere. Behind Narasimha is a four-armed standing figure of Brahmā with three faces clearly visible. His lower left hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu* and his lower ~~right~~ is in the *kataka hasta*. The upper left hand holds an *akṣhamālā*. Above Brahmā is a bust of Chandra depicted as if behind the clouds and with his hands in *añjali hasta*. Standing to the right of Viṣṇu is a graceful figure of Siva with a deer depicted just above his upper right hand and a serpent held in his upper left hand. The lower left hand is in the *kataka hasta* and the lower right rests on his hip in the *katyavalambita hasta*. *Sarpa kuṇḍalas* are represented in his distended ear

lobes. Above Siva is a bust of Sūrya with a large halo behind his head, and with his hands in *añjali hasta*. Kneeling in front of Siva with one hand in the *vismaya hasta* indicative of wonder and the other hand apparently holding a lotus, is a figure that probably represents the sage Markandeya. In front of him is a kneeling female figure with hands in the *añjali hasta*, and possibly to be identified as Bhūdevi. If the identification is correct, this is an unusual location and pose for Bhūdevi in a Vaikuṇṭha Nārāyaṇa relief. The *yajñōpavīta* of most of this figures in this relief, as in the others at Nāmakkal, is depicted as going over the right arm and is reminiscent of the early Pallava and of Chālukyan practice. The entire composition is beautifully balanced, and the apparent ease with which the figures have been depicted reveals the undoubted mastery of the sculptor.

The next panel, on the back wall of the *mandapa* and to the left of the shrine, contains a powerful representation of Śhaṇa or Ugra

Narasimha. An eight-armed figure of Narasimha, with right foot on the ground and the left bent and placed on a raised pedestal, is depicted slaying Hiranyakaśipu to whom Brahmā had also given the assurance that he would not be killed in heaven or on earth, or through the use of any weapon. Narasimha is depicted holding Hiranyakaśipu's helpless body off the earth with two arms, while the other two are occupied in tearing into him with his claws. Strictly speaking, it is the bowels of Hiranyakaśipu that Narasimha is meant to tear into, but here the hands are depicted in the chest, and indeed, this is so in most representations of the theme. Hiranyakaśipu's dangling arms still hold the shield and sword with which he tried to fight Narasimha. Of Narasimha's four upper hands, two firmly hold the *sārṅga* and *khaḍga*, and the other two have depicted just above them a *śankha* and *chakra* with flames. As in the Vaikuṇṭha Nārāyaṇa relief, Narasimha wears a *karāṇḍa makuta* and his lion face with small pointed ears is stylised as compared to the naturalistic representation in cave IV at Badāmi.

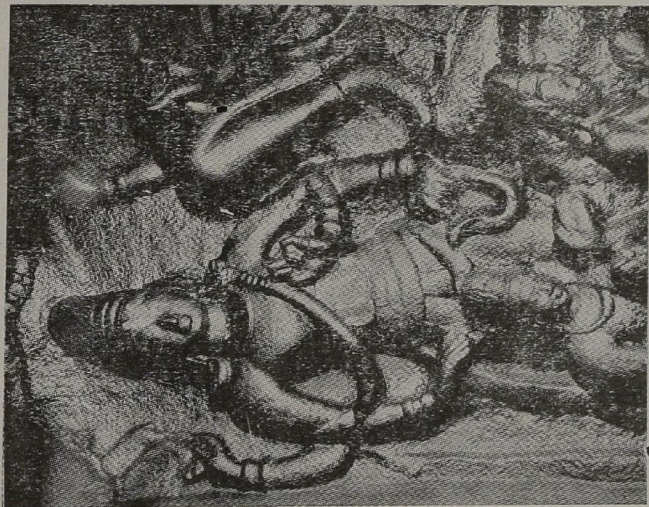
Depictions of Ugra Narasimha are rare in the monuments of south India and the theme is unknown in Pallava rock-cut monuments. Pāṇḍya rock-cutting however provides us with a representation from the Subrahmanya cave-temple at Tirupparankunram. Other examples of the scene are known from the Chālukyan temples at Aihōlē and Paṭṭadakāl but none of these can compare for vigour and impact with the Nāmakkal example.

The main shrine contains an enormous rock-cut image of the seated Kevala Narasimha. On either side of him are Sūrya and Chandra holding *chāmaras*. Siva on the left and Brahmā on the right are described as appeasing his anger aroused on the occasion of the destruction of Hiranyakaśipu. Two sages, one standing on either side have been identified as Sanaka and Sanandana: they perhaps report to the world the news of the slaying of Hiranyakaśipu.

The panel to the right of the shrine contains a depiction of the Varāha *avatār* in which Viṣṇu took the form of a gigantic



Vaikunṭha Nārāyaṇa, Narasimha cave.



Siva



Bāla Narasimha

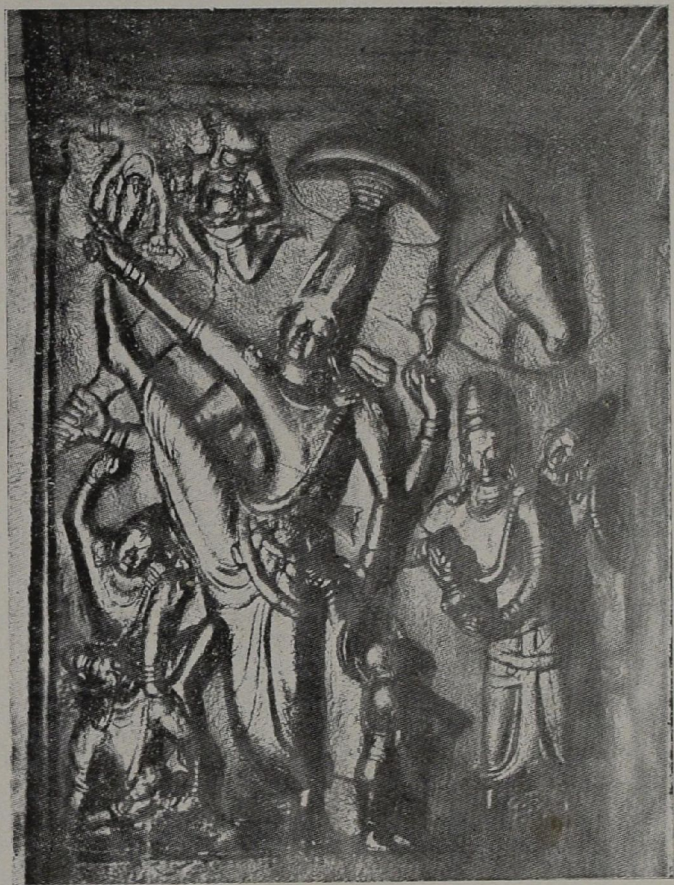
Details of Vaikunṭha Nārāyaṇa relief.



Ugra Narasimha, Narasimha cave.



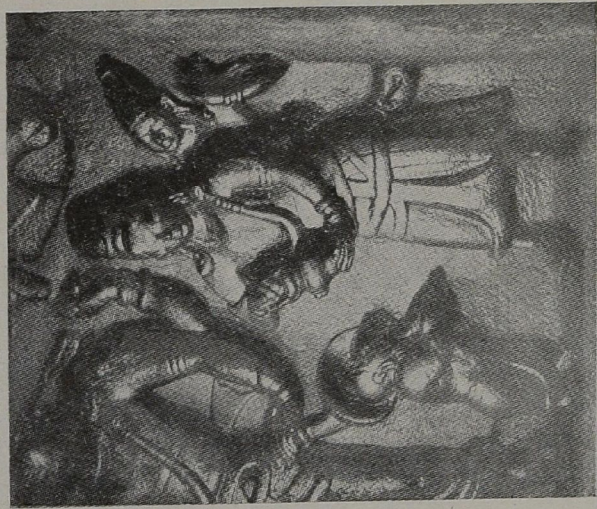
Varāha avatār, Narasimha cave.



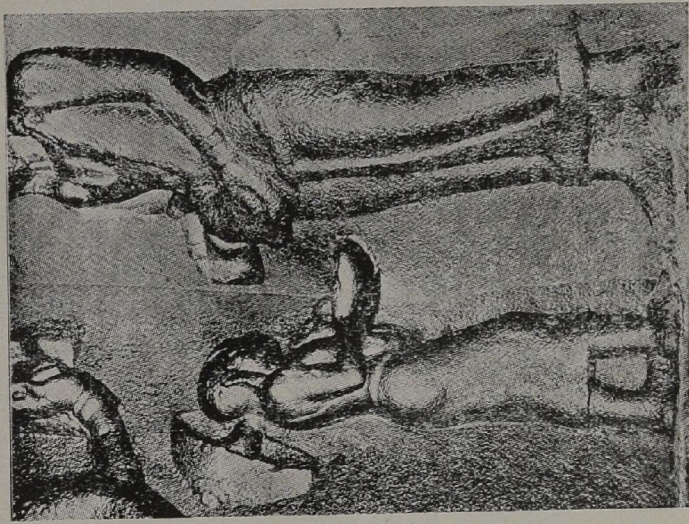
Vāmana avatār, Narasimha cave.



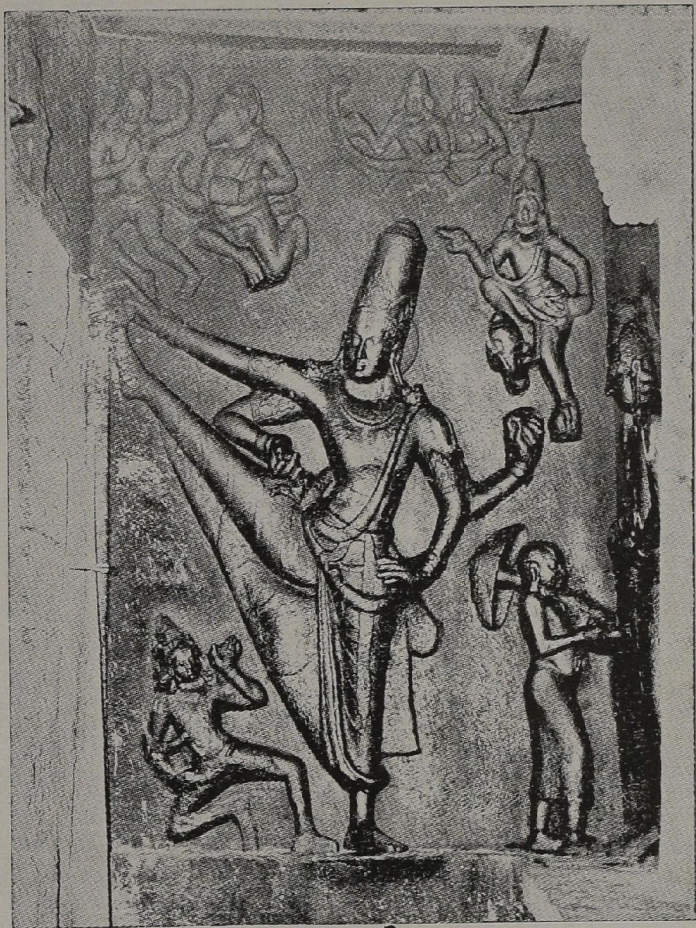
Sacrificial horse and yūpa
Detail of Vāmana relief, Narasimha cave.



Detail of Vāmana, Vāmana avatār,
Narasimha cave.



Detail of Vāmana, Vāmana avatār,
Anantasāyī cave.



Vēmana avatār, Anantasāyi cave.

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Sankara-Nārāyaṇa, Anantasāyi cave.

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An inscription reading Mānasāra,
a title of Atiyendra in the Anantasāyi cave.

boar to rescue the earth from the demon Hiranyāksha who had hidden her under the seas. This theme has been a favourite with sculptors throughout the centuries, some of the most notable early depictions being at Udayagiri, Badāmi and Māmallapuram. The figure of the Varāha is shown here as if emerging from the waters, with one leg being hidden up to the knees, and the other to just above the ankles. Bhūdevi, with her hands in the *añjali hasta* is seated gracefully on Varāha's upraised right arm and her legs are supported by his left hand. To the right of Varāha is seated the serpent Ādiśeṣha with his left hand in the *vismaya* pose depicting his wonder. To the left of Varāha is a part-kneeling female figure with her hands in the *añjali hasta*. It is suggested that this represents Bhūdevi giving thanks after having been rescued. It seems possible however, that it depicts instead Ādiśeṣha's wife, since the *Vai-khānasāgama* states that she must always be sculpted accompanying Ādiśeṣha. Above the figure of Varāha, and apparently behind a cloud, are depicted four heads probably representing

the sages Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkūmāra, who according to the *Vishnu Purāṇa* sang a hymn in praise of Viṣṇu's deed. Varāha is represented with two arms only, unlike the depictions in the Varāha *maṇḍapa* at Māmallapuram and in caves II and IV at Badāmi where the figure has four arms (the upper two holding the *śankha* and *cakra*). The upward tilt of the head of the Varāha, and the feeling of momentous action pervading the relief is quite remarkable. At Māmallapuram there is a lack of this sort of atmosphere as the Varāha is depicted standing erect with both feet firmly on the ground, thus representing a moment in time slightly later than at Nāmakkal. The Badāmi reliefs though depicting the Varāha with both feet having emerged from the water, still retain a feeling of movement that makes them more akin to Nāmakkal. The *vakra danta* of the Varāha that may be discerned also at Māmallapuram and Badāmi, is here very prominently depicted. While this seems to emphasize its animal nature, a step in the opposite direction is seen through the introduction of the distended

lobe to the Varāha's ear-a feature unknown in the other representations discussed.

The fourth relief, on the right wall of the *ardha maṇḍapa*, is a panel depicting the Vāmana *avatār* of Viṣṇu. This is a very forceful depiction and the individual figures deserve closer study. The theme is divided into two parts. To the right is depicted the tiny Vāmana figure with an umbrella in his left hand, and his right held out to receive his gift of three strides of land from the mighty king Bali. In front of him is the standing figure of the king holding a water jug from which he is about to pour water, signifying the granting of the gift. Behind Bali is a figure, apparently protesting, and this seems to represent Bali's *guru* Sukrāchārya who, perceiving the true nature of the Vāmana, strongly advised Bali against granting the gift. Sculpted above these figures is the head of a horse, with a stake in front of it, perhaps indicating that these events took place at the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. To the left, and occupying most of the panel is the

next episode of the *Vāmana avatar* in which Vishṇu, on receiving his gift, grew to an enormous size and covered the earth with one stride and the heavens with the second. The four-armed Trivikrama Vishṇu is depicted with his left foot on the ground and the right raised to shoulder level. The representation thus exemplifies the instructions given in the *Silparatna*, as against the more usual depiction of Trivikrama standing on his right foot with the left raised as stated in the *Vaikhānasāgama*. Vishṇu's upper right hand holds a *khadga* and the upper left has represented just above it a *śankha* with flames. His lower right hand is stretched out almost touching his upraised foot, and the lower left is placed on his hip in the *katya-valambita hasta*. An umbrella is depicted over the *kirīta makūta* of Trivikrama. The action of the scene is convincingly conveyed by the outward swing of Vishṇu's *makara kuṇḍalas* and by the sway of his *yajñōpavīta*. To his upper right is the flying figure of Jāmbavān beating a drum to proclaim to the world the greatness of Vishṇu. To Jāmba-

vān's right is a falling figure with sword and shield in its hands - a figure that seems to be indicative of the fight that ensued on Vishṇu's assumption of the Trivikrama form. To the lower right of Vishṇu we see Garuḍa overpowering Sukra as punishment for having tried to prevent the granting of the gift to Vāmana.

The Vāmana *avatār* theme, like that of the Bhūvarāha, was popular both at Māmallapuram (Varāha *maṇḍapa*) and at Badāmi (caves II and IV). At both these sites there are further depictions of the fight between the *asuras* and the attendants of Vishṇu - an episode kept to the minimum in this representation. Vishṇu is depicted with eight arms at Badāmi and Māmallapuram, while the figure here is represented with only four. At Nāmakkal, as at Badāmi, two episodes of the Vāmana *avatār* are depicted, while at Māmallapuram, the earlier part with the Vāmana receiving the gift from Bali is omitted. The actual figure of the Vāmana at Nāmakkal and in cave II at Badāmi closely resemble

each other in depicting a young, plump and appealing boy, rather than a mis-shapen dwarf or a *brahmachārin*. (In Badāmi cave IV the entire Vāmana figure seems to have been chiselled away.)

Anantasayi Cave-Temple

The Anantaśāyi temple consists of a raised rectangular shrine, with two pillars and two pilasters along the front. Two steps between the central pillars interrupt the *adhishtāna* moulding which is similar to that in the Nara-simha cave. The *ardha maṇḍapa* in front is a narrow hall, of slightly greater length than the shrine, but no wider, with two pillars and a once open frontage. Here too a wall has been built up to enclose the cave which now has three doorways opening into it. Beyond this the natural roof of the cave projects a few feet forward in a curve. The pillars of the cave are of the standard variety known from early Pallava and Pandya caves and consist of two square *śadurams* decorated with lotus medallions, and an octagonal *kattu* between. The two pilasters, which are really

attached pillars as they are almost complete in section, are square throughout with no intervening *kattu*, but have lotus medallions engraved on them. Curved *taranga* corbels with a plain *patta* are to be seen here too. The moulded cornice above the shrine is decorated with six plain *kūḍu* arches with human heads carved within.

The shrine contains an enormous rock-cut image of Viṣṇu reclining on his serpent, with a large number of attendant figures. The two side walls of the *ardha maṇḍapa*, on a level with the height of the shrine, display reliefs of Trivikrama and Sankara-Nārāyaṇa. The Trivikrama panel on the left wall is continued onto the main wall of the *ardha maṇḍapa*, just beyond the pilaster of the shrine front, and the corresponding space on the other side beside the Sankara-Nārāyaṇa pane is occupied by a figure of Bāla Nara-simha. As in the Narasimha cave, the stone of the main image and of the reliefs has been covered with oil and is dark and shiny. Here too the shrine image has a number of gold

kavachas, and several metal *utsava* images are placed on the raised platform.

Pallava inspiration on architectural grounds seems apparent, the example closest in floor plan to the Anantaśāyi cave being the excavation at Singavaram dedicated to Ranganātha. Singavaram has a similar raised shrine with two pillars and two pilasters. The *ardha maṇḍapa* in front has a further two pillars and two pilasters with a once open frontage now built up to enclose the cave. The pillars are typical early Pallava examples, divided into two *śadurams* decorated with lotus medallions and an octagonal *kattu*. The corbels however differ from Nāmakkal and are of the angular bevilled variety with no *tarāṅga* moulding. The major portion of the Singavaram shrine too is occupied by an enormous rock-cut reclining Viṣṇu on Ananta, with various attendant figures. Nāmakkal provides us with a more elaborate version of the theme. The Mahishamardini *maṇḍapa* at Māmalla-puram also presents us with an example of

this theme which is sculpted in shallow relief on the left wall of the cave. The attendant figures are even fewer than at Singavaram, and Brahmā himself is absent, thus apparently representing a moment in time prior to his appearance. Inspiration for the Anantaśāyi image may well have come from Pallava examples.

The Anantaśāyi cave at Nāmakkal is dominated by the impressive figure of a *yōgaśayana* Viṣṇu lying on the serpent identified as Kārkoṭaka. This five-hooded serpent is said to be the fiercest of the serpents and is hence represented with the face of a lion within each hood. Viṣṇu is shown with two arms, one stretched out, and the other bent and held in the *kataka hasta*. A large number of attendant figures are depicted around the *śayana* figure. The inscription engraved on the beam above the corbels of the shrine pillars can be of some help to us as it apparently refers to the carving within. It seems to list the figures grouped around Viṣṇu and refers to the whole as a *śayya*

griham-an abode for the *śayana* or reclining form of Viṣṇu. The *Mānasāra* the famous text on architecture-refers to *śayana prāsādaś* intended for *sayana mūrtis*. (In this context we may recall the fortuitous occurrence of *māna-sāra* as one of the *birudaś* of king Guṇaśīla, engraved on the southern pillar of the shrine.) The figures mentioned in the inscription do not seem to tally exactly with the figures carved in the shrine and there are slight variations. Near the feet of Viṣṇu and forming the end wall of the shrine are the powerfully modelled figures of the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, as if about to rush forward and attack Viṣṇu. Chandra is depicted at this end and the opposite end wall contains the figure of Sūrya. On the back wall of the shrine, above the reclining Viṣṇu, the figures include Brahmā seated on a lotus rising from the navel of Viṣṇu, Nārada, Tumburu and other sages. On the base of the serpent couch are represented the *āyudha* gods. The order in which the attendant figures are mentioned in the inscription is Markaṇḍeya, Maharishi, parṇa (garuda), Varuṇa,

Brahmā, Īśa, Daksha, Saśī, Sūrya, Tumburu, Nārada, Guru, Bhrigu, Sārnga, Kaupōtaka (*gada*), Chakra, Nantaka (*khaḍga*), Pañchanjanya (*śankha*), Sri Madhu, Kaiṭabha. The representation would seem to belong to the *uttama* classification.

On the left wall of the *ardha maṇḍapa* and continuing onto the back wall is a depiction of the Vāmana *avatār* similar in its treatment to the relief in the Narasimha cave. The figure of Bali is carved along the back wall leaving the main area free to depict the Trivikrama figure of Viṣṇu. The difference in the depiction of the Vāmana as compared to that in the Narasimha cave is interesting. The figure is here treated more as a young *brahmachārin* than as a plump boy. One hand holds an umbrella and the other is outstretched to receive the gift that Mahābali is in the act of presenting. Here, there are no subsidiary figures beside Bali. The figure of Trivikrama is depicted in much the same pose as in the Narasimha cave, with his right leg raised to shoulder level and the right arm

outstretched almost touching his leg. His upper left arm has a *śankha* depicted well above it, and the lower left is placed on his hip in the *katyavalambita* pose. Although the figure is very similar to that in the Narasimha cave, down even to the outward swinging *makara kuṇḍalas*, something in the way of forceful impact seems to be lost in this relief. The draping of the lower garment too is somewhat stylised as compared to the more naturalistic treatment in the Narasimha cave. To the lower right of Trivikrama is the partly kneeling figure of Garuḍa with his left hand in the *vismaya hasta*. Above Viṣṇu to his right is the flying figure of Jāmbavān beating his drum. Two other flying figures, one to the right of Jāmbavān and the other just above the *śankha* near Viṣṇu's left hand, probably represent attendants of Viṣṇu. The latter flying figure has one hand in the *sūcī hasta* and is apparently indicating Trivikrama Viṣṇu. Above this figure are an unidentified male and female figure perhaps representing a *gandharva* couple, depicted down to the waist as if behind the clouds, and with

an unusual curved configuration beside the male. There is no indication at all in this panel of the fight that ensued between the attendants of Bali and Vishṇu. It is indeed remarkable that the sculptors at Nāmakkal should have twice chosen to depict the Vāmana *avatār*, and that each panel with its slight variations, should be so successful.

The figure of Sankara-Nārāyaṇa, with his left half depicting Vishṇu and the right Siva, is sculpted on the opposite wall of the *ardha maṇḍapa*. The *Vamana Purāṇa* explains the form as a manifestation to a *rishi* to whom Vishṇu explained that he and Siva were really one. The side representing Vishṇu has one hand placed in the *katya-valambita hasta*, and the other raised with the *śankha* with tongues of flame depicted just above the hand. Siva is shown with one hand holding a snake, and the raised hand with a deer just above it. The *makuta* shows a division with Vishṇu's side being a *kirīṭa* and Siva's side revealing a crescent moon on it. Vishṇu has in his ear a *makara kundala*

while Siva appears to have a *sarpā kundāla*. Sankara-Nārāyaṇa is shown standing on a small raised platform and his posture is quite straight and erect, in the *samabhanga* as laid down in the *Vishnudharmōtara*. The lower garment of the figure, reaching almost to the ankles, is depicted in a somewhat stylised manner. There is some difficulty in the identification of the seven subsidiary figures depicted around Sankara-Nārāyaṇa, and it has been suggested that they represent the river goddesses. However, five of the figures are male. Representations of Harihara frequently include the consorts of Siva and Viṣṇu, as well as their vehicles Nandi and Garuḍa. The *tribhanga* figures standing on either side of Sankara-Nārāyaṇa with one hand on their hip and the other is the *vismaya hasta*, could represent Nandi and Garuḍa, although in this relief there are no specific indications of this being so. Both wear *karāṇḍa makutas* and have large *pātra kundālas* in their ears, and are dressed in a very similar manner. The two female figures are both shown down to the hips only and could

perhaps be Pārvatī and Lakshmi although their placing would then be unusual. One is depicted to the right of Siva and has her hands placed in a relaxed manner on her hips, while the other is shown directly above Sankara-Nārāyaṇa with her hands in the *añjali hasta*. A male figure to the left of Viṣṇu is also shown down to the hips. He is depicted with a *jata makuta* and probably represents a *rishi*. The two flying figures at the top of the relief, on either side of the main image may possibly represent Sūrya and Chandra. Both are shown with one hand on hip and the other in the *vismaya hasta*, and one figure has a small halo behind his head and may be Sūrya.

The standing figure of Kēvala, or Bāla Narasimha on the adjoining wall is depicted in a relaxed pose and is slender and graceful. His two upper arms have the *śankha* and *chakra* depicted just above them, with tongues of fire, and his lower right hand is placed in the *katyavalambita hasta*. The figure is depicted with a *kirita makuta*,

unlike the standing Kēvala Narasimha in Badāmi cave IV who has a crown shaped as a lotus bud¹. As compared to the natural lion face at Badāmi, the depiction here is definitely stylised in a manner similar to that seen in the Narasimha cave. The figure wears a *yajñōpavīta* made of flowers, rather reminiscent of the late Chālukya tradition, and has several ornaments including *hāra*, *keyūras* and *kankaṇas*. The *udarabandha* and *katibandhas* are elaborately decorated. Above Narasimha is a figure that appears to be a flying *gandharva*.

Concluding Remarks

A date somewhere in the first half of the eighth century seems to be indicated for the two caves at Nāmakkal. Historical evidence provides us with a terminus of A.D. 784 by which time the caves must have been excavated. At that date the Atiya domain seems to have been annexed to the Pāṇḍyan empire

1. *Narasimha with a lotus bud crown is to be seen again in the Pandya rock-cut monolith at Kalugumalai.*

by Parāntaka Neduñjadaiyan. How much prior to that time the Atiya ruler Guṇasīla may belong, depends to some extent on the exact interpretation of Pāṇḍya records. Thus Kōccadaiyan (A D 700 730) is referred to as Lord of Kongu, and Māravarman Rājasimha (A.D. 730-765) is described as having subjugated the Malakongam. Whether in fact this means that the north Kongu Atiya territory with its capital at Tagaḍur was affected, we cannot tell. However, a mere defeat in battle would not have been sufficient to deter Guṇasīla from singing the praises of the Atiya *kula* in his inscriptions, or from excavating cave-temples and having their walls covered with eloquent relief sculpture.

Inscriptional evidence indicates close contacts with the Pallavas. The assuming of *birudas* and the engraving of these on the monuments are very suggestive of Pallava inspiration. The same applies to the very styling of the caves as *Atiyanāthavishṇu-griham* and *Atiyendra-vishṇu-griham*, strongly reminiscent as this is of the practice of Pallava Nara-

simhavarman II Rājasimha of describing his structures as *Pallavesvara-griham*. In view of this, it does indeed seem possible that Guṇaśīla was connected in some way with the Pallavas, probably through his mother's line. R. Nagaswamy suggests that Guṇaśīla's mother was probably a sister of Pallava Rājasimha I. It is unfortunate that the inscription describing the ruler as foremost among the daughter's sons (*dauhitra*) of some person, should be so fragmentary. It would undoubtedly have furnished us with some definite information on Guṇaśīla's ancestry. We have seen that palaeographic evidence is not of much help in fixing a date for the Nāmakkal inscriptions. The records display features that appear to be earlier than those of the Ānaimalai and Tirupparankunram inscriptions of Pāṇḍya Parāntaka Neduṇḍaḍaiyan-inscriptions dated to A. D. 770 and A.D. 773. They could however belong even to the period of Pallava Rājasimha—a time at which a variety of scripts were in use.

1. R. Nagaswamy, "Kalai Chelvangal", *Dinamani*, 5—11—1967.

Sculptural evidence indicates an undoubted influence from Pallava carvings particularly in the depiction of tall and slender figures in the 'southern' style. Architectural inspiration from the same source is quite clear. A consideration of the choice of themes however, seems to point to the effect of Chālukyan rock-cutting of the late sixth century. The Narasimha cave at Nāmakkal contains representations of the Vāmana, Varāha and Narasimha *avatārs*, and of Viṣṇu seated on Ananta - all four themes found in one form or another in the verandah of cave IV at Badāmi. At Māmallapuram by contrast the carvings of the Vāmana and Varāha *avatārs* in the Varāha *maṇḍapa*, are accompanied by two depictions of Dēvi — Gajalakshmi, and Durga with attendants. We may note also the similarity in the juxtaposition of the Sankara-Nārāyaṇa and Bāla Narasimha reliefs in the *ardha maṇḍapa* of the Anantaśāyi cave at Nāmakkal as compared with the Verandah of Badāmi cave IV. Apart from the main shrine images, most of the themes found in the two caves at Nāmakkal are to be seen in one form or another in

Badāmi cave IV. In some episodes Nāmakkal presents us with the more elaborate rendering as in the case of Vishṇu seated on Ānanta, while in others such as the *Vāmana avatār*, the Nāmakkal version reduces the number of subsidiary figures and presents us thereby with a more effective and vital depiction. The striking similarity of themes does indeed lead one to speculate on whether the artist or the ruler responsible for the carving of the two caves at Nāmakkal had perhaps visited Badāmi and been impressed by the choice of subjects in cave IV. While we have no inscriptional or literary evidence of any direct contact between the Atiyas and Chālukyas, a comparison of the themes chosen for sculptural representation is suggestive of some communication. Certainly the Pallavas and Pāṇḍyas with whom the Atiyas allied themselves or fought on occasion, had frequent contacts with the Badāmi Chālukyas. The Atiya ruler's own predilection for the worship of Vishnu as Narasimha resulted in the main shrine image in one cave being a seated Narasimha, and one of the subsidiary carvings

depicting Ugra Narasimha unknown at Badāmi. In addition, this predisposition made itself felt in the unique introduction of the figures of Narasimha into a scene depicting Vaikuṇṭha Nārāyaṇa.

Architectural and sculptural evidence indicates an admixture of Pallava and Chālukyan traditions which the genius of the Ātiya craftsmen transformed into a single entity. A complete mastery of the art of stone relief sculpture is displayed at Nāmakkal. It is certainly a matter for regret that we have no further examples of sculpture from the hands of the artists responsible for the carvings in these two caves. The somewhat stylised treatment of the figures in the Ānantaśāyi cave as compared with those in the Narasimha cave, together with the uniformity of style within each cave, leads us to suggest that the two sets of carvings came from the hands of two different sculptors, trained however in the same school. Sculptural and architectural evidence leave little doubt that the excavations belong together. The two *birudas* engraved beside

the Narasimha cave when compared with the inscriptions within the Anantaśāyi cave, further emphasize this contemporaneity. It has been suggested that some twenty years may have been required to complete work on these two caves¹. It seems to us that the time taken to excavate caves in general has been greatly exaggerated. We would suggest that a period of around five years, somewhere in the first half of the eighth century, is sufficient to cover the cutting and sculpting of the Nāmakkal caves.

1. K. R. Srinivasan and P. R. Srinivasan, "Ātiya Inscriptions from Namakkal", *Epigraphia Indica* XXXVI, pp. 131-138. p. 135, note 3. Their estimate is based on a period of twenty years for the excavation of Nasik cave III. We have shown elsewhere that Nasik III is in fact, the result of two phases of cutting and have discussed at some length the probable time span needed to cover the excavation of caves (Vidya Dehejia, "The Chronology and Development of the Cave Architecture of Western India", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1967, chapter IV).

NOTES

Ātiya – the name by which these rulers refer to themselves in their Nāmakkal inscriptions – is the Sanskritized form of Adīyan. The Pāṇḍya records and the Tamil Sangam literature refer to them as Adīyamān or Adigaīmān. We use these names interchangeably.

For the three *birudas* engraved on the rock surface outside the caves, see *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy*, 1938–39, p. 71.

The above report records two *birudas* reading *Sridhara* and *Silibhrta*, (actually it reads *Sitibhuta*) on the rock face outside the Narasimha cave. Besides these two *birudas* which are in Grantha characters, three more titles of the same king written, in Vatteluttu characters have been recently noticed immediately above the two labels, by the Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology. They read *taccavu*, *muthukila* and *mmaivali*. The letters are very shallow and are damaged at places. The import of these titles are not very clear but, like some of the *birudas* of Pallava Mahendra I, they sound like archaic Telugu-Kannada. This seems to strengthen the view, that Ātīyas had some contact with the Telugu-Carnataka region. The other two titles in grantha characters reading *Sridhara* and *Sitibhuta*, have a terminal "n", in Vatteluttu character. The combined use of grantha and Vatteluttu in these titles is interesting.

For other records see K. R. Srinivasan and P. R. Srinivasan, "Atiya Inscriptions from Namakkal" *Epigraphia Indica* XXXVI, pp. 131-138.

The following work may be consulted :

Srinivasan, P. R. "Sculptures in the two Rock-cut Vaisṇava Cave Temples of Nāmakkal", *Artibus Asiae* XXIV, 1961, pp. 107-116 & Plates.

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