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Material Culture of Buddhism in the Krishna-Godavari Delta: A Study of Medieval Andhradesa

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Abstract: *The ancient and medieval Andhradesa, viz. the Krishna-Godavari delta, forms one of the most archaeologically well-attested and culturally significant areas of Buddhist articulation on the Indian subcontinent. This article analyzes the material Buddhist culture in the area from ca. 3rd century BCE 13th century CE, utilizing archaeological, epigraphic, iconographic and architectural data, changing to and creating the social, economic and doctrinal settings of Buddhist monuments, sculptures, reliquaries and monastic formations of production and use. Through its examination of space, this study argues that Buddhist material culture in the Andhradesa, while not wholly ordinary nor Pan-Indian religious ideal, was also not trapped in a local position but the nexus of a number of convergent forces ranging from regional patronage networks and transoceanic commerce, to doctrinal innovations and stylistic transmissions. By focusing on key sites such as Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, and Salihundam as well as mobile material culture bronze icons, relic caskets, and votive terracottas this article proposes that Andhra Buddhist being was itself a phenomenon of process in which collective identities were produced, royal legitimacy radiated, sacred space was mapped and cultural power was transmitted throughout maritime Asia. In addition, the article explores the multi-causal collapse of Buddhist institutions after the 8th century CE and the processes of assimilation that allowed for the survival of Buddhist material traditions in the increasingly medieval Hindu devotional world.*
Keywords: *Buddhist archaeology; Krishna-Godavari delta; Andhradesa; Amaravati stupa; Nagarjunakonda; Ikshvaku dynasty; relic culture; Andhra sculpture; medieval South India; Indian Ocean Buddhism*

I. Introduction

The region of the Krishna-Godavari delta, long referred to as Andhradesa or Vengi in ancient and medieval textual traditions, is situated at a crossroads of matter and thought in the historiography of South Asian Buddhism. Covering the contemporary Krishna and Guntur districts and the East and West Godavari of Andhra Pradesh, the region served for more than a thousand years not only as a prime site of genesis for the development of Buddhist art and architecture but also as a principal juncture in the transoceanic conduits that transmitted Buddhist culture to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia (Shimada, 2012; Knox, 1992). Material from this landscape, in the form of massive stupas, dense sculptural programmes, portable reliquaries, bronze motives, inscribed pillars, and monastery complexes of considerable architectural complexity, makes up an archaeological assemblage that has significantly greater relevance than regional history alone.

But even with the recognised significance of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in studies on Indian art and architecture, the Andhra Buddhist material culture has not always been studied in a manner that enables it to be recognised as a totalised and analytically coherent phenomenon. Scholarship, however, has tended in the direction of either the connoisseurial study of discrete sculptural corpora (Sivaramamurti, 1942; Knox, 1992) or the diachronic tracing of sequences of dynastic patronage (Sarkar&Misra, 1966) rather than sustained consideration of the social-economic and spatial logics that conditioned Buddhist production in its entirety. Recent archaeological and art-historical work has started to attend to this lacuna, especially through recent landscape approaches that locate monuments within their agrarian and mercantile surroundings (Shaw, 2007) and a renewed focus on the epigraphic record as base for a donor sociology (Lüders, 1912; Sircar, 1965).

This article participates in an incipient synthetic overview of Andhra Buddhist materiality by conceptualizing the entire spectrum of material forms architectural, sculptural, portable, and epigraphic within a coherent hermeneutic framework. It suggests that Buddhist material culture in the Krishna-Godavari delta, far from being a fixed or monolithic form of religious objects, was a historical dynamic porcess of symbolic agency whereby a variety of social actors - royal dynasties, mercantile guilds, monastic orders, female patrons, and foreign travellers - negotiated their positions vis-a-vis the sacred, the political, and the economic. The study unfolds in both chronological and thematic sequence, beginning with the Mauryan-period foundations of the tradition and proceeding through the Satavahana and Ikshvaku floruit, the medieval doctrinal developments of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, and culminating with the intricate patterns of institutional contraction and cultural assimilation that marked the post-10th-century period.

II. Historiography And Scholarly Argument

2.1 Colonial and Early Post-Colonial Scholarship

The contemporary study of the Buddhist material culture of the Krishna-Godavari basin was initiated by the antiquarian pursuits of the Archaeological Survey of India in the nineteenth century. Colin Mackenzie's pioneering records of the Amaravati site (1816) and the excavations which were led by Robert Sewell and later by James Burgess shaped the early discipline that would in its first decades be dominated by object-based connoisseurship and the scholarly battle for the possession and dating of sculptural styles (Burgess, 1887). The mass transfer of the large Amaravati sculptural panels to the Madras Government Museum and later to the British Museum, a process that both preserved and stripped the material of its context, defined the parameters of all future inquiry, emphasizing isolated sculptural objects over the spatial and social contexts of their making and use.

The classic canon for modern Amaravati studies is still Sivaramamurti's Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum (1942), which not only covered the Chennai assemblage in detailed stylistic and iconographical scrutiny, but which also afforded the historical and iconographical margins defining the 'Amaravati school' as a unique regional style within the pan Indian art historical discourse. Longhurst's The Buddhist Antiquities of Nagarjunakonda (1938), supplemented at the end of the process by the comprehensive excavation reports of Sarkar and Misra (1966) for the Archaeological Survey of India, brought this model of the record to the Ikshvaku-period sites in the Krishna valley. While these treatises called too late for you all, I suppose have been empirically necessary, they have generally functioned within an overarching formalist framework that stressed stylistic genealogy and iconographic analysis at the expense of social or economic inquiry.

2.2 Theoretical Reorientations

The analytical framework for study of Andhra Buddhist changed considerably in the late twentieth century and early decades of the 21st century with transnational methodological adaptations within South Asian archaeology and art history. The development of Buddhist sites through landscape archaeology by Shaw (2007) highlighted that the placement of stupas, monasteries, and linked network infrastructure aligns with agro-ecological and hydro-geographical natural-landscape features, emphasizing the intimate connection of Buddhist organizations with the agrarian economy. Although Shaw conducted most of her fieldwork in the Sanchi region of central India, her conceptual approach that emphasizes the monastery as an economic and ecological actor rather than a solely religious formation is directly relevant for the Andhra delta, where the connection between monastic complexes and the hydraulic infrastructure of the delta represents an important yet neglected facet of Buddhist material culture.

Shimada's Early Buddhist Architecture in Context: The Great Stupa at Amaravati (2012) is arguably the most nuanced recent attempt to place Andhra Buddhist architecture in a compelling social and historical context. Drawing on architectural studies as well as a detailed analysis of the inscriptions, Shimada traced the phased building history of the Amaravati Mahastupa and argued that its elaboration was motivated by the collective patronage of a socially variegated donor community rather than simply the patronage of kings. This has significant implications for understanding the social base of Buddhist material culture more generally, pointing to the monumental landscape of Andhra Buddhism as being generated by what might be termed a 'participatory economy of merit' involving merchants, guild members, monks and laywomen on at least equal footing as the royal court (Shimada, 2012, pp. 134–159).

The epigraphic aspect of this donor sociology has been brought to light through the cumulative work of scholars from Lüders (1912) and Sircar (1965) to recent linguistic and historical investigations. The Brahmi inscriptions at the sites of Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, and related sites, form one of the largest epigraphic bodies of early medieval South India, they document not only royal grants, but those of Settis (Merchants), Gahapatis (Householders), guild-members, nuns, and foreign visitors, among them Sinhalese monks a social diversity that mirrors the cosmopolitan nature of Andhra's Buddhist institutions (Sarkar, 1960).

2.3 Central Argument

In light of historiographical concerns, the present article makes three interrelated claims. First, that the Buddhist material culture in the Krishna-Godavari delta was an integrated system of symbolic practice, rather than a loose assortment of discrete art-historical or archaeological types, so that large-scale architectural monuments, portable artifacts, inscriptions, and bodily practices of circumambulation and veneration combined in complementary ways to produce space and community for Buddhist devotees within and through this region. Second, this system of material culture was grounded in, and informed by, the particular socio-economic context of Andhradesa - its mercantile networks, its agrarian surplus, its coastal connectivity, and its multi-ethnic monastic population. Thirdly, that the contraction of the region's Buddhist institutions from the eighth century onward was not a straightforward collapse, but rather a resignification of Buddhist material forms, iconographic

repertoires, and devotional procedures through their incorporation into the rising Shaiva- and Vaishnava- orders of medieval Andhra - a process of 'creative assimilation' whose residues are still visible in ruins and in stone (Rao, 1993).

III. Geographical And Historical Context

The physical location of the Krishna-Godavari delta region was a factor shaping the development of Buddhist material culture in that area. An alluvial delta formed over centuries by riverine sediment is the basis for an agricultural intensification which supported an about monastic complexes of enclosures (Sinopoli, 2001). The rivers themselves acted as channels of travel for monks, merchants, and pilgrims; and the region's coastal portsh particularly Ghantasala (ancient Kantakosila) and the harbor zone in the vicinity of modern Masulipatnam made Andhradesa part of the larger Indian ocean system, connecting it with Sri Lanka, Southeast Asian states, and eventually Roman markets in the Mediterranean (Begley&De Puma, 1991).

The region's political history between the 3rd century BCE and the 13th century CE got progressively shaped by the divergent and competing priorities of patronage of the dynasties ruling this tract in turn that was periodically transformed materially in the Buddhist context. Satavahanas (c. 1st century BCE – 3rd century CE) and Amaravati, for the Satavahanass were one of the major early donors to the Amaravati stupa complex, both structural and epigraphic attributions testify (Yazdani, 1960). The Ikshvakus (c.), their successors 3rd–4th century CE), raised the site of Nagarjunakonda in the Krishna valley to an unparalleled concentration of Buddhist buildings, comprising more than thirty separate religious establishments identified by pre-inundation excavations (Sarkar & Misra, 1966). The later Vishnukundina, Chalukya of Vengi, Eastern Chalukya, and Kakatiya periods saw both continuation in Buddhist patronage as well as the incremental redirection of royal religious support towards the Shaiva and Vaishnava Paṇḍits (Talbot, 2001).

IV. The Stupa As Architectural Monument And Devotional Centre

4.1 Form and Regional Innovation

The stupa (Sanskrit: Stūpa; Pali: Thūpa) is the central monument of Buddhist material culture in the Krishna-Godavari belt. Formally, the canonical stupa is a hemispherical dome (Aṇḍa) resting on a raised cylindrical base (Medhi) with a square platform (Harmikā) situated on top of the dome and a parasol-like structure (Chattrāvali) above the square platform. Andhra stupas modified this canonical design introducing various regionally distinct elements, such as the Pradakṣiṇāpatha (circumambulatory path) and most noticeably the Āyaka platform, an outward jutting rectangular platform projecting from each of the four cardinal directions of the drum (Shimada, 2012, pp.

The Āyaka platform seems to have been an architectural innovation unique to the Andhra style. Its exact ritual function is unclear and debated: it has been seen as a directional gateway, a stage for relic enshrinement and as a representation of the axis mundi, the cosmic pillar that connects the earthly and heavenly realm (Knox, 1992, pp. 21-25 Case Whatever symbolic significance it might have had, its repeated presence in nearly every important Andhra stupa site Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, Gummadidurru, Chandavarm makes it a central feature of the entire regional style, one that distinctly diverges from the norms of Buddhist Northern Indian stupas.

4.2 Amaravati: The Great Stupa

The Mahastupa at Amaravati (ancient Dhānyakataka) in Guntur district is the culminating and best studied manifestation of Andhra Buddhist architecture. Located on the right bank of the Krishna River and linked to the Mahāsāṃghika Nikāya, the stupa was built and elaborated in a series of stages from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE (Shimada, 2012, pp. The monument when finished had a diameter of 164 feet at the base and a height of 88 feet, and was clad with layers of finely worked relief in the form of limestone slabs depicting Jātaka tales, the life of the Buddha and friezes with floral and geometrical decorations (Sivaramamurti, 1942). The scattered sculptural panels of the nineteenth century to the Government Museum, Chennai and the British Museum, London have fostered a scholarship geared towards reassembling the original program from fragmented remains (Knox, 1992; Burgess, 1887).

4.3 Nagarjunakonda and Ikshvaku Patronage

The valley of Nagarjunakonda (now under the waters of the Nagarjunsagar reservoir in the districts of Nalgonda and Guntur) was the political seat of the Ikshvaku line and it achieved an unprecedented concentration of Buddhist religious architecture in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. Pre-inundation excavations revealed more than thirty distinct Buddhist institutions Mahachaityas, residential Viharas and apsidal shrine temples a concentration of monastic building unknown in the archaeological record of early medieval South Asia (Sarkar & Misra, 1966, p. 3). The royal women had a significant role in Ikshvaku patronage: inscriptions mention that a number of the largest religious institutions were founded by queens and princesses of the house, and their role as

religious patrons was one of the main channels for female participation in Buddhist public culture (Dhavalikar, 1996).

V. Sculptural Traditions And Iconographic Development

5.1 Aniconic Representation

The first images of Buddhist sculptural practice in the Krishna-Godavari region followed what scholars have conventionally termed the 'aniconic' phase, in which the Buddha is depicted not through personified forms but through a series of symbolic stand-ins: The Bodhi tree, the empty throne, footprints (Buddhapāda), the wheel of the dharma (Dharmacakra), and the parasol (Chattra). The meaning of this mode has been a sustained object of interpretation: the idea that aniconic representation reveals a theological conviction regarding the Unrepresentability of the enlightened being (Coomaraswamy, 1927) has been disputed by revisionist scholars who consider such devices to be context-specific visual languages rather than a principled avoidance of figural representation (Huntington, 1990). The Amaravati repertoire is pivotal evidence for this discussion, since the aniconic and iconic modes are juxtaposed in the stupa sculptural field over coinciding temporal phases.

5.2 The Amaravati School and Transoceanic Transmission

However, by the 1st to 3 rd c. CE, the Andhra artists developed an overarching iconic tradition of exquisite fineness, which the art historian have called the 'Amaravali school.' Its stylistic hallmarks: intense three-dimensional modeling of figural forms that curve and turn in space with a plasticity unprecedented for the time period smooth drapery stylization characterized by cloth revealing forms of the body through translucent pleats multi-moment narration in which sequential events in a story are visually integrated within a single spatial field (Sivaramamurti 1942: 353; Knox 1992). The physiognomic norms developed for the Buddha image at Amaravati (Elongated Body, Serene Expression, Spiral Uṣṇīṣa, Ūrṇā) were also adopted and adapted in Buddhist sculptural traditions throughout maritime Asia, where clear stylistic parallels are to be found in early Theravāda Thai and Sri Lankan sculpture (Schopen, 1997).

The physical substrate of Andhra sculptures a solid substance white limestone, to be exact is at the same time rather directly responsible for a great deal of the distinctiveness of the tradition in terms of its visuality. The relative softness of stone enabled high-relief carving with fine detail, with the radiant surface quality that resembled marble in polished sheen, let Andhra Buddhist sculpture differentiate itself from the tradition of red Mathura sandstone or grey Gandharan schist in the north-west, and attribute it as a separate style among Indian sculptural schools (Harle, 1986).

5.3 Medieval Iconographic Expansion Under Mahayana and Vajrayana

With the Buddhist establishment of Andhra coming into greater interaction with Mahāyāna, and later Vajrayāna, ideas from the 4th century onwards the sculptural programme received a comprehensive enlargement. The proliferation of Bodhisattva forms, most notably Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, and Tārā, revolutionized the iconography of monastery shrines and votive contexts, embodying the new devotional theology of the Great Vehicle and its attention on compassionate mediators easily contacted by lay worship (Williams,1982). Bronze and stone idols of Tārā and various Tantric Bodhisattvas found in excavations around Guntur and Krishna district establish the region's intricate interaction with the secret Buddhist currents originating in Nālandā and the Pāla royal courts of Bengal and Bihar (Huntington & Huntington, 1990).

VI. Metal Objects And Portable Material Culture

6.1 Relic Caskets and Reliquary Hierarchies

Relic culture was important to Buddhist materiality from the start, and the Krishna- Godavari has yielded some of the most spectacular reliquary groups in South Asian archaeology. The theoretical and ritual groundings of relic veneration in Buddhism have been thoroughly examined in the academic literature: Schopen's (1987) path-breaking claims about the primacy of the cult of the book over the cult of the stupa have been challenged and complicated by later excavation evidence, yet the basic argument that bodily relics of the Buddha defined the most sacred category of material object in Buddhist practice that in turn necessitated elaborate apparatuses of containment, protection, and access has been cemented as an. In the Andhra region, relic caskets were generally made of gold, silver, crystal or bronze and interred within the stupa or in the Āyaka pillars itself or in the building surrounding. Among the earliest in the corpus, the Bhattiprolu caskets are accompanied by one of the earliest known Brahmi inscription from Andhra stating the contents are bodily relics of the Buddha (Sarkar, 1960). Later deposits from Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati illustrate the material layering of containment nested arrangements, of crystal within silver within gold, which parallel the cosmological patterning of Buddhist cosmography and the increasing holiness of relics by mythical distance to the body of the Buddha (Strong, 2004).

6.2 Votive Terracottas and the Democratisation of Devotion

Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Dharmacakra in votive terracotta plaques form what can be considered as the 'popular' layer of Buddhist material culture in the delta – mass-produced objects of devotion, pressed in Moulds and kiln-fired, with a production cost low enough to allow those from social groups far beneath the wealthy patrons who were able to commission stone sculpture or metal reliquaries (Rhi, 2008). Their presence at both major monastic centers and smaller rural sites across space, indicates the existence of a system of circulation for devotional objects through pilgrimage networks and localized ritual economies. Miniature terracotta votive stupas, models of the great monuments, also served as merits-earning objects and as means of domestic and personal practice.

VII. Monastic Architecture And The Production Of Sacred Space

Buddhist Viharas (monasteries) in the Krishna-Godavari region had a general standardised layout a central courtyard with Monk's cells on all or most sides, and a shrine room on the main axis, but regional and temporal variation in architectural typology did manifest itself in plan and in the treatment of spatial zones. The Viharas of Nagarjunakonda are exceptional for their variety: different institutions have different plans for the ordination hall, a variety of shrine arrangements and size divisions ranging widely indicating a consideration of the different requirements of the numerous Nikāyas (monastic fraternities) attending the site, such as the Mahāsāṃghikas, Bahushrutiyas, and Aparaśailas (Sarkar&Misra, 1966, p

Importantly for Viharas some were reserved or designated for monks from Sri Lanka and other foreign groups: a spatial marker of the multinational composition of Andhra's monastic populations and the vibrant institutional engagement between the Andhra sangha and the Sinhala Buddhist world (Shimada, 2012, p. 189). The apsidal hall plans a rectangular building ending in a half-hexagon or semicircular apse is seen at Nagarjunakonda and elsewhere in Ikshvaku times, for both shrine rooms and Uposatha (ordination day) halls, and its later embrace by Hindu and Jain religious architecture in the region is indicative the cross-traditional transmission of architectural knowledge's that marked the religious terrain of medieval Andhra (Hardy, 1995).

VIII. Epigraphy As Material Culture And Social History

Inscriptions are a part of Buddhist material culture which at the same time acts as a historical source, act of merit-making, and material claim endeavoring for a share of the sacred space. The epigraphic repertoire of the Krishna-Godavari delta, presenting itself on stupa drum slabs, Āyaka pillars, relic caskets, and Vihara walls, manifests a socially diverse donor landscape whose very composition destabilizes the easy perception of Buddhism as chiefly a religion of royal patronage (Sircar, 1965).

The Iskvl) aku period inscriptions at Nagarjunakonda rank among the most historically significant early medieval inscriptions in the Indian subcontinent for South India. They record, amongst other things, the endowments of certain Ikshvaku queens and princesses to particular institutions; they reveal the Nikāyas of monks which were resident within these establishments; the location of a nunnery at the place; and a Sinhalese monk community, bearing witness to a Buddhist institutional life with a wide social and geographical extent (Sarkar, 1960; Lüders, 1912). The language of the inscriptions Prakrit, inscribed in Brahmi script brings Andhra into an identity of a wider South Asian Buddhist epigraphic koine and the formulaic modes used bear regional distinctiveness which make it possible to distinguish Andhra inscriptions from the rest of the corpus (Sircar, 1965, pp. 201–245).

IX. Trade Networks And The Material Connectivity Of Andhra Buddhism

The material manifestation of Buddhism in the Krishna-Godavari delta was not separate in analysis from the networks of trade that connected Andhradesa with regional and trans-regional systems. The spatial association of Buddhist monastic sites with the main routes of trade, the inland riverine corridors as well as coastal maritime routes is a recurring characteristic of the archaeological record and is indicative of the structural affiliation of merchant groups and Buddhist institutions extant in early medieval South Asia more broadly (Ray, 1986).

Brought from elsewhere, goods in the Buddhist archaeological record offer immediate testimony to Andhra's participation in long-distance trade: Roman and Mediterranean glass beads buried in relic chambers at Nagarjunakonda and satellite sites; exotic stones from distant parts of the ecocultural orbit in relic casket assemblage; and stylistic gestures from Gandhara encoded in certain sculptural idioms pointing to the mobility of the Andhra Buddhist continuum along the overland Silk Road route and the Indian Ocean maritime system (Begley & De Puma, 1991; Ray, 1986). In cultural terms acting in the reverse direction, the 'Amaravati style' became an important export, propagating Indian Buddhist visual culture to maritime Southeast Asia, and directly influencing early Thai, Indonesian, and Sri Lankan Buddhist sculpture (Huntington & Huntington, 1990).

X. Institutional Decline And Cultural Assimilation

By the 8th to 10th century CE Buddhism in the Krishna-Godavari delta was in a visibly contracting phase in terms of institutional presence, but the timing and spatiality of this pattern were asymmetrical of sorts and the driving forces were diverse. One factor is that royal patronage was diverted as dynasties rose and fell and took on religious affiliations with Shaiva and Vaishnava rather than Buddhist institutions, but the decline of Buddhism in the peninsular has been somewhat reevaluated in recent scholarship. While earlier histories pointed to external persecution and catastrophic overthrow, these were replaced by more complex narratives emphasising the internal politics of religious competition, the channeling of mercantile devotion into Hindu temple institutions, and the incorporation of Buddhist devotional practices into the burgeoning devotional sects of medieval Hinduism (Thapar, 1966; Talbot, 2001).

The evidence viewed in this light is the vacating and gradual dismantlement of monasteries, the repurposing of sculpted Buddhist stone in later Hindu building, and the reconsecration of Buddhist sites to Hindu gods - the conversion of the Amaravati site into a Centre of Shiva worship is the most notable Andhra illustration (Rao, 1993). Tantric Buddhism, with which some conceptual and ritual Shaiva Agamic traditions are closely aligned, might have survived longer than "orthodox" Mahayana forms, and some folk religious traditions in modern Andhra Pradesh still show iconographic and ritual vestiges that can be linked to Buddhist roots (White, 2000).

Its intellectual affiliation with the philosopher Nāgārjuna who tradition situates at Śrīparvata, now identified in modern scholarship with the Nagarjunakonda or Śrīśailam region, gave the medieval Andhradesa a lasting renown within Buddhist doctrinal history that outlasted the material decay of Buddhist establishments. This association both informed regional monastic self-understandings and conditioned the ways in which (later) Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna traditions positioned themselves historically vis-à-vis an Andhra Buddhist past (Walser, 2005).

XI. Conclusion

This study has argued that the material culture of Buddhism in the region of the medieval Andhradesa in the Krishna-Godavari delta forms a historically changing, socially inflected, and transoceanic ally available system of symbolic practice rather than a set of isolated artifacts or archaeological sites. The large stupas and other Monuments at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, the portable reliquaries and bronze icons, the mass-produced votive terracotta's and the inscribed pillars naming an incredible range of donors to this community, all contribute to a material record of exceptional complexity one that can be understood not only in terms of the cultural status of its form and what it shows about the aesthetic of Buddhist art, but in terms of what it reveals about the social, economic, and devotional imaginations of the medieval communities of South Asia.

Three results are especially compelling from this analysis. First, the culture of material that made up Andhra Buddhism was shaped in a participatory economy of merit where royal patronage, although integral, was not exclusory or always primary; the participation of merchant guilds, women patrons, monastics, and laypeople made up the monumental landscape. Secondly, the material conditions of Andhra Buddhism were grounded in a regional economy whose surplus agricultural production and coastal access were immediate and necessary preconditions for organizing Buddhist institutions at this scale of complexity. Third, the erosion of Buddhist institutions from the eighth century, which was a slow, gradual process of transformation and assimilation, did not mean the elimination of Buddhist architectural forms, iconographic vocabularies, or devotional practices from the medieval and early modern Andhra.

Further work could profitably engage in more systematic spatial analyses of Buddhist sites in relation to water and agricultural infrastructure; in archaeometric studies of the material supply systems that generated Andhra Buddhist goods; and through the synthesis of the local evidence with emerging scholarship on the material culture of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and maritime Southeast Asia regions that we must tentatively identify as the source of, wide-ranging, and formative in part.

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